

Where Is 60 Years of Data, Information, and Knowledge One Year After USAID Was Fed “Into the Wood Chipper”?

TANYA TORRES AND ZACHARY BAQUET

ABSTRACT

When the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was dismantled in early 2025, groups and individuals mobilized to rescue information resources created by staff and partners. The patchwork of federal laws, policies, and guidance, combined with a lack of compliance enforcement, meant that preservation of the agency’s legacy through official channels was in question. The USAID Knowledge Rescue effort, along with partner organizations and other volunteers, has formed a decentralized network to preserve and provide public access to over sixty years’ worth of the agency’s data, information, and knowledge.

This article provides a snapshot of the progress and challenges faced by those involved in rescuing USAID’s information. The USAID Knowledge Rescue effort has captured over 274,000 materials, made 136,000 available to the public, and is building a digital repository to ensure public access. Other organizations and individuals have mirrored websites and rescued data and information resources that are now hosted on a variety of different online sites. Unsurprisingly, former USAID partners played a key role in rescuing information resources and providing continued access. The current political climate in the US and USAID’s experience during 2025 suggest that federal agencies and organizations would benefit from having a knowledge “living will” or legacy plan to ensure the preservation of data, information, and knowledge—these would include inventories and contingency plans with the aim of ensuring public information continues to be accessible and is preserved.

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Introduction

It’s been over a year since the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the largest bilateral funding agency for humanitarian and development aid worldwide, was

fed “into the wood chipper” by Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) in early 2025 during the second Trump administration (Morse and Ellison 2025). A July 2025 study in *The Lancet* estimated that USAID programs had saved more than ninety million lives over the past two decades, and that if the Trump administration’s current cuts continue through 2030, fourteen million people who might otherwise have lived could die (Cavalcanti et al. 2025).

Despite USAID’s annual budget being less than 1 percent of the overall federal budget, the agency provided sixty years’ worth of data, information, and knowledge, funded by US taxpayer dollars, influencing US foreign assistance policy and shaping economic and social development and humanitarian assistance worldwide. While changes in political priorities are expected during presidential transitions, the Trump administration and DOGE sought to erase USAID’s work by taking official websites offline, removing and preventing access to information, and even attempting to destroy official records, drawing congressional attention (Peters and Shaheen 2025).

The USAID ecosystem, including its knowledge ecosystem, functioned through a vast array of partners, consisting largely of contractors and grantees who both created and maintained much of USAID’s knowledge. In addition, USAID’s extensive network of partners (contractors and grantees around the world who contribute to and use USAID knowledge) experienced significant job losses and organizational closures during this period. Once it became clear that Congress and the courts would not prevent USAID from being dismantled¹ and that most US-based employees would lose their jobs as of July 1, 2025, staff and the broader concerned community began organizing official and volunteer efforts to preserve agency knowledge, information, data, and official records. Over two thousand potential volunteers (including former staff, contractors, grantees, partners, and others) formed the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort to save the research, data, photos, and collective expertise accumulated over sixty years of the agency’s work.

Recognizing the urgent need to collect, preserve, and share these resources, the group worked with the USAID Alumni Association and the Aid Transition Alliance to establish a catalog and resource repository. As of April 2026, this effort has collected 274,845 resources and conducted 194 interviews and focus group discussions with former staff to preserve tacit knowledge (USAID Knowledge Rescue, n.d.).

This article provides an update on the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort and the status (as of April 2026) of the data, information, and knowledge that existed on USAID public websites when the agency was dismantled, while acknowledging that the websites represent a small subset of the information created by staff and partners, which includes official government records, reports, documents, and information residing on internal websites.

Literature Review

US Federal Public Information Access and Archives Laws, Policies, and Their Implementation

Traditionally, the US government has relied on a variety of means to ensure access to and preserve public information, most notably through the legally required mandates

¹ This occurred despite Congress’s establishment, authorization, and reauthorization of USAID as an ongoing US government entity in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

of the Federal Records Act (FRA), implemented by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); the Government Publishing Office (GPO), and the Open Government Act, which gave rise to whole-of-government websites like Data.gov; and individual agency websites.

Starting in 1951, the US government enacted the FRA to govern the collection, retention, and preservation of federal agency records (44 U.S.C. Chapters 21, 29, 31, and 33). The definition of records in the FRA was amended in the Presidential and Federal Records Act Amendments of 2014 (Section 3301) to remove references to physical media and accommodate digital information. The FRA and subsequent amendments govern the maintenance and disposition of federal records, and the records control schedule process specifies the preservation value and the length of time records are to be preserved (FRA: 44 U.S.C. 2111, 2904, 2905, 3102, and Chapter 33). Each federal agency is responsible for creating a records schedule in consultation with NARA, which provides disposition authority for the records covered by the schedule and information on the archiving and destruction of records (Stuessy and Knoedl 2026). Under normal circumstances, physical and digital official records would be sent to NARA for preservation and disposition in accordance with the official agency records schedule.

The Evidence Act (H.R. 4174 – Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018) comprises three parts that address evidence capacity, open data (the Open Data Act), and data confidentiality. The first part (evidence capacity) requires each agency to create evidence-building plans to identify and address relevant policy questions and to establish a chief evaluation officer within each agency to continually assess the evidentiary process. As part of the implementation of the Evidence Act, USAID and other agencies developed annual learning agendas, which helped focus evaluation and learning activities across the agency and identify the data and approaches needed to provide critical evidence to inform policy priorities.

Government-wide websites like Data.gov were implemented as a statutory requirement of the Open Government Data Act (2018) as part of the Evidence Act, which requires federal agencies to publish their information online as open data, using machine-readable formats and metadata in the Data.gov catalog. Data.gov hosts over four hundred thousand datasets and works with federal agencies to implement the law (Data.gov, n.d.). The third part of the Evidence Act reauthorized the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA), which protects the confidentiality of information acquired from the public for statistical purposes and allows designated statistical agencies to exchange business data for statistical purposes only.

While there are US laws, policies, and NARA guidance in place to address the preservation and access of federal records, there is no enforcement capacity to ensure compliance by individual agencies. As a result, when federal websites are taken down and people lose access to public information, there is little recourse. The lack of enforcement and compliance with archival requirements by federal agencies, and distrust of official federal efforts to maintain access and preserve data and information, led to an increasing number of information and data “rescue” efforts during the first and second Trump administrations.

Distrust Gives Rise to Knowledge, Information, and Data Rescue Efforts

In the last decade, numerous grassroots rescue efforts have sought to preserve US government data and knowledge resources to address concerns about data integrity. In 2016, the term “guerrilla archiving” was used to describe the work of the Data Refuge Project and the

Environmental Data and Governance Initiative (EDGI), a volunteer group formed to save climate and environmental data from websites that were threatened during the first Trump administration (Janz 2018). Initial explorations of their work describe how they evolved from having groups of activists saving data to creating infrastructure for community stewardship of data (Walker et al. 2018), and reframing their decentralized data rescue efforts as removing information from institutional control and creating “spaces for community dialogue and wider public awareness of the vulnerabilities of contentious scientific work” (Paris et al. 2017, 4).

While their initial efforts focused on saving threatened datasets, in 2018, they began working on a broader project, Data Together, focused on the infrastructure required for community stewardship of data (Walker et al. 2018). Data Together’s work was based on environmental data justice and the “post-custodial stewardship” paradigm, in which noninstitutional repositories assume an archiving role (Abrams 2017; Kelleher 2017).

A variety of nongovernmental organizations are involved in hosting infrastructure and tools for rescued data. The End of Term Web Archive (n.d.), hosted by the Internet Archive in collaboration with other organizations and government partners, collects, preserves, and makes accessible US government websites at the end of presidential administrations and makes those pages available through the Wayback Machine (Internet Archive, n.d.). More complex websites from numerous federal agencies at the end of the Biden administration and the beginning of the Trump administration were rescued and are now hosted on the Webrecorder US Government Web Archive (govarchive.us), including those of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), USAID, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Climate.gov, etc. (Webrecorder, n.d.). Attempts to capture dynamic Tableau-driven data sites (e.g., aidscape.usaid.gov) were unsuccessful because the archiving technologies were unable to capture the sites’ underlying databases. Webrecorder’s success in replicating the USAID site lies in its user interface and its ability to package all the necessary files into a single “playable” archive.

More recently, and building on the work of the 2017 Data Refuge Project and EDGI, the Data Rescue Project has been bringing together a community of data librarians, researchers, volunteers, and organizations to crowdsource the preservation of US federal government data since it began disappearing in early 2025. The Data Rescue Project volunteers work to identify, preserve, curate, and maintain public access by collaborating with organizations like the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) to save vulnerable datasets in DataLumos, a trusted repository, as part of a coalition of data organizations including the International Association for Social Science Information Service & Technology (IASSIST), Research Data Access & Preservation (RDAP), and the Data Curation Network (Guldalian 2025). In a separate effort to preserve government records and ensure access to public information, the Library Innovation Lab at Harvard Law School created the Data.gov Archive, a complete archive of the more than 311,000 federal public datasets linked by Data.gov and harvested during 2024 and 2025 (Library Innovation Lab at Harvard Law School 2025).

The destruction of USAID’s knowledge, the takedown of agency websites, and the elimination of access to online public information resources have been framed as “a possible epistemicide—or destruction of knowledge systems” (Cummins et al. 2025, 1). Randall Jimerson (2007, 264), past president of the Society of American Archivists, discussed how “oppressive regimes try to impose selective amnesia on society” by destroying records and manipulating the public’s historical memory. He argued that archives and archivists play a

critical role in holding institutional and government leaders accountable and protecting the rights of all citizens.

As such, these data and knowledge rescue efforts can be seen as attempts to preserve the historical record when the federal government fails to preserve public goods and our collective memory. When the official means of preserving access to public information is no longer trusted, librarians, volunteers, and activists will mobilize to rescue and steward resources (Rothfritz 2026; Jacolbe 2026).

The Challenge and USAID Knowledge Rescue's Results (as of April 2026)

This article provides an update as of April 2026 on the data, information, and knowledge that were available on USAID public websites at the time the agency was dismantled. This includes the work of the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort, as well as other groups and individuals who have taken the initiative to preserve and provide access to these formerly public goods. While the public information available on USAID's websites is significant, it bears repeating that it represents only a small subset of the information created by staff and partners, including official government records, reports, documents, and information on internal websites. It remains unclear to what extent USAID's information will be utilized to inform US foreign assistance going forward or preserved via official government channels.

How the USAID Knowledge Rescue Came to Be

The USAID Knowledge Rescue effort began in early 2025 as USAID's shutdown ramped up and knowledge resources began disappearing from public access. On February 27, 2025, KM4Dev, an international knowledge management community of practice, hosted a knowledge café to discuss issues around organizational knowledge loss. As partners were told to stop activities (January 2025) and USAID staff were placed on administrative leave (February 2025), many began working to preserve USAID knowledge. The nucleus of USAID Knowledge Rescue—a small group with long-term, high-level experience leading knowledge, learning, and evidence efforts at USAID and in the knowledge management for development community—met in late March. They emailed knowledge management professionals inside and outside the agency to learn what others were doing. Their determined goal is to identify and partner with an existing distributed or federated archive, or to build a new one, involving several knowledge repositories of different types and in different locations, all housing as much USAID-related rescued knowledge as possible. As next steps, the group created a private LinkedIn group to bring together potential volunteers and share progress on rescue efforts. To facilitate knowledge collection, they formed two teams: one for tacit knowledge and one for explicit knowledge capture.

To capture tacit knowledge, they began conducting key informant interviews and focus group discussions to document the professional experiences of USAID colleagues and partners. While somewhat tailored to the individual or group, the interviews touch on some of the following:

- Could you describe an example of a USAID intervention that you worked on that you believe had a significant positive impact?
- What factors do you think contributed most to the success or failure of the USAID programs that you worked on?

- Were there any major breakthroughs or innovations that resulted from programs or initiatives you were involved in? If so, what were they and what accounts for them?
- What are five things you would want your successor to know (to avoid, or to build on, or . . .)?
- If you could implement three changes to improve USAID's effectiveness, what would they be?

Interviews are anonymized and synthesized to find patterns in experiences that can inform current and future development activities. Individual interviews are made publicly available only if and when interviewees give their approval.

For explicit knowledge, already in documentary or visual form, the team developed a Google Form that described the group's purpose, explained the types of resources they wanted to capture, and gave participants a way to share the knowledge products they had. They focused on collecting information about USAID's programs, operations, and research studies intended for public use. This included formerly publicly available documents containing the following:

- Nonclassified, nonsensitive but unclassified (SBU)/non-Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI), non-Personally Identifiable Information (PII) that was previously publicly available—particularly mission retrospectives/histories and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) data with PII removed, including material used or created by partners
- Addresses for USAID country mission landing pages on platforms like YouTube, Medium, Exposure, or similar, if they were used; and the mission Facebook archive (instructions: <https://tinyurl.com/kr-facebook-instructions>)
- The mission Flickr archive (instructions: <https://tinyurl.com/kr-flickr-instructions>)
- Reports, research findings, market or feasibility studies, and any other documents or related data coming out of sectoral/project implementation offices/partners that were not restricted but had not yet been uploaded to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) or Development Data Library (DDL)
- Reports, studies, and analyses outlining programs carried out over the life of USAID's involvement in the country or region

As of April 2026, What Has the USAID Knowledge Rescue Achieved?

USAID Knowledge Rescue's work is now cosponsored by the USAID Alumni Association and the Aid Transition Alliance. Over the past year, the group has captured 274,845 items for preservation. This includes materials from the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC), USAID Flickr accounts, and resources from former USAID staff and partners. Currently, these materials are available to the public via a Google spreadsheet. The materials captured include approximately 143,000 DEC documents downloaded through its Application Programming Interface (API) in July 2024. The USAID Knowledge Rescue continues to work on the best ways to organize these resources and make them available to the public.

The USAID knowledge ecosystem was decentralized (perhaps more so than any other US government agency). There were a variety of sites, from those specific to a particular

contract or grant to decades-old, globally recognized platforms such as the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and USAID Learning Lab, which many practitioners relied on to support international development. Some of these sites covered topics such as agriculture and food security, climate change, and market systems that USAID technical bureaus supported.²

These sites facilitated knowledge exchange by enabling USAID technical staff and partners to share guidance and insights on sector-specific topics. They were used by development practitioners worldwide, well beyond the USAID and partner community. Most of the sectoral websites went down by the end of January, when stop-work orders took effect. Much of the USAID knowledge ecosystem was managed and maintained by contractors and grantees.

Some sites disappeared altogether, and only their prior versions from before February 2025 can be found on the Wayback Machine. Others have transformed and evolved into new platforms that host former USAID content—for example, content from the USAID DRGLinks site transitioned to a new one called DRGHub. The rescue of these sectoral sites depended on the complexity of the site and on access to the backend. In some cases, groups were able to take ownership of the content and transition it to another site; in others, the sites could not be rescued.

Sites for grants associated with US universities took various paths. Since much of the research funding was in the form of grants, universities had greater flexibility in maintaining their sites and did not have to take them down due to the stop-work order. While their USAID funding ended, some kept their sites online, though without new content, such as the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Horticulture, thereby maintaining access to materials created under the research grant. Others transformed into new initiatives, such as the Soybean Innovation Lab, formerly the USAID-funded Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Soybean Value Chains.

Other Initiatives to Rescue USAID Data, Information, and Knowledge

USAID's Public Websites

In addition to the main USAID website, which provided information on the organization and its work, the agency maintained several additional websites and managed interagency websites that served sectoral or program-specific needs. For the purpose of this article, we focus on what happened to a core set of websites from the USAID ecosystem. These are examples of original sites preserved in the End of Term Web Archive, sites rescued and maintained by partners or individuals, and, to the extent possible, provide links to where the rescued information is available. The websites include:

- USAID.gov
- Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC)
- Development Data Library (DDL)
- Sector-Based Websites
 - Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Network
 - DRGLinks to DRGHub

² Examples of former USAID technical sites can be found in the page footer of a rescued site on the Wayback Machine: <https://web.archive.org/web/2025010321304/https://www.climatelinks.org/#uls-partner-container>.

USAID.gov

The original USAID website was taken down by DOGE on February 1, 2025, and contained information about the agency's work in 112 countries and regions, as well as programs, results, data, and information about the organization and staffing. USAID.gov reappeared online on February 5, 2025, with a message stating, "On Friday, February 7, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. (EST), all USAID direct hire personnel will be placed on administrative leave globally." On February 23, 2025, a notification of administrative leave was posted to USAID.gov and remains in place today (US Agency for International Development, n.d.)

Much of the information from the USAID's main website was rescued through the Internet Archive's End of Term Web Archive and is available on the Wayback Machine, and a copy of the website from January 16, 2025, is also available on the Webrecorder US Government Web Archive at <https://usaid.govarchive.us/>.

Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC)

USAID established the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) in 1975 as a repository for materials such as annual reports, evaluations, strategy documents, and oral histories from former Foreign Service Officers that documented the agency's work. When taken offline in January 2025, it provided access to "over 250,000 technical and programmatic materials" (per old system documentation) from sixty years of international development implementation. An exact number is difficult to determine since the DEC housed publicly available materials, SBU/sensitive materials behind the USAID firewall, and hardcopy materials that had not been digitized. The DEC had an application programming interface (API) that allowed users to download the publicly accessible materials. Some users downloaded the contents of the DEC to experiment with applying AI approaches to extract learning from this knowledge base, and perhaps some did so as acts of guerrilla archiving.

With these API-accessed copies of the DEC, a number of DEC replicas appeared not long after the site went offline. Their creators intended these replacements to restore public access to the DEC materials. With the launch of DECfinder, Azra Nurkic, CEO and cofounder of I4DI, noted "how easily development knowledge can slip away. As institutional and political priorities change, the public repositories that once grounded our work often get overlooked—or quietly disappear" (Kacapor 2025). Another site, called DEC Document Search, claims to hold over 230,000 documents from the former repository (USAID DEC Archive, n.d.). It is unclear who manages this latter site. In both cases, unlike the original DEC, users need to create an account to access the materials. This makes it impossible for search engines (like Google) to index the content of the sites and makes it challenging to share or embed links to materials from these databases in other documents or websites, as a user could do with persistent uniform resource locators (PURLs) provided by the DEC. So, while the public again has access to much of the material, it has become more challenging to share it with others.

Development Data Library (DDL)

Many of USAID's datasets were available through the USAID Development Data Library (DDL), which was originally developed by DevTech. DevTech was tasked with integrating all of the agency's data products and services in coordination with the Bureau for Management and Chief Information Officer (M/CIO) (DevTech Systems, Inc., n.d.). In *The Integrity of Public Access to Federal Data: Evaluating Disruptions to Open Government Data, 2025–*

2026, Christopher Steven Marcum (2026) provides a detailed analysis of the DDL and what happened in the aftermath of the 2025 DOGE cuts. According to his analysis, the public lost access to the 2,027 data assets on the DDL site on/about January 31, 2025. The lack of an orderly administrative process to preserve the agency's data assets is apparent in the analysis, which highlights issues with the DDL API connection with Data.gov that resulted in ghost datasets in the Federal Data Catalog. It remains unclear to what extent any of the USAID data assets will be archived with NARA. It is ironic that the DDL—established barely a decade ago as part of a new US Open Data policy requiring research partners to make their data public and accessible—ultimately ensured that this data would no longer be public or accessible when the DDL was taken down.

Some data assets were captured by data preservation, rescue, and archiving efforts. Marcum's analysis highlights the preservation of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which collected longitudinal health and population data in developing countries. The dataset remains available through the contractor website, which has secured project funding for the next three years. ICPSR also rescued several education-related datasets and preserved them on datalumos.org. Additionally, Marcum points to the archiving work conducted by the Library Innovation Lab at Harvard Law School in 2024–2025 to rescue the remaining publicly accessible data held by USAID on Data.gov. This effort resulted in the preservation of 2,028 datasets, which are now available for viewing and downloading on the lab's website (Library Innovation Lab at Harvard Law School 2025).

However, making datasets publicly available is not the focus of the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort, as it requires somewhat different skills and expertise, especially around privacy and redaction of social science data, than those currently possessed by the group. Those who collected the data own it, and the US government has an unlimited-use license to the data. The ideal situation is for the data owners to post it to one of the platforms mentioned above. USAID Knowledge Rescue looks for opportunities to help other groups, especially those with experience handling datasets, identify the most promising pathways to rescue and archive available USAID-funded data.

Sector-Based Websites

Some sector-based websites, such as the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) and the Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Network, were taken offline in early 2025 when all foreign assistance funding was frozen by the Trump administration. After several months, funding was restored by the US Department of State. While these sites were offline and with little indication of when, or if, funding might be restored, irreparable damage was done to the working relationships and trust built with partner governments, organizations, and beneficiaries worldwide who relied on these sites to access valuable information. FEWS had been relied on by NGOs, the UN, and governments worldwide as a key element in decisions regarding the timing and nature of providing emergency food assistance.

Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Network

The Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Network was a community of practice for food security and nutrition implementers, researchers, and donors worldwide, established in 2010 under the auspices of the Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program, funded by the USAID Office of Food for Peace (FFP). The FSN Network was funded through a series of cooperative agreements, most recently by USAID's Bureau for

Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), until USAID's demise in 2025. The network enabled its members to exchange knowledge, collaborate, and learn while shaping agendas, influencing donor priorities, and building consensus on promising practices.

The FSN Network website served as a knowledge hub, featuring an extensive library of tools, guides, and capacity-strengthening materials, as well as proceedings from large-scale knowledge-sharing events and stakeholder consultations. Thanks to the efforts of Save the Children, the website has come back online after being shut down in 2025 and is now funded through cooperative agreements with the US Department of State, ensuring that decades of investment in resources remain accessible to strengthen capacity and improve the performance of food security and nutrition programs.

DRGLinks to DRGHub

DRGLinks was an external online platform developed under USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, completed in September 2023 and officially launched in November 2023. Managed under a contract with Cloudburst Group, the platform curated high-quality technical resources and evidence in a single accessible location—including technical guides, evidence reviews, e-learning courses, and recordings of learning events—for use by USAID staff, implementing partners, academics, and practitioners across the DRG field. DRGLinks also complemented USAID's DRG Learning, Evidence, and Analysis Platform (LEAP), which hosted country-level data portraits, indicator inventories, and evidence maps to support evidence-based program design.

When USAID was dismantled in early 2025, the Cloudburst contract sustaining DRGLinks was canceled, with Cloudburst continuing to cover some maintenance costs as part of its closeout obligations before the platform went offline in spring 2025. Drawing on this preservation work, DRGHub (drghub.org) was launched in August 2025 as an independent successor platform, gradually expanding its content over time. DRGHub is currently funded and maintained by an individual and serves as a global resource that consolidates evidence, technical practice, insights, and learning to support democratic practice worldwide (DRGHub, n.d.).

These examples—FEWS NET, the FSN Network, and DRG Links—are just three of many knowledge websites closed down in early 2025 across all sectors relevant to development and humanitarian assistance.

Reuse and the Future of USAID Knowledge

As illustrated in the preceding sections, a significant amount of USAID's data, information, and knowledge has been rescued and made accessible through various websites and portals. In addition to rescuing information, other recent initiatives have leveraged access to USAID information and technology in innovative ways. An article from the Stanford Innovation Lab highlights the work of DevelopMetrics, a social enterprise that created the Development Evidence Large Learning Model (DELLM). This domain-specific AI system was trained to read, classify, and connect development evidence at scale and was run on sixty years' worth of evaluation reports in USAID's DEC (Moore 2025).

Using a precise taxonomy of how development work is described in practice and a human-coded dataset to develop an aggregated spreadsheet of interventions, outcomes, a confidence score, and metadata related to each evaluation, DevelopMetrics refined the data through a series of prompts to reveal patterns and the five most frequent lessons—essentially

functioning as an AI “institutional memory” to surface valuable nuggets of knowledge and examples from thousands of pages of USAID evaluations. As Moore (2025) suggests, preserving what USAID has learned over its long history is particularly important given the agency’s demise in 2025.

Given the current administration’s hostility toward USAID, a number of the agency’s former partners have removed or de-emphasized agency branding, program names, and language to avoid scrutiny/targeting, complicating online searches for data, information, and knowledge formerly funded by USAID. Anyone attempting to access USAID information now struggles through broken links to and from the agency’s original websites and the loss of original metadata. It will be interesting to see how these dynamics affect the business models of former partners and others who hold USAID knowledge, information, or data that the public no longer has access to.

A year after USAID was dismantled, the resulting ecosystem of rescued data, information, and knowledge is complicated. While it is gratifying to see so many initiatives that value USAID information enough to dedicate resources to preserve and provide access to it, there are advantages and disadvantages to having information in so many places. By having a fragmented information ecosystem, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to take down. By the same token, having information preserved by many different organizations makes it challenging to maintain an accurate map of its location, establish consistent standards for access and metadata, and measure resource usage and impact. This new information landscape provides an opportunity to see how different organizations and individuals innovate to meet stakeholders’ needs.

Conclusion/Call to Action

As stated in the introduction, this article provides an update as of April 2026 on the data, information, and knowledge available on USAID public websites at the time the agency was dismantled and where some of these resources can now be found online. While there are federal policies and guidelines to ensure effective management, accountability, and the preservation of public information, there is no enforcement capacity for compliance. Like many other organizations, USAID lacked a complete inventory of its websites, data, and knowledge resources. As a result, there is no way to determine the full extent of the information lost when the agency was dismantled.

The work of the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort and other groups initially focused on preventing loss by mirroring websites and by volunteers saving resources. As part of the larger information stewardship community in the US, we have the opportunity to learn from others who have gone down this road before. Because of the work of the End of Term Web Archive, the Internet Archive, WebRecorder’s US Government Web Archive, ICPSR, DataLumos, the Data.gov Archive, and others, there now exists an ecosystem of preservation infrastructure, tools, and expertise that other knowledge rescue efforts can tap into.

For many rescue efforts, the next steps include ensuring access through curation and metadata improvements, using analytics to identify valuable resources, and demonstrating usage and impact. This is often the key to sustainability as it allows rescue efforts to attract the funding needed to continue. Members of the information stewardship community have generously shared their experiences and expertise with volunteers from the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort and have offered support in the months ahead.

While this article focused on the publicly available information on USAID's websites, it represents only a small subset of the information created by staff and partners, including official government records, reports, documents, and information on internal websites. There are many lessons from USAID's recent experience, and no doubt there is more to learn in our future. In terms of practical lessons learned for other federal agencies and organizations, we would recommend the following:

1. Maintain an accurate inventory of all public datasets, websites, and information resources, and update it annually. Ideally, this inventory would be publicly accessible online and be part of a transparent accountability process in line with the spirit of the Evidence Act.
2. To the extent possible, collaborate with partners and other organizations to maintain access and preserve public information. Many USAID resources were rescued by partners.
3. Even though no enforcement capacity exists for federal archiving, work with staff and partners to ensure that all official records are sent to NARA in accordance with the agency's records schedule.

The shuttering of USAID, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and others makes it clear that organizations are not permanent, and the knowledge they generate is fragile. When an organization ends, time moves quickly. The careful, deliberate work of identifying and preserving decades-old institutional knowledge can get crowded out by the immediate pressures of winding down in weeks or months. Staff need to have thoughtful conversations about what to do with knowledge assets before the crisis arrives in order to be effective stewards.

We argue that every organization should have a knowledge "living will" or legacy plan. When planning for knowledge continuity, most organizations tend to focus on two areas: maintaining records and administrative documentation as ongoing practices, and protecting access to critical information during short-term disruptions. Both are necessary. Records management frameworks are mature, often legally grounded, and reasonably well understood. Organizational continuity planning, while uneven in practice, at least exists as a recognized practice with established guidance. A third component, largely absent from organizational planning, is the deliberate preparation for the transfer, preservation, and long-term stewardship of an organization's generated knowledge in the event that the organization itself ceases to exist.

The distinction matters because records management, however thorough, was never designed to do this work. An annual grant or contract report documents what was spent and, broadly, what was done. It does not capture what the organization learned, what approaches failed quietly before a successful one was found, what relationships sustained the work, or what the staff understood about their field that existed nowhere in writing. That knowledge, both tacit and explicit, provides context and nuance and is what is most at risk when organizations close and what successor organizations, peer institutions, and the communities they serve should have access to.

Archivists, librarians, and knowledge management specialists are the practitioners left navigating organizational endings on the ground, often without a plan and with dwindling resources. That experience, frustrating as it is, confers both standing and credibility. The field has conceptual tools such as triage frameworks, appraisal methodologies, and digital preservation standards that organizational leaders rarely possess. What has been missing is the application of those tools to this specific and underserved problem: not disaster recovery,

not routine records management, but the deliberate planning for what an organization leaves behind.

Existing frameworks offer partial guidance. Continuity of operations planning, digital preservation handbooks, and archival appraisal literature each address a piece of the problem. That gap is an invitation for organizations to develop a knowledge “living will” or legacy plan. Library and information science (LIS) and knowledge management professionals working with organizational leaders are the right people to develop these “living wills,” and the need could not be more urgent. The organizations that have closed and continue to close around us right now deserve a plan. The ones still operating have time to make one.

Given the current political climate, the ongoing dismantling of federal agencies, and the threat of the loss of public information across the government, it is prudent to be prepared and to have risk mitigation plans in place to ensure public information is preserved. The work of the USAID Knowledge Rescue effort and others is still evolving and may one day contribute to the postcustodial rebuilding and preservation of the agency’s legacy.

One additional step that organizations and individuals can take to preserve US government information is to endorse and sign the Preservation of Government Information: An Information Stewardship Call to Action, which aims to build a community of government information practitioners around a set of agreed principles and action items to preserve public information and build a distributed Digital Preservation Infrastructure (DPI) (Jacobs and Jacobs 2026).

This update on the USAID data, information, and knowledge rescue efforts since early 2025 reflects a range of emotions: appreciation for the resources that have been saved, deep gratitude for the collaboration and support from the information stewardship community, and also a desire to share our experiences with other federal staff to prevent this from happening to other agencies and organizations.

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About the Authors

Tanya Torres is a former USAID Knowledge Management Team Lead, has earned a Master of Library Science (MLS) degree from the University of Maryland (UMD), and will be a doctoral student in UMD's Information Science Leadership and Community Engagement (D.Inf.Sci.) program, starting in fall 2026. She can be reached at ttorres@umd.edu.

Zachary Baquet is a USAID Strategy and Learning Advisor and Acting Division Chief for Analysis, Data, and Learning, and will be a student in UMD's College of Information's Master's in Library and Information Science (MLIS) program starting in fall 2026. He can be reached at zbaquet@gmail.com.