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# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

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# Acronyms

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<b>AWG</b>	Accountability Working Group (MFAN)
<b>CAP</b>	Center for American Progress
<b>CBO</b>	Congressional Budget Office
<b>CDR</b>	Consensus for Development Reform
<b>CGD</b>	Center for Global Development
<b>COWG</b>	Country Ownership Working Group (MFAN)
<b>FAA</b>	Foreign Assistance Act
<b>FATAA</b>	Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act
<b>GPA</b>	Global Partnerships Act
<b>GPG</b>	Glover Park Group
<b>HFAC</b>	House Foreign Affairs Committee
<b>IATI</b>	International Aid Transparency Initiative
<b>IFARA</b>	Initiating Foreign Assistance Reform Act
<b>IPR</b>	Implementation and Procurement Reform
<b>KHG</b>	Kyle House Group
<b>LER</b>	Office of Learning, Accountability, and Research
<b>MCC</b>	Millennium Challenge Corporation
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>MFAN</b>	Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental organization
<b>NSC</b>	National Security Council
<b>NSS</b>	National Security Strategy
<b>OMB</b>	Office of Management and Budget
<b>PEPFAR</b>	United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
<b>PPD-6</b>	Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development
<b>PSD</b>	Presidential Study Directive
<b>QDDR</b>	Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review
<b>SFRC</b>	Senate Foreign Affairs Committee
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	U.S. Agency for International Development
<b>USGLC</b>	U.S. Global Leadership Coalition
<b>USTR</b>	Office of the United States Trade Representative

# Executive Summary

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## About the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network

The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)<sup>1</sup> is dedicated to bolstering the leadership role of the United States in promoting economic growth and reducing poverty and suffering around the world by improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of U.S. foreign assistance. MFAN is a bipartisan coalition of international development and foreign policy practitioners and experts representing think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector organizations, and also includes former government officials. Since its launch in 2008, MFAN has worked closely with the U.S. Congress, the executive branch, and the broader development community to advance a reform agenda to increase the impact of U.S. development assistance.<sup>2</sup>

## About the Evaluation

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation commissioned this evaluation, working in close collaboration with MFAN, to learn from MFAN's past: its relevance and effectiveness, and the sustainability of its impact. This evaluation studied MFAN's activities and results from just before its launch in mid-2008 through mid-2016. It was planned for a key moment: as the Hewlett Foundation completed its funding for MFAN, and MFAN prepared for its next phase. It also occurred during the 2016 U.S. elections and the early months of the Trump presidency, giving its findings greater importance, as MFAN positioned itself in a new and challenging political environment.

The evaluation used a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods including document and literature reviews, interviews, a survey, workshops, and a facilitated learning discussion. The evaluation team and evaluation advisory committee<sup>3</sup> also met several times throughout the process.

The evaluation included four phases and was built around four areas of questioning: results, adaptability, coalition effectiveness, and member engagement. The team also assessed these questions as they related to four outcomes to which MFAN felt the network had made significant contributions: the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development, the rewriting of the Foreign Assistance Act, the passage and enactment of the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act, and progress the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) made on its Local Solutions initiative.<sup>4</sup> The resulting findings in this report are organized around the four areas of questioning and provide useful insights both for efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of MFAN and efforts to create and strengthen networks in other key public policy areas. Appendix 1 then provides a detailed narrative story for each of four contribution areas mentioned above. More details on the evaluation process are provided below and in the appendices.

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<sup>1</sup> References to MFAN in this report include its fiscal sponsor, New Venture Fund. New Venture Fund serves as the official legal and fiscal entity for MFAN and exercises management oversight over the project.

<sup>2</sup> See Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, About MFAN. Available at: <http://modernizeaid.net/about-us/>.

<sup>3</sup> To guide this evaluation, Hewlett and MFAN created an evaluation advisory committee with two representatives from the Hewlett Foundation, two MFAN co-chairs, the executive director of the Hub (MFAN's secretariat), and a deputy. A few other MFAN members with leadership roles in MFAN or who represent key MFAN member organizations joined the committee for some meetings with the evaluation team.

<sup>4</sup> These four outcomes were selected from among a list of outcomes that MFAN member interviewees and survey respondents identified as having been influenced by MFAN. MFAN members believed that these were among the most important outcomes on the list and had benefited the most from MFAN's involvement. They also represent changes in both legislation and executive branch policy, as well as changes that took place over the period covered by the evaluation (2008-2016). Appendix 1 provides a detailed narrative account of the efforts that led to each of the four outcomes.

## Key Findings

**MFAN members have achieved more together as a network than they could have achieved individually.** This is evident in increased support for foreign assistance reform within the development community and Congress, as well as policy changes.

**MFAN raised global development on the policy agenda, and made foreign assistance reform principles mainstream.** MFAN's focus on reform principles strongly contributed to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) looking beyond their silos to reach agreement on broader aid approaches.

**MFAN has helped build a bipartisan constituency in Congress that supports foreign assistance reform.** In July 2016, the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act, on which MFAN was a key external partner, passed the Senate and the House with broad bipartisan support. In 2010, MFAN was also instrumental in the creation of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Effective Foreign Assistance, which started in the House and has since expanded to the Senate.

**MFAN played a critical role in advancing legislative and policy changes that reflect key foreign assistance reform principles.**

- ***The Global Partnerships Act (GPA), a bill aimed at modernizing the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA), was written and introduced.*** Congressman Howard Berman (D-CA), chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the committee rewrote the FAA, and Congressman Berman introduced the new bill in December 2012 largely because of MFAN's support, according to a key policymaker and his staff. It was at MFAN's urging that Congressman Berman decided to pursue rewriting the FAA. MFAN then played a critical role bringing together the development community to support this effort, and helping bridge sectoral divides. It continually encouraged the Obama administration to partner with Congress on legislation. It also kept pressing Congressman Berman's office to draft the new bill. Given the effort involved in the task, absent MFAN, Congressman Berman and his staff would not have attempted to rewrite the FAA, and the development community might not have found a similar opportunity to come together around a common reform agenda.
- ***The Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) was enacted into law.*** FATAA "require[d] that detailed foreign assistance information be regularly updated on the ForeignAssistance.gov website, and that development and economic assistance be rigorously monitored and evaluated."<sup>5</sup> FATAA's enactment in 2016 resulted from the long-term, concerted effort of many stakeholders, among whom MFAN played the most critical role, according to congressional staff members. MFAN provided much of FATAA's content. MFAN was in the most regular contact with congressional offices on the bill, and did most of the outsider legwork to keep the bill moving. Absent MFAN, the quality or focus of the bill might have changed; some congressional offices may have focused on competing priorities instead; or broad-based political support might not have coalesced.
- ***USAID advanced its reforms related to country ownership<sup>6</sup> and accountability.*** MFAN members worked together to help USAID adjust its agency-wide program cycle<sup>7</sup> guidance to support greater

<sup>5</sup> George Ingram, Carolyn Miles, and Connie Veillette, July 6, 2016, "Foreign Aid Accountability Bill Unanimously Approved by Congress, Heads to the President for Signature," MFAN, <http://modernizeaid.net/2016/07/foreign-aid-accountability-bill-unanimously-approved-congress-heads-president-signature/>.

<sup>6</sup> MFAN and the development community generally use the term "country ownership." The term "local ownership" is most favored by USAID reformers. USAID uses "local ownership" to refer not only to partner governments, but also civil society and the private sector.

<sup>7</sup> USAID's "Program Cycle, codified in the *Automated Directive Systems (ADS) 201*, is USAID's operational model for planning, delivering, assessing, and adapting development programming." See <https://usaidlearninglab.org/program-cycle-overview-page>.



country ownership and improve evaluations, according to USAID staff members. MFAN was a strong voice for country ownership within the executive branch and the development community, as well as on the Hill. During the contentious roll out of USAID's Implementation and Procurement Reform initiative (IPR) in 2011. MFAN successfully neutralized most opposition from international NGOs and private contractors. MFAN was an invaluable sounding board for USAID staff, helping them figure out how to implement the agency's Local Solutions initiative, through which USAID sought to increase its direct investment in partner governments and local organizations. MFAN also helped USAID staff overcome internal obstacles on measurement reforms related to Local Solutions goals. Absent MFAN, there would not have been such a strong external voice supporting country ownership and USAID's reforms, and USAID would have been hard pressed to overcome internal obstacles.

- ***The first-ever Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6) was issued in September 2010.*** MFAN's work among its members to agree on shared aid reform principles, and its advocacy prior to the 2008 elections and during the Obama transition appear to have provided content and political momentum for PPD-6. An MFAN founder entered the Obama administration, and was a key drafter of PPD-6. However, most interviewees agree that MFAN was not a key player in influencing the drafting of the directive. Absent MFAN, PPD-6 would likely still have been issued, given the administration's support for these concepts. Nonetheless, the global recession might have knocked the topic off the list of presidential priorities without the visible network of thought leaders advocating for the emerging consensus on how to reform foreign assistance.

**A number of MFAN's characteristics contributed to its gains, including MFAN's membership, focus, strategy, tactics, and operations.** MFAN serves as a platform where diverse groups – think tanks, NGOs, former policymakers, and other thought leaders – connect, build trust among themselves, and share information, with a concentrated focus on U.S. foreign assistance reform. Members offer complementary experience and expertise. To bring in a diverse membership and to appeal to a broad spectrum of policymakers, MFAN remains principles-focused and nonpartisan in its agenda. Its members, because of their seniority in the field, have many valuable relationships that facilitate sharing ideas with Congress and the administration. Over time, they have deepened those relationships and developed new ones, all of which have helped MFAN identify and address obstacles to policy change. MFAN's secretariat, referred to as the Hub, and select MFAN members have provided policymakers and their staff with constant engagement supporting their reform efforts. Finally, through its membership, publications, and advocacy, MFAN has developed a reputation as the go-to resource on aid reform for target audiences, such as congressional staff and other members of the development community.

**Yet, MFAN has also missed some opportunities.** According to some MFAN leaders and members, a prime area is related to earmarks and presidential initiatives, which are significant obstacles to increased aid effectiveness. In their view, MFAN did not make strong enough statements or take effective action about these, in deference to its members.

*“There was no support in the administration for getting rid of earmarks. We should have publicized more about the effects of earmarks, exposed the absurdity of them. This would potentially have teed it up for the next administration, and given more strength to people inside the agencies.”*

Former MFAN member

In addition, many interviewees said MFAN has had difficulty navigating relationships with friends in the administration, and knowing when to push or critique. Some believe MFAN could have been more engaged on sectoral legislation and strategies, although there is evidence of MFAN exerting its influence in both areas. Others believe MFAN could have been more influential if it had stronger relationships with more agencies.

Finally, many MFAN members noted that MFAN lost momentum and effectiveness, while it underwent internal transitions in 2013 and 2014. For example, most members felt MFAN missed opportunities to weigh in on legislation and policy decisions related to country ownership during that period.

#### **MFAN’s missed opportunities have been attributed to a number of causes.**

Many interviewees noted MFAN’s efforts to balance its membership size with its strength of message. More weight on the former at times led to watered-down messaging, while emphasizing the latter at times led to less reach. When working to enhance its political strength – achieved through a combination of strong messages and membership size, MFAN has faced challenges getting some members on board with its agenda. This was true in its early days, when some members feared a message focused on aid effectiveness might undermine calls for greater aid funding. When emphasizing strength of message, having sufficient bandwidth to access the full range of key actors has been challenging. Members have also hesitated to critique the administration in power for fear of losing access to certain circles and conversations.

Internally, MFAN undertook too many simultaneous changes during its 2013-2014 transition (details below), leading to decreased network effectiveness for six to twelve months. For a time, MFAN lacked clarity about its governance and decision-making processes for the new structure, and some MFAN members also felt that their roles were unclear.

## Conclusion

Based on this evaluation’s findings, MFAN plays an essential role in advancing U.S. foreign assistance reform, due to its singular focus on the topic, its nonpartisan approach, and the quality and engagement of its membership.

## Recommendations

To increase its influence even further, the evaluation team identified the following recommendations, based on the findings. Recommendations specific to the 2017 presidential transition are presented in a separate policy memo.

MFAN and its members should:

- **Focus** | Maintain focus on the importance of U.S. foreign assistance and making it more effective. MFAN's singular focus on and nonpartisan framing of this issue appeal to a broad spectrum of policymakers.
- **Strategic priorities** | Continue to regularly and systematically assess the policy landscape (including Congress, the administration, and the development community), and adjust priorities accordingly.
- **Membership** | Continue to identify and work closely with members who share MFAN's priorities, have committed to work on foreign aid reform through MFAN – even with uncertain funding, and have convening power, access, influence, knowledge, and expertise about congressional and administration policymaking and technical content. Also identify additional actors to bring in, depending on MFAN's agenda and the gaps it needs to fill. Maintaining a membership that includes think tanks, NGOs, and former policymakers gives MFAN the breadth of perspectives, experience, and expertise needed to generate innovative ideas and grounded policy proposals.
- **Dedicated resources** | Encourage MFAN funders to require that grantees focused on sectors, such as health or education, also adhere to aid reform principles. Also, encourage MFAN funders to coordinate with each other to maximize the impact of their investments. Members need to identify funding sources or other mechanisms that can support their aid reform work and participation in MFAN.
- **Structure** | Establish a streamlined structure that: represents the minimum required for MFAN to advance its agenda, in order to facilitate decision making; reflects members' skills and resources; and ensures the easy flow of information among members. When MFAN's agenda is broad and focused on agenda setting, a core group of highly committed principals and deputies meeting regularly can achieve that purpose. Thematic working groups are effective at addressing narrower issues focused on policy adoption and implementation.
- **Decision-making process** | Develop more explicit guidelines for how decisions are made in order to increase coalition effectiveness within a larger and more diverse MFAN that has a more complex structure than in its earlier years. For example, MFAN should clarify the authority working groups have to make decisions, and when they need to consult with the Executive Committee and co-chairs. The near-consensus decision-making model and absence of clear governance rules worked best when MFAN was a smaller, more homogenous group.
- **Fostering relationships with allies** | Foster relationships with allies to expand MFAN's political heft without losing its policy sharpness. This can be done through participating in ad hoc efforts, such as the campaign on the budget led by the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition; bringing others into MFAN's working groups, such as allies dedicated to MFAN's priorities; or participating in others' working groups, such as those at InterAction. In these relationships, connecting and building awareness among members, in addition to top leaders, will help maximize the influence and results that MFAN and its allies can achieve.
- **External relationships with policymakers** | Undertake a formal landscape analysis to understand key leverage points, and regularly update this analysis. Create a process to allow MFAN to prioritize its relationship-building efforts, so MFAN can increase its influence and avoid missed opportunities. MFAN needs to continue to reach out to members of the Freedom Caucus, either directly, through MFAN members, or via the Kyle House Group and the Consensus for Development Reform. MFAN also needs to foster stronger relationships with appropriators and other committees in Congress, such as Armed Services. Additionally, MFAN must build relationships with strategically positioned members of the administration who value foreign assistance and want to increase its effectiveness.



# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

About the Modernizing  
Foreign Assistance Network  
(MFAN)

The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)<sup>8</sup> is dedicated to bolstering the leadership role of the United States in promoting economic growth and reducing poverty and suffering around the world by improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of U.S. foreign assistance. MFAN is a bipartisan coalition of international development and foreign policy practitioners and experts representing think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector organizations, and also includes former government officials. Since its launch in 2008, MFAN has worked closely with the U.S. Congress, the executive branch, and the broader development community to advance a reform agenda to increase the impact of U.S. development assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Building on national and global momentum pushing for greater aid effectiveness<sup>10</sup>, in 2007, the Hewlett Foundation began a series of conversations with development experts at several think tanks to “discuss the possibility of a coherent and coordinated approach to their independent, but related, work on foreign aid reform.”<sup>11</sup> These included experts from the Center for Global Development (CGD), the Brookings Institution, and the Center for American Progress (CAP), all of whom received funding from the Hewlett Foundation. A consensus emerged that, as one interviewee described it, the “foreign aid apparatus was broken,” and had not adapted well to the challenges of the 21st century. Too much aid money was earmarked for sector-specific programs.

Early on, Hewlett program officers concluded that having primarily think tanks in the conversation was creating an “echo chamber.” The conversation was then broadened to involve more nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), even though some at Hewlett doubted that NGOs would want to join, since some benefitted from earmarked funding from U.S. development agencies. Nevertheless, Hewlett program officers knew NGOs needed to be on board “if USAID was going to have a coherent strategy that was more driven by local needs and priorities,” as one officer explained.

The unofficial launch of MFAN as a coalition began during a two-day Wye River retreat in Maryland in January 2008, which gathered together global development experts from think tanks, NGOs, and individuals who had worked on U.S. foreign assistance for much of their careers to develop a consensus on how to reform and restructure the U.S. foreign aid system. At the conclusion of the retreat, the group agreed on key principles and a set of potential action items.

The coalition formally launched in 2008. Gayle Smith from CAP and Steve Radelet from CGD served as its first co-chairs. Representatives from think tanks, NGOs, and former policy officials became decision-making members of the coalition. As one Hewlett program officer remembered, “It was exciting bringing together these ... sets of actors who hadn’t interacted in a coalition way ever before. It was groundbreaking. What was really heartening was to see the trust that emerged and the relationships that were built that didn’t exist before.”

Each member organization appointed a principal and a “plus one” to participate in MFAN. This ensured high visibility and “boots on the ground” to produce research and policy papers. A core group was

<sup>8</sup> References to MFAN in this report include its fiscal sponsor, New Venture Fund. New Venture Fund serves as the official legal and fiscal entity for MFAN and exercises management oversight over the project.

<sup>9</sup> See Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, About MFAN. Available at: <http://modernizeaid.net/about-us/>.

<sup>10</sup> At the Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, governments, multilateral and bilateral development institutions, and civil society organizations agreed to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which set out five principles aimed at making aid more effective. See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>. In 2006, the U.S. Congress created the Helping to Enhance the Livelihood of People around the Globe (HELP) Commission to review U.S. foreign assistance programs and recommend ways to improve them. The commission published its report in 2007. See <http://helpcommission.info/>.

<sup>11</sup> Freedman Consulting, LLC, April 29, 2010, Strategic Review: An Evaluation of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network & Options for Moving Forward, Summary Draft, Freedman Consulting, LLC, p. 2, unpublished.

charged with drafting MFAN's foundational document, *New Day, New Way*. The document, published in June 2008, made the following policy recommendations: (1) develop a national strategy for global development; (2) reach a "Grand Bargain" between Congress and the executive branch and enact a new Foreign Assistance Act; (3) streamline organizational structures, create a Cabinet-level Department for Global Development, rebuild human resource capacity, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation; and (4) increase funding for and accountability of foreign aid.

In late 2008, Hewlett contracted with the Glover Park Group (GPG) to handle messaging for MFAN. Two member organizations offered themselves as potential hosts for MFAN's secretariat (or Hub), and MFAN leadership selected Bread for the World. The formation of the Hub moved slowly, so Hewlett and the co-chairs decided to expand GPG's role to manage MFAN, while MFAN Hub staff, who reported to GPG, remained housed at Bread for the World. Bread for the World was MFAN's fiscal sponsor and the Hub's host until 2013, when the New Venture Fund became MFAN's fiscal sponsor, and the Hub established its own office independent of MFAN members.

During MFAN's first years, several key MFAN members, including its first two co-chairs and several plus ones, entered the Obama administration. This potentially gave MFAN access to high-level policymakers. By 2009, it was clear the administration was not enthusiastic about working with Congress on aid reform legislation. Because some of those who entered the Obama administration were from think tanks, MFAN membership from that sector waned. MFAN recruited more NGOs and sector-focused organizations to become members to strengthen its advocacy capacity. MFAN appointed two new co-chairs, both from NGOs: David Beckmann (Bread for the World) and George Ingram (then with Academy for Educational Development). They worked closely with the MFAN Hub staff and GPG to develop a legislative strategy. A legislative working group was formed to lead on advocacy around several aid effectiveness bills.

After Republicans won the majority in the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm election, MFAN appointed a former Republican policymaker and MFAN principal, Jim Kolbe, as a third MFAN co-chair. In 2009, MFAN had hired a Republican consulting group – first Capitol Management Initiatives and then the Kyle House Group – to conduct additional outreach to congressional Republicans, and formed a small group within its Advocacy Subcommittee to support the consulting group's work.

Advancing comprehensive reform legislation proved difficult after 2010, so MFAN began focusing on enacting parts of its reform package (e.g., the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA)), and doing more outreach to embed aid reform principles in sector-focused legislation, including the Education for All Act and the Water for the World Act. While MFAN had some success with these strategies, it lost momentum and focus in 2012 and 2013. One contributing factor was that the diversity of the coalition had made it difficult to reach consensus on sharp policy positions.

In 2013, recognizing MFAN's lost momentum, Hewlett felt that MFAN needed to refresh its strategy. It also made clear to MFAN that it sought to invest in organizations aligned with its priorities. Through their conversations, Hewlett and the MFAN co-chairs agreed that MFAN would refocus MFAN's agenda to concentrate efforts in two areas: (1) transparency, accountability, and learning; and (2) developing country ownership, including the alignment of aid with recipient countries' national priorities and support for processes that foster citizen participation in decisions. In addition, MFAN appointed two new co-chairs: Carolyn Miles from Save the Children and Connie Veillette from the Lugar Center. George Ingram, now with the Brookings Institution, stayed on as a third co-chair. The MFAN co-chairs reduced the size of its membership, and asked members to commit to greater involvement in the coalition. They invited some principals to join the newly formed Executive Committee, thus streamlining the decision-making process.

In the final years of the Obama administration, MFAN continued to achieve important outcomes and make meaningful progress. FATAA passed, and USAID reformed its operating procedures to embed local ownership principles in its manuals for its Missions and implementing partners. MFAN was a major force in these victories, and demonstrated that a bipartisan coalition can engage and connect key leaders committed to aid effectiveness, align its members' policy assets and resources, and take joint action to successfully advance an aid reform agenda. These stories and two more from MFAN's earlier years are captured more fully in Appendix 1.

Table 1. MFAN structure, membership, and governance 2008–2016.

	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016
<b>Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential campaign and election</li> <li>• Global economic crisis</li> <li>• Obama administration begins</li> <li>• Democratic-controlled House and Senate</li> <li>• Global consensus emerging on development reform</li> <li>• New leadership at USAID</li> <li>• Midterm congressional campaigns and election</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Republican-controlled House</li> <li>• Partisan conflict</li> <li>• Looming budget deficit</li> <li>• Slow economic recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Republican-controlled Senate and House</li> <li>• End of the Obama presidency</li> <li>• Presidential campaign and election</li> </ul>
<b>MFAN Policy Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u><i>New Day, New Way</i></u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u><i>From Policy to Practice</i></u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u><i>The Way Forward</i></u></li> <li>• <u><i>ACCOUNTDown to 2017</i></u></li> </ul>
<b>MFAN Top Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPD-6</li> <li>• Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) 2010</li> <li>• ForeignAssistance.gov</li> <li>• Initiating Foreign Assistance Reform Act (Rep. Berman)</li> <li>• Foreign Assistance Revitalization and Accountability Act (Sens. Kerry and Lugar)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPD-6 implementation</li> <li>• ForeignAssistance.gov</li> <li>• Global Partnerships Act (GPA) (Rep. Berman)</li> <li>• Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) (Rep. Poe, Sens. Lugar and Rubio)</li> <li>• USAID Bureau for Policy Planning and Learning (PPL) and Office of Budget and Resource Management (BRM)</li> <li>• USAID evaluation policy</li> <li>• USAID transparency</li> <li>• 3.0 transparency and accountability for the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FATAA (Reps. Poe and Connolly, Sens. Rubio and Cardin)</li> <li>• USAID Local Solutions initiative</li> <li>• ForeignAssistance.gov</li> <li>• QDDR 2015</li> <li>• Department of State evaluation policy</li> <li>• USAID transparency</li> <li>• USAID ADS 201</li> <li>• PEPFAR 3.0 transparency and accountability</li> <li>• PEPFAR 3.0 Sustainability Framework</li> <li>• Millennium Challenge Corporation NEXT strategy</li> </ul>



	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Addis Tax Initiative and Domestic Resource Mobilization</li> <li>• Food for Peace Reform Act (Sens. Corker and Coons)</li> </ul>
<b>MFAN Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 co-chairs</li> <li>• 16 principals</li> <li>• Plus ones</li> <li>• GPG communications/management consultant</li> <li>• Working groups (communications)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 co-chairs</li> <li>• 25 principals</li> <li>• Deputies</li> <li>• Advocacy Subcommittee</li> <li>• Working groups (legislative, communications, and Republican outreach)</li> <li>• Managing consultant and the Hub (MFAN secretariat)</li> <li>• Republican outreach consultant – Capitol Management Initiatives and then Kyle House Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 co-chairs</li> <li>• Executive Committee</li> <li>• 18 principals</li> <li>• Deputies</li> <li>• Working groups (Country Ownership, Accountability, Emerging Issues)</li> <li>• Hill sub-group of deputies</li> <li>• Independent Hub</li> <li>• Republican outreach consultant - Kyle House Group</li> </ul>
<b>MFAN Membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 think tanks</li> <li>• 6 NGOs</li> <li>• Individuals with careers working on foreign assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36 organizations and individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 organizations</li> <li>• 5 independent consultants</li> </ul>
<b>MFAN Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly meetings of principals under direction of co-chairs</li> <li>• Small plus one group met weekly</li> <li>• Co-chairs met weekly with Hub, GPG, and Hewlett advisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-chairs met weekly with Hub, GPG, and Hewlett advisor</li> <li>• Quarterly in-person meetings of principals under direction of co-chairs, with monthly calls in between</li> <li>• Plus one group met biweekly under direction of Hub and GPG</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-chairs met weekly with Hub and Hewlett advisor</li> <li>• Executive Committee met quarterly, with phone calls in between</li> <li>• Executive Committee members participated in at least one working group</li> <li>• Deputies met biweekly</li> </ul>

	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016
<b>MFAN Secretariat/ Hub</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-person team managed by MFAN’s fiscal sponsor and overseen by GPG management consultant (de facto network coordinator)</li> <li>• MFAN Senior Policy and Government Relations Associate</li> <li>• MFAN Outreach Associate</li> </ul>	2012: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GPG consultant coordinating MFAN</li> <li>• MFAN Deputy Director</li> <li>• MFAN Outreach Coordinator</li> <li>• MFAN Program Associate</li> </ul>	2014: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MFAN Executive Director</li> <li>• MFAN Communications and Policy Manager</li> <li>• MFAN Program Associate</li> </ul> 2016: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MFAN Executive Director</li> <li>• MFAN Deputy Director and Senior Policy Advisor</li> <li>• MFAN Senior Communications and Policy Manager</li> <li>• MFAN Program and Membership Coordinator</li> <li>• MFAN Program Associate</li> </ul>

This report presents findings from an evaluation of MFAN’s work over its first eight years: 2008–2016, as summarized above. Today, MFAN continues to engage the administration, Congress, and the development community to advance more effective U.S. foreign assistance. As it begins to work with a new administration and the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, MFAN is considering how to position itself to be most effective. In the near term, MFAN is focused on defending the foreign aid budget and finding allies in the administration to protect the independence of the foreign aid structure. Over the longer term, MFAN plans to engage the private sector, think tanks, NGOs, and former policymakers to focus more attention on development finance and humanitarian aid.

# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

## Evaluation Overview

*“Experience shows that three things matter especially to networks, making each an important focus for evaluation [...] ... network connectivity, ... network health, ... and network results.”*

Network Impact and Center for Evaluation Innovation (July 2014) [\*Framing Paper: The State of Network Evaluation\*](#), Guide to Network Evaluation, Part 1, pp. 5-6.

## Purpose

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation commissioned this evaluation, working in close collaboration with MFAN, to learn from MFAN’s past: its relevance and effectiveness, and the sustainability of its impact. The evaluation studied MFAN’s activities and results from just before its launch in mid-2008 through mid-2016. It was planned for a key moment: as the Hewlett Foundation completed its funding for MFAN, and MFAN prepared itself for its next phase. The evaluation process also occurred during the 2016 U.S. elections and the early months of the Trump presidency, giving its findings greater importance, as MFAN positioned itself in a new and challenging political environment.

To determine what a coalition and its advocacy have achieved, it is useful to examine its contributions to policy changes, while examining its capacity helps predict its ability to achieve results in the future. Capacity is seen in the coalition’s effectiveness (leadership models, management structures), member engagement, and adaptability to changes in the external environment. The evaluation was, therefore, designed to answer these key questions about MFAN’s results, adaptability, coalition effectiveness, and member engagement:

- **Results:** To what extent has MFAN achieved its intermediate and ultimate goals? What has been MFAN’s contribution to those achievements?
- **Adaptability:** How effectively did MFAN adapt its agenda and approach to respond to changes in the political environment and optimize opportunities to make progress on MFAN goals? What lessons about agenda setting and approach can MFAN use to prepare for a shift in presidential leadership?
- **Coalition Effectiveness:** How did changes in MFAN leadership models and management structure influence or interfere with the progress MFAN was able to make towards its goals during each of the three phases of its work?
- **Membership and Engagement:** How effectively has MFAN recruited and engaged members and allies to collaborate and align their individual and collective efforts to advance MFAN’s agenda?

The full list of evaluation questions, as addressed in the evaluation, appears in Appendix 6.

## Methods

The evaluation used a variety of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods: document and literature reviews, 44 interviews with MFAN members and external actors, a survey with MFAN members and active members of the MFAN Advocacy Subcommittee that garnered 61 responses (a 33 percent response rate), four workshops with 26 MFAN members, and a facilitated learning discussion with the evaluation advisory

committee<sup>12</sup> and several other MFAN members with leadership roles in the network. The evaluation team and evaluation advisory committee also met regularly during the process to discuss findings to date, explore emergent learning, and review potential recommendations.

The evaluation included four phases: Inception, Breadth, Depth, and Synthesis. During the Breadth phase, the evaluation team gathered feedback broadly on the evaluation's four areas of questioning: results, adaptability, coalition effectiveness, and member engagement. Building on those insights, the evaluation team then used the Depth phase to conduct contribution analysis to examine these questions as they related to four outcomes to which MFAN felt the network had made significant contributions: the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6), the rewriting of the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA), the passage and enactment of the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA), and USAID's progress on its efforts to promote local ownership. These four outcomes were selected from among a list of outcomes that MFAN member interviewees and survey respondents identified as having been influenced by MFAN. MFAN members believed these were among the most important outcomes on the list and had benefited the most from MFAN's involvement. They also represent changes in both legislation and administration policy, as well as changes that took place over the period covered by the evaluation (2008-2016).

More information about the evaluation methods can be found in Appendices [7](#) and [8](#).

## Limitations and Quality Assurance

The evaluation took place while MFAN was making strategic decisions regarding its composition, structure, governance rules, and agenda. Many of the evaluation deliverables had to be completed after strategic decisions needed to be made. To compensate, BLE Solutions and MFAN remained in close communication. Whenever MFAN needed information, BLE Solutions quickly passed along findings informally.

The evaluation was designed to fit within time and budgetary constraints, which limited the number of interviews with external actors in the Breadth phase. To compensate, BLE Solutions, in determining its purposive samples for these interviews, favored interviewees who had been involved with MFAN in multiple ways: as MFAN members, external actors, and/or policymakers.

The survey was designed to gather input from approximately 170 MFAN members and active members of the Advocacy Subcommittee who had been involved in MFAN over the past eight years. Some were difficult to locate. Additionally, the survey was administered at the height of summer vacation, which may have limited the response. Nonetheless, with assistance from MFAN, BLE Solutions achieved an adequate response rate (33 percent).

The retrospective nature of this evaluation presented limitations regarding possible time effects and accidental misrepresentation by interviewees and those who participated in workshops. Data collection primarily took place during the contentious 2016 presidential election, which may have influenced how respondents considered the future and reflected on the past. And, as is often the case in similar social science research, there were potential limitations regarding general selection effects, social desirability, and evaluation apprehension. To overcome these limitations, BLE Solutions designed multiple data collection efforts and systems to triangulate data in all phases.

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<sup>12</sup> To guide this evaluation, Hewlett and MFAN created an evaluation advisory committee with two representatives from the Hewlett Foundation, two MFAN co-chairs, the executive director of the Hub (MFAN's secretariat), and a deputy. A few other MFAN members with leadership roles in MFAN or who represent key MFAN member organizations joined the committee for some meetings with the evaluation team.



# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

## Context of the Evaluation Process

This evaluation studied MFAN’s activities and results from 2008 through 2016.<sup>13</sup> The evaluation process took place from May 2016 through May 2017, during the 2016 U.S. elections. Midway through, Donald Trump was elected president, and on January 20, 2017, he took office. In its first months, the new administration proposed cutting the State Department’s budget by one-third. The administration’s lack of support for foreign assistance was also illustrated by the lack of visibility of the Secretary of State and lack of senior staff at State; a delay nominating a USAID Administrator; and an executive order to reorganize executive branch agencies, including the State Department and all agencies involved in U.S. foreign assistance, potentially eliminating the leadership role of USAID.

In foreign assistance’s favor, the new administration retained a seat for USAID as a permanent member of the National Security Council (NSC) Deputies Committee, which had not been done before. Additionally, MFAN and its members identified a few potentially sympathetic voices within the administration whom they planned to approach. By May 2017, the administration had nominated someone to lead USAID who was very positively viewed within the development community.

The 115<sup>th</sup> Congress is not significantly different from the 114<sup>th</sup>. However, the divisions between the parties, highlighted during the presidential campaign, have continued, as evidenced by contentious cabinet nomination hearings and other partisan battles. Divisions within each party also remain.

MFAN benefits from still having many global development champions – both Republicans and Democrats – in Congress and in key committee and leadership roles. Therefore, Congress will likely offer more opportunities for MFAN over the next few years, and MFAN’s priorities may shift to defending existing budgets and legislation, rather than promoting new initiatives.

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<sup>13</sup> All findings in this report refer to the timeframe studied: mid-2008 through mid-2016. Recommendations are offered in the context of the new political environment of early 2017, but do not reflect specific and evolving policies of the new administration.



# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

Findings

**MFAN's ultimate goal:**

- U.S. foreign assistance reformed to be more effective, efficient, and transparent.

**MFAN's intermediate goals:**

- Congress, the administration, and the development community working across parties, sectors, and cultural divides to reform U.S. foreign assistance.
- MFAN success in raising the administration's, Congress', the development community's, and the public's interest in, knowledge about, and willingness to modernize U.S. foreign assistance.

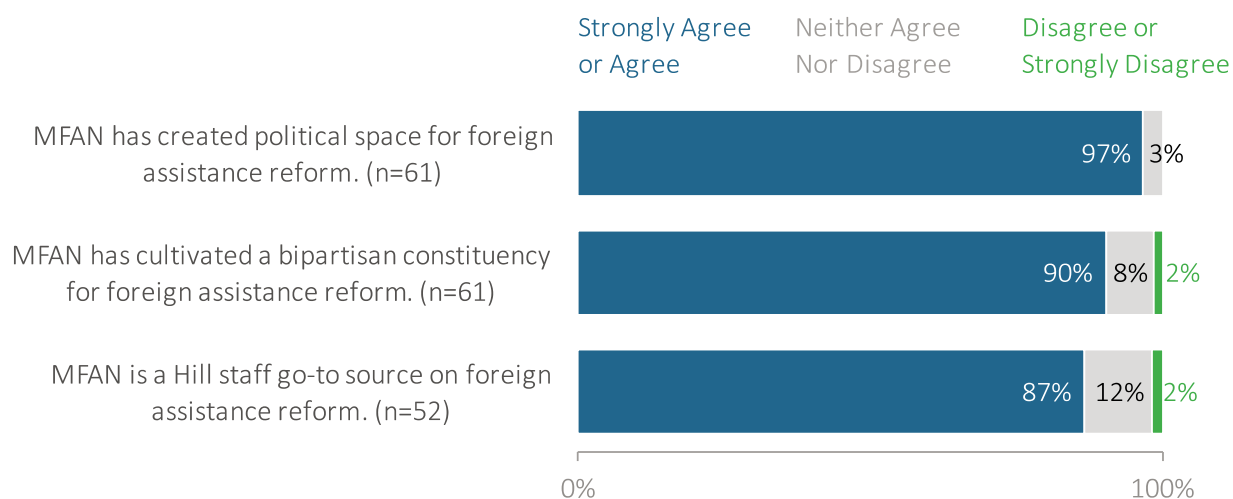
## Results

MFAN's results reflected changes in congressional legislation and administration policy. In many cases, the changes advanced development effectiveness. In a few cases, they protected gains already made, or avoided potentially more negative outcomes. The following section discusses these gains and the challenges MFAN faced, missed opportunities, and unintended impacts.

### Ultimate and Intermediate Goals

During the timeframe studied (mid-2008 through mid-2016), MFAN made progress advancing toward its ultimate goal: U.S. foreign assistance reformed to be more effective, efficient, and transparent. The first Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6) was issued. The Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) passed, enacting into law many of the Obama administration's aid reforms, which reflected MFAN's principles.<sup>14</sup> Respondents also shared similar views, noting that MFAN put foreign assistance on the reform agenda and kept it there by creating political space, cultivating a bipartisan constituency, and serving as the go-to source for Hill staff (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Survey respondents consistently believed in MFAN's value.<sup>15</sup>



**MFAN was part of a broader group that effectively encouraged the Obama administration to adopt more transparent and accountable practices in its foreign assistance.** As recounted by interviewees inside and outside MFAN, MFAN's influence can be seen in the ForeignAssistance.gov website, USAID's evaluation policy, the U.S. government's commitment to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, the revitalization of USAID (as seen in the creation of the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning and the budget office), and

<sup>14</sup> MFAN's contributions to these policy changes are described below and in Appendix 1.

<sup>15</sup> Percentages may add up to more than 100 percent, as a result of rounding numbers. The n's are all survey respondents who responded to these questions.

in other advances in the USAID Forward reform agenda, including progress toward implementing the Local Solutions initiative, through which USAID sought to increase its direct investment in partner governments and local organizations.

**However, achieving MFAN’s ultimate goal remains a work in progress.** A global development strategy that is regularly refreshed does not yet exist. A proposed re-write of the FAA, although introduced, has not yet been passed. Some Obama administration practices that were not enacted into law may not be sustained.

**MFAN has led and supported efforts that successfully helped the administration, Congress, and the development community work across parties, sectors, and cultural divides to reform U.S. foreign assistance.** One of MFAN’s most notable accomplishments has been its success bringing the development community together around a reform agenda. This was manifest in MFAN’s work supporting Congressman Howard Berman’s (D-CA) effort to rewrite the FAA. MFAN also fostered bipartisan congressional support for reform, notably evident in its instrumental role creating the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Effective Foreign Assistance in 2010, and in its work on FATAA. In July 2016, FATAA, on which MFAN was a key external partner, passed the Senate and the House with strong bipartisan support.

**MFAN has successfully raised the Obama administration’s, Congress’, and the development community’s interest in, knowledge about, and willingness to modernize U.S. foreign assistance.** Prior to 2009, presidential initiatives, earmarks, and assigning “czars” to lead sector efforts were prominent ways to advance sectoral development interests. While presidential initiatives and earmarks remain, the development community is now more cautious about elevating one sector at the expense of others. Language about aid effectiveness has become mainstream.

**MFAN has been less successful at raising the public’s interest in modernizing U.S. foreign assistance.** MFAN has not strategically included the public among its target audiences. In its early years, MFAN conducted some public outreach through focus groups and a grassroots petition. However, it quickly decided other levers were more effective for attaining the desired results, and that it was better to focus its energies elsewhere.

## Gains

### ➤ Nature of gains

**MFAN has achieved quite a number of gains beyond those described above.** It has raised foreign assistance reform on the policy agenda, made its principles mainstream, brought together the development community on the issue, and built a bipartisan congressional constituency for reform. MFAN has also become a go-to source for congressional staff interested in advancing foreign assistance reform. Since many congressional MFAN allies

*“When we first started six years ago, committee staff weren’t convinced this was a problem or that our solution was the right solution. Now they understand it and have made it a priority. Now it is not an issue of ‘Is this a problem?’ Now they love effectiveness conversations, want to have more conversations. Awareness levels have increased a lot among committee staff. [This is e]ven more important on the Senate staff where there was staff turnover.”*

Congressional staffer

*“If [MFAN] hadn’t been pushing, we wouldn’t have done it. MFAN was unique in proactively pushing for an FAA rewrite and in its constant contact on the issue. For other actors, this was not a top priority issue.”*

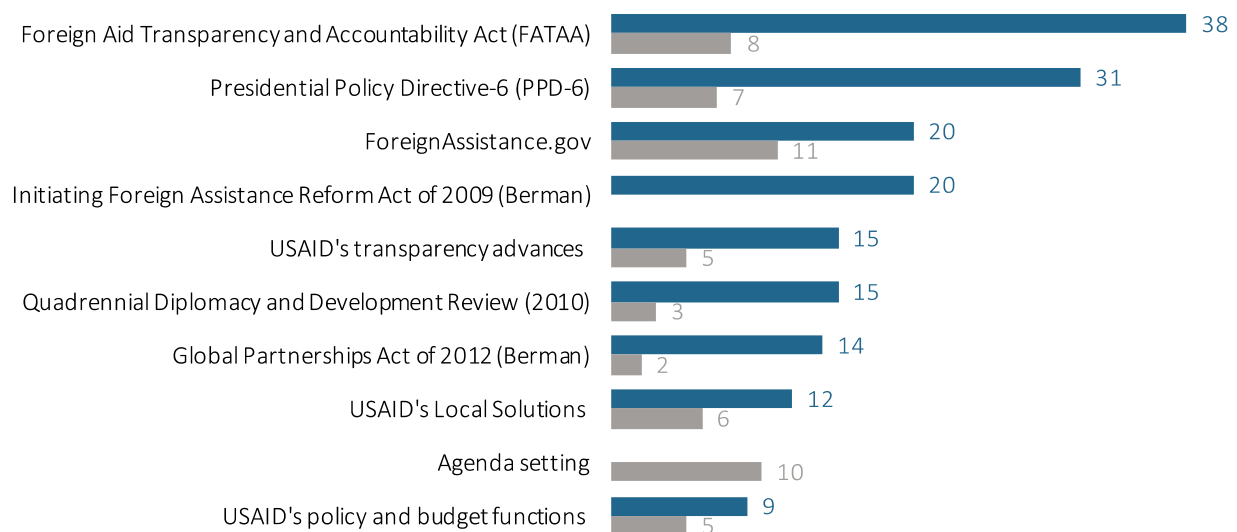
Congressional staffer

remain in their leadership positions in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, MFAN can maintain that role going forward.

**MFAN played a critical role in advancing legislative and policy changes that reflect key foreign assistance reform principles.** These have included, among other important changes, writing and introducing the Global Partnerships Act (GPA) to replace the FAA, passing and enacting FATAA, and advancing the local ownership agenda in USAID. To a far lesser extent, MFAN contributed to the issuance of the first Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6). As discussed below, each of these was the focus of deeper analysis in the evaluation.

Survey respondents and interviewees were relatively consistent in their rankings of MFAN’s policy contributions (Figure 2). They felt strongly about including “agenda setting” on the list and also mentioned the Local Solutions initiative relatively frequently.

Figure 2. FATAA and PPD-6 ranked highest among MFAN’s policy contributions.<sup>16</sup>



***The Global Partnerships Act (GPA), a bill aimed at replacing the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA), was written and introduced.*** Congressman Howard Berman (D-CA), chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), introduced the GPA (a rewrite of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961) in December 2012 largely because of MFAN’s support, according to a key policymaker and his staff. It was at the urging of an MFAN co-chair that Congressman Berman decided to pursue rewriting the FAA. Although he recognized the need to rewrite the FAA, it was a heavy lift, and he had many other priorities. Therefore, according to a key policymaker, “It took someone to raise it.” MFAN’s leadership and Hub and a few influential members then played a critical role bringing together the development community and bridging sectoral divisions to support this effort and foreign assistance reform more generally. MFAN also kept pressing Congressman Berman’s office to draft the new legislation. Absent MFAN, Congressman Berman and his

<sup>16</sup> The numbers in the chart are the number of survey or interview respondents who listed each policy contribution. The survey question was “Please select the four policy areas to which you believe MFAN made the greatest contribution.” The interview question was similar, but open-ended.

staff would not have pursued an FAA rewrite, and the development community might not have found a similar opportunity to come together around a common reform agenda.

While the GPA did not advance out of committee, the drafting process also benefitted reform efforts by generating ideas and bill language that both congressional staffers and advocates continue to reference in advancing narrower reform legislation.

***The Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) was enacted into law.*** FATAA “require[d] that detailed foreign assistance information be regularly updated on the ForeignAssistance.gov website, and that development and economic assistance be rigorously monitored and evaluated.”<sup>17</sup> FATAA’s passage and enactment in July 2016 resulted from the long-term, concerted effort of Congressmen Ted Poe (R-TX) and Gerry Connolly (D-VA), Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Ben Cardin (D-MD) and their offices, along with support from MFAN (particularly the Hub and co-chairs), Oxfam, the Consensus for Development Reform, the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC), and InterAction, with each playing a critical role. According to congressional staffers, MFAN played the most vital role: MFAN presented the bill idea to Congressman Poe’s office, engaged in the most regular contact with his and other congressional offices on the bill, and conducted most of the outsider legwork to keep the bill moving. Absent MFAN, the quality or focus of the bill might have changed, some congressional offices might have focused on competing priorities instead, or broad-based political support might not have emerged.

FATAA’s passage strengthened Obama administration reforms by enshrining them in statute, although the congressional offices involved in leading its passage, MFAN, and its allies need to keep a close eye on its implementation.

***USAID advanced its reforms related to local ownership<sup>18</sup> and accountability.*** MFAN members worked together to help USAID adjust its agency-wide program cycle guidance<sup>19</sup> to support greater country ownership and improve evaluations, according to USAID staff members. MFAN was a strong voice for country ownership within the Obama administration, the development community, and on the Hill, clarifying what ownership meant, and amplifying the ownership message. MFAN’s focus on country ownership and the publication of *The Way Forward: A Reform Agenda for 2014 and Beyond* were instrumental in helping USAID staff work through what it means for problems and priorities to be owned and resolved locally, and how USAID can support, rather than supplant, local systems to produce and sustain results.

During the contentious roll out of USAID’s Implementation and Procurement Reform (IPR) initiative in 2012, the MFAN Hub, along with members such as Oxfam, successfully waged a campaign that helped neutralize opposition from international NGOs and counterbalance the voice of private contractors, both of whom argued for recognition of the important roles their institutions played helping local organizations strengthen their capacities. MFAN and its members also helped USAID rebrand the initiative as Local Solutions to emphasize that, more than a procurement reform effort, it was an effort to support locally-driven and owned development approaches.

<sup>17</sup> George Ingram, Carolyn Miles, and Connie Veillette, July 6, 2016, “Foreign Aid Accountability Bill Unanimously Approved by Congress, Heads to the President for Signature,” MFAN, <http://modernizeaid.net/2016/07/foreign-aid-accountability-bill-unanimously-approved-congress-heads-president-signature/>.

<sup>18</sup> MFAN and the development community generally use the term “country ownership.” The term “local ownership” is most favored by USAID reformers. USAID uses “local ownership” to refer not only to partner governments, but also civil society and the private sector.

<sup>19</sup> USAID’s “Program Cycle, codified in the *Automated Directive Systems (ADS) 201*, is USAID’s operational model for planning, delivering, assessing, and adapting development programming.” See <https://usaidlearninglab.org/program-cycle-overview-page>.

*“On IPR/Local Solutions there was a lot of pushback from the partner community, and I know MFAN tried to play a broker, mediator role, bringing the different groups together and explaining the different positions.”*

USAID senior staff

*“The local ownership piece consistently stayed in there, not only because people worked hard in this building, but I really believe the consistent MFAN voice was absolutely instrumental. I’ve watched a lot of different stakeholder groups over the years, and what I saw with MFAN on this issue, they stuck with it, and they had something to bring to the table to help us figure out how do you really integrate [local ownership] into project design and evaluation.”*

USAID senior staffer

MFAN’s Country Ownership Working Group was an invaluable sounding board for USAID staff, helping them figure out how to implement the Local Solutions initiative and overcome internal obstacles. MFAN’s efforts also pushed USAID to stay focused on institutionalizing local ownership to achieve improved development impact. Absent MFAN, there would not have been such a strong external voice supporting ownership and USAID’s reforms, and USAID would have been unlikely to overcome the internal obstacles on the issue.

**The first-ever Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6) was issued in September 2010.** MFAN’s internal work on shared principles and its external advocacy prior to the 2008 elections and during the subsequent Obama transition appear to have provided content and political momentum for PPD-6. An MFAN founder entered the Obama administration, and was a primary drafter of PPD-6. However, most interviewees agree that MFAN was not a key player in influencing the drafting of the directive. An exception is in the area of country ownership: some interviewees believe MFAN members may have contributed to the directive’s commitment to this concept. Absent MFAN, PPD-6 would likely still have been issued, given the Obama administration’s support for these concepts. However, responding to the global recession might have lowered the topic on the list of presidential priorities without the visible network of thought leaders advocating for the emerging consensus on how to reform foreign assistance.

All of these gains are explored in greater detail in Appendix 1.

### ➤ Sustained accomplishments

**Among its many accomplishments, a number stand out as unlikely to be undone in the near future.** MFAN has changed the way the development community talks about development. As noted above, MFAN’s principles, which have also been promoted by others, are now ingrained in the development community: transparency, accountability, effectiveness, and country ownership (to a lesser degree). In advocating for these principles, MFAN has also helped build a bipartisan constituency in Congress in support of foreign assistance reform. As a reflection of this, FATAA was enacted, the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Effective Foreign Assistance continues to operate, and in March 2017, with MFAN’s help, the caucus expanded to include the Senate. Finally, MFAN has influenced how USAID conducts development by working with USAID staff to incorporate aid reform principles into USAID’s operational policy for programming, as captured in ADS 201,<sup>20</sup> USAID’s program cycle operational policy that provides guidelines for planning, delivering, assessing, and adapting development programming at the country level.

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/201.pdf>.

## ➤ Factors contributing to gains

A number of MFAN's characteristics contributed to its gains, including MFAN's membership, focus, strategy, tactics, and operations.

- **Members' stature:** MFAN members are notable for their stature, which has translated into convening power, access, and influence with key decision makers in Congress and the previous administration. MFAN members' stature was at its height in MFAN's earliest years (2008-2009), before members entered the Obama administration. From 2010 through 2013, the remaining plus ones who replaced those who had entered the administration had comparatively less influence. In part as a result of this, while MFAN's membership broadened during this time, its decision-making authority narrowed to MFAN's co-chairs and the Hub. In its most recent phase (2014-2016), MFAN worked to enhance the stature of its Executive Committee and deputies. Its plans going forward continue in that direction. (See Membership and Engagement section below.)
- **Knowledge and expertise about policymaking and technical content:** Among its membership, MFAN gathered former congressional staffers, former administration officials, and technical experts. This mix gave MFAN expertise in congressional processes, administration policymaking, and global development effectiveness. (See Membership and Engagement section below.)
- **Singular, nonpartisan focus:** MFAN's singular focus on foreign assistance reform, framed as a nonpartisan issue, has given it a unique ability to work with both Democratic and Republican policymakers to provide constant engagement on the topic. Other organizations, although interested in the issue, had other priorities that also demanded their attention and potentially competed with reform messages. (See Membership and Engagement section below.)
- **Multi-pronged strategy:** To advance its priorities, MFAN targeted Congress, the administration, and the broader development community. In that way, it built a broad constituency for its issues, and increased pressure on all to advance reforms.
- **Tactics:** In its advocacy, MFAN successfully used a number of tactics. These included:
  - Coordinating the development community's engagement, which its stature allowed it to do;
  - Providing an external voice supporting policymakers' efforts, thus providing welcome cover to policymaker allies;
  - Offering policymakers constant engagement, which helped them stay focused on MFAN's priority issues in spite of competing priorities, and gave them additional support in advancing their efforts;
  - Supplying policymakers with content to include in draft policies and legislation;
  - Calling on policymakers to make change, and seeking to influence them by publishing papers, statements, and blogs, holding public meetings, and occasionally leading petitions from the development community or the public more broadly;
  - Educating members of Congress and their staff;
  - Using informal relationships with policymakers to gain access and have influence through behind-the-scenes campaigns;
  - Meeting with policymakers to build support and overcome opposition; and
  - Holding policymakers publicly accountable for their positions and actions.

- **Internal alignment and collaboration:** In recent years (2013-2016), MFAN adopted a thematically-focused working group model, which it has used to coordinate and align member organizations to undertake and share research, build relationships with key policymakers, and spread and amplify similar messages. (See Coalition Effectiveness section below.)

## Challenges

**MFAN has faced a few challenges, mostly related to its size.** Some interviewees noted that MFAN's effectiveness would increase if it had relationships with more congressional offices, especially Freedom Caucus members, and with more U.S. government agencies. However, internal and external actors note that MFAN is a small network with limited bandwidth, so it must carefully prioritize how it spends its energy.

**MFAN needed to balance policy sharpness with political heft.** The first comes with a small membership and a controlled message, while the second results from both policy sharpness and working with a larger group with more policymaker connections. In its earliest years, MFAN benefited from being a small group of like-minded organizations capable of producing an initial policy document with clear policy stances: *New Day, New Way*. However, MFAN recognized that to get its messages broadly shared with Congress and beyond, it needed to include advocacy organizations. Even from the beginning, MFAN faced challenges getting some of its advocacy organization and NGO members on board with its agenda. Some worried a reform message could negatively affect advocacy for increased foreign assistance funding, while others relied on earmarks to get funding for prioritized sectors. While MFAN overcame the former concern, the latter, according to some MFAN members, caused MFAN to water down its messages and take an insufficiently strong stance on presidential initiatives and earmarks, which are imperative to address in order to promote aid effectiveness.

**MFAN had to work hard to maintain the stature of its members,** as key members have left MFAN to enter the administration, or move to other jobs. In response to political shifts in Congress, MFAN has had to reach out to new individuals and organizations to ensure its on-going, high-level access to key decision makers. After the 2010 congressional elections, MFAN intentionally invited more Republicans to take leadership roles within it.

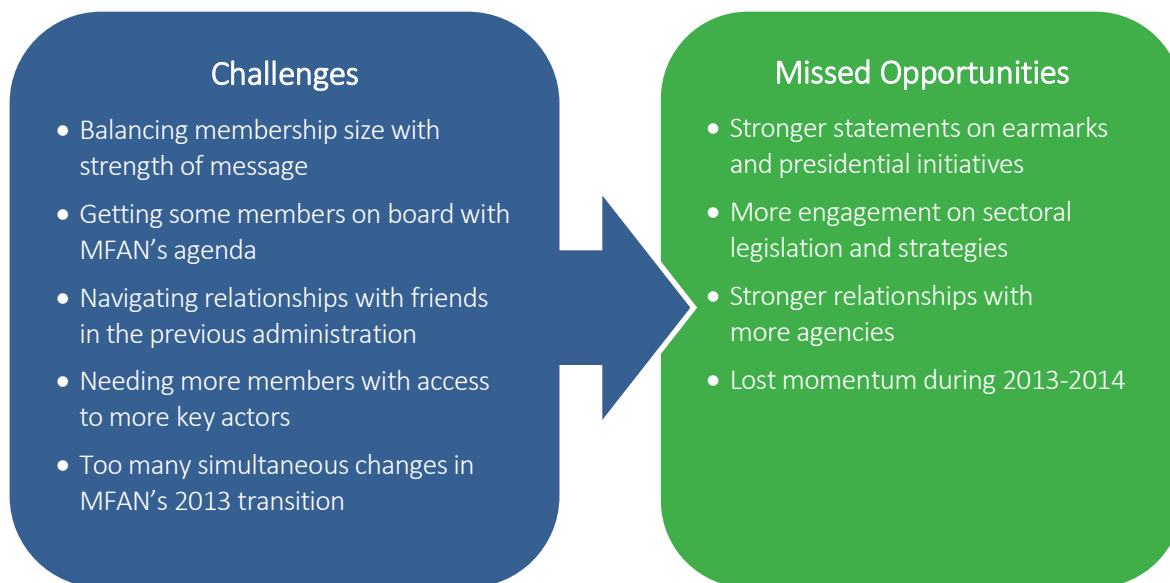
**In its relationships with the Obama administration, two challenges may have negatively affected MFAN effectiveness.** First, MFAN was perceived both internally and externally as unwilling to critique its friends in the administration, or according to some, unwilling to critique the administration in general. Some MFAN members saw this as a desire to not lose access to certain decision-making circles. Others described difficulty determining whether Obama administration friends wanted external pressure. Still others stated that, with limited bandwidth, MFAN could not push all of its friends, and had to strategically choose where it placed its energies. Relatedly, some felt MFAN members did not understand the difficulty of reform in a large bureaucracy. While MFAN members had deep knowledge of congressional processes, their knowledge of USAID processes was more limited.



## Missed Opportunities

Some of MFAN's challenges led to missed opportunities, according to those internal and external to MFAN. Some were discussed above, but a few nuances merit mention here.

Figure 3. MFAN's challenges led to missed opportunities.



*The elimination of presidential initiatives and earmarks is critical to increased aid effectiveness, so development strategies and investments can be decided based on country needs.* Yet, MFAN was unable to make strong statements on this topic, because some of its members feared that losing earmarks without increased support for country ownership would result in less funding for aid.

MFAN had a positive influence *integrating reform principles into sectoral legislation*, such as the Global Food Security Act, the Water for the World Act, and the Education for All Act. However, some external stakeholders thought MFAN could have done more. Some also thought MFAN could have done more to *influence USAID's sectoral strategies*. At first, these processes were less consultative, but their openness increased over time, possibly at least in part because MFAN explicitly raised the issue of more open policymaking in its second paper, *From Policy to Practice*.

While MFAN had very strong relationships with some people in some agencies, had it developed *stronger relationships with more people in more agencies*, it could have addressed reform issues more broadly, rather than at an agency level. Yet, a smaller membership for MFAN, as well as the loss of members to the Obama administration and other job changes, meant limited bandwidth and sometimes gaps in expertise, experience, and access to key decision makers.




There is broad internal agreement that *MFAN lost momentum during its 2013-2014 transition*. In 2013, MFAN undertook too many changes simultaneously. Some were MFAN's choice. It brought on new co-chairs, established a new fiscal sponsor, and created a newly independent Hub with a new executive director. However, some changes seemed beyond MFAN's control. MFAN's primary funder wanted to support organizations aligned with its strategy. In response, MFAN chose to shift its agenda, with varied responses among its members.

To support its new agenda, MFAN established a new structure with thematically-focused working groups, and appointed new working group co-chairs. MFAN’s new leaders at various levels, most of whom had other full-time jobs and limited time allocated for MFAN, needed time to clarify roles and relationships in MFAN’s new structure, as well as how they would work on MFAN’s new agenda. Many felt frustrated when this led to several missed opportunities to advance policy change. For example, one MFAN member said MFAN delayed its action on an appropriations bill and an inspector general report. Fortunately, while this was felt within MFAN, it was not mentioned by external actors when asked about MFAN’s areas for improvement.

## Unintended Impacts

MFAN’s work has produced some unintended impacts – positive and negative. Most have been previously discussed. The third, related to MFAN’s agenda and structure, merits mention.

Figure 4. MFAN experienced some unintended impacts – positive and negative.

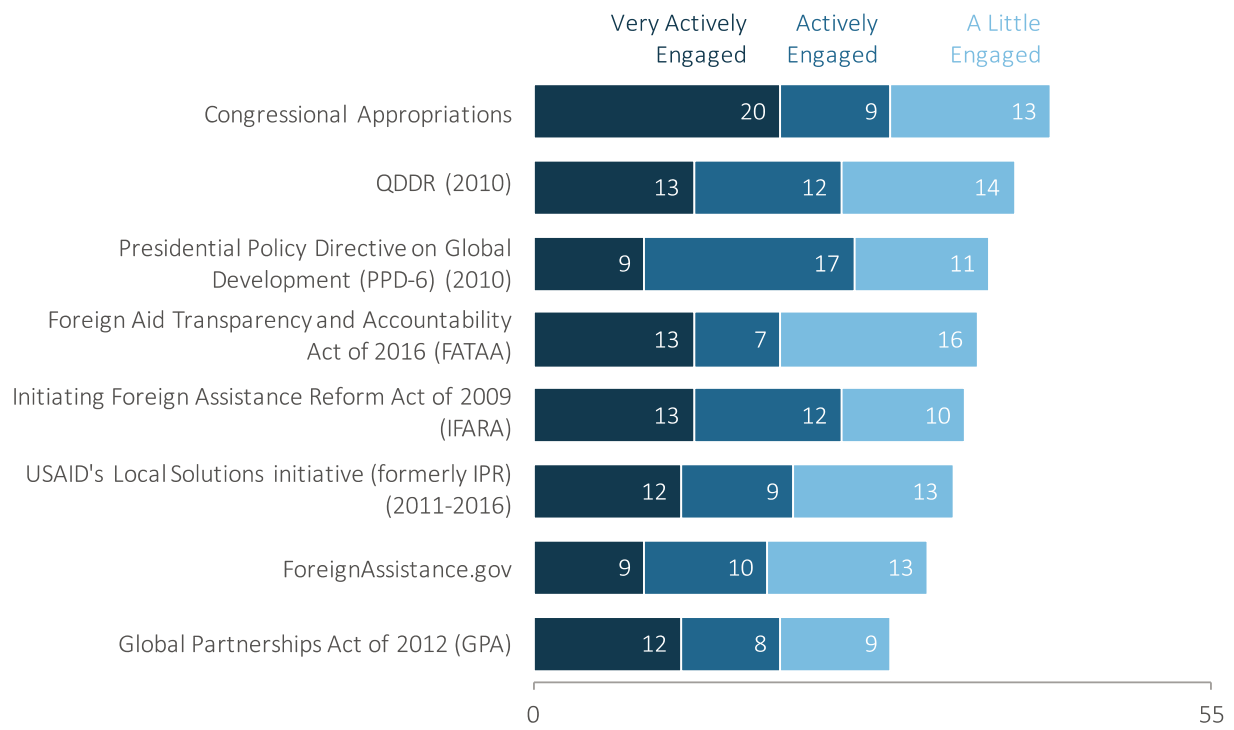
Positive	Negative
Some of MFAN’s early members joined the Obama administration, taking MFAN’s principles and agenda with them.	 When early members joined the Obama administration, MFAN lost some clout, and hesitated to push too hard on administration allies.
MFAN has built a bipartisan congressional constituency in favor of foreign assistance reform (although more needs to be done).	 When MFAN broadened its coalition to have more political heft, it lost its ability to make some sharp statements.
Easy flow of information in MFAN’s early days led to unplanned partnerships and activities among members.	 When MFAN shifted to focus on country ownership and transparency and accountability, it lost the interest of some previously highly engaged members.

**One positive, unintended impact of MFAN’s structure prior to 2013 was an easy flow of information among members.** At regular principals’ and plus ones’ meetings, members could share intelligence and concerns. For example, two members who did not know each other well before recognized a mutual interest and co-authored a report on budget priorities. Unintentionally, when MFAN shifted in the 2013-2014 transition to a structure based on thematically-focused working groups, that easy flow of information, which according to some was one of MFAN’s greatest assets, diminished.

**On the negative side, the 2013-2014 shift to a narrower agenda and a thematically-focused working group structure unintentionally decreased engagement by some members who were more interested in an agenda with goals with potentially broader impact.** While MFAN determined near the end of the Obama administration that it was time to institutionalize the gains already being made via narrower legislation and policy, some members still wanted space to discuss principles and bigger reform efforts. This mismatch of interests caused some previously prominent MFAN members to become less engaged in MFAN’s activities. Those who remained engaged contributed to notable changes, such as the enactment of FATAA and USAID’s advances promoting its Local Solutions initiative. However, had more members

remained more engaged, MFAN would have had additional bandwidth to address other issues as they arose and to build or strengthen more relationships with more policymakers.

Figure 5. Survey respondents were most actively engaged in advocating for the outcomes to which they believed MFAN made the greatest contribution.<sup>21</sup>



<sup>21</sup> The n's are the number of survey respondents who provided each response.



## Adaptability

Because policy environments change quickly, adaptability is a critical skill for advocates to hone. Advocates must constantly monitor their environment, assess the continued relevance of their strategy and tactics, and make adjustments to ensure their efforts remain on track to influence targeted policies in intended ways. The characteristics outlined in the box below can help an organization or network do this. See also Appendix 2. Literature Review.

### Organizational characteristics critical to adaptive capacity, by Tanya Beer (unpublished)

- Conduct regular assessments of needs, resources, the environment, risks, opportunities, and stakeholders, reflect on their implications for strategy, and adjust accordingly;
- Seek diverse perspectives;
- Build connections and collaborate with strategic allies with complementary assets;
- Put processes in place for collecting and reflecting on metrics for progress;
- Create decision-making structures that promote flexibility and nimbleness;
- Have access to significant amounts of unrestricted funds;
- Encourage risk-taking, experimentation, and creative thinking;
- Balance emergent strategies and planned strategies; and
- Act proactively, not just reactively.

The following section discusses how MFAN’s agenda evolved in response to its changing environment, what MFAN had in place to enable its adaptability, and how its adaptability could be strengthened.

## Evolution of MFAN’s Agenda

**Between 2008 and 2016, MFAN’s agenda evolved through three phases.** In each iteration of MFAN’s agenda, MFAN has contributed to some progress and also faced limits on what it could realistically achieve, given the environment and its resources available.

**In 2008 and 2009, with the promise of a new administration and Congress friendly to foreign assistance, MFAN focused on agenda setting and broad goals** to raise U.S. foreign assistance reform on the policy agenda. MFAN released *New Day, New Way*, which reflected and promoted consensus views on reform. It began to work with members of Congress on reform legislation. MFAN pressed the White House to develop a global development strategy. In 2010, the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6) – the first of its kind – was announced. However, according to external and internal actors, MFAN had a limited role in influencing its content once the drafting process began. Other criticism at this time stated that MFAN did not put enough pressure on the State Department to make its first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) a more open and consultative process.

**When the 2010 congressional elections ushered in a much more conservative House leadership, MFAN shifted to advocating for policy adoption and implementation related to narrower goals.** MFAN valued the creation of the Consensus for Development Reform comprised of conservative thought leaders, policy experts, and private sector leaders who were well positioned to bring a U.S. foreign assistance reform

message to congressional conservatives. FATAA progressed, and reforms with the administration advanced, although both encountered more hurdles than were expected. As discussed above, external actors felt MFAN could have done more during this period, including working to institutionalize reforms throughout the executive branch, rather than focusing most heavily on USAID, and also serving as a more consistent watchdog on PPD-6 implementation.

**In 2014, at the beginning of the final years of the Obama administration, MFAN continued its advocacy for policy adoption and implementation with even narrower goals aimed at consolidating the reforms that the administration had put forward.** FATAA passed and was enacted, while reforms advanced within the administration, although they still faced hurdles. Again, external actors thought MFAN might have been overly focused on USAID, and could have done more to support reform at other government agencies to have a greater impact at the administration level.

**Agendas with broader and narrower goals each have their places within a political and policy environment,** as MFAN has demonstrated. At the beginning of an administration and Congress that both stated an openness to foreign assistance reform principles, it made sense for MFAN to focus on policy agenda setting, more visible action, and goals with potentially broader impact. Once an administration and Congress are advancing reforms, it is often time to promote policy adoption and implementation. At some points, both might be required.

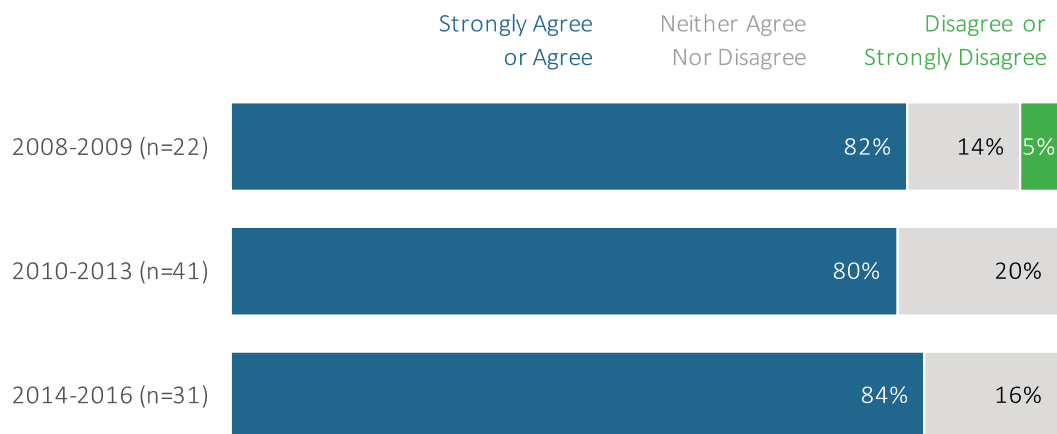
MFAN currently faces a new administration less supportive of foreign assistance, as evident in its call for steep cuts to the foreign assistance budgets, while Congress continues to be interested in foreign assistance reform principles. Opportunities exist to continue working with members of Congress who are advancing foreign assistance legislation and appear willing to oppose administration policies that undermine it. At the same time, MFAN can take more of a visible, agenda-setting approach to help defend foreign assistance funding and support.

## MFAN's Adaptability to External Factors

**MFAN effectively used policy environment monitoring information to make strategic decisions about timing and activities,** according to survey respondents. They found MFAN good at adapting to external political changes, although there may have been some missed opportunities. Internally, MFAN's near-consensus decision-making process<sup>22</sup> and leadership transitions slowed MFAN's adaptability at various times, especially during MFAN's 2013-2014 transition.

<sup>22</sup> From the beginning, MFAN used a near-consensus model of decision making (i.e., discussing issues and making decisions that the vast majority of members consent to without formal voting).

Figure 6. MFAN used policy environment information effectively.<sup>23</sup>



*"We had to go back and resolve people's concerns regarding language. MFAN gave us educated input on this. They could propose alternative language that would appeal to the Members without gutting the bill."*

Congressional staffer

MFAN's success in helping advance policy change and adapting to external factors has been linked to:

- Constant and ongoing engagement by the Hub and select MFAN members with policymakers, through which MFAN offers critical support;
- Development and maintenance of relationships and trust with members of Congress, their staff, and members of the administration, which provide MFAN with insights for identifying and responding to hurdles; and
- Agility in responding to those hurdles by offering constructive input and also setting up meetings, listening to concerns, and identifying satisfactory responses to those concerns that did not undermine the ultimate goal of the target policy.

**MFAN is viewed as vigilant and adaptive. However, at times, some observers believe that MFAN may have over-corrected in the face of changes in the political environment.** For example, after the 2010 congressional elections, according to many MFAN leaders, MFAN saw fewer legislative opportunities, and therefore pivoted to work more with the administration, while others believe the opportunities still existed but were simply different.

**Some also believe that MFAN has not always had the knowledge, connections, and access required to influence some key stakeholders in Congress and the administration.** In one case, one working group member commented on the time it took to develop trust with an agency staff member. Once trust finally existed, the staff member told MFAN where some of its challenges lay, which enabled MFAN to open a new channel for influence.

<sup>23</sup> Percentages may add up to more than 100 percent, due to rounding numbers. The n's reflect the number of survey respondents who were active in MFAN during each period listed and who responded to the question.

## Capitalizing on Change

While MFAN to a great degree responded well to the opportunities created by the new administration in 2009 and the new Congress following the 2010 elections, it also learned some lessons regarding how to capitalize on change. When the new administration took office in 2009, both MFAN and Congress anticipated a positive relationship supportive of foreign assistance legislation. Absent this anticipated support and, in the face of the administration's unexpected opposition to it in its early years (see Appendix 1), broad legislative change became much more difficult to achieve, if not impossible. Nonetheless, the legislative initiatives under way still played important roles raising U.S. foreign assistance reform on the policy agenda, and supporting some of the administration's own policy reforms.

In the wake of the 2010 congressional elections, MFAN learned to look for unlikely allies and ways to share MFAN's message with them, as well as more ways to include foreign assistance reform principles in related legislation already advancing in Congress.

## Strengthening MFAN's Adaptive Capacity

MFAN, in many regards, has strong adaptive capacity. However, there is always room to strengthen it further. Of the characteristics identified by Tanya Beer of the Center for Evaluation Innovation (see box above and Appendix 2. Literature Review), MFAN has a good track record of conducting assessments, seeking diverse perspectives, building connections and collaborations, and creating decision-making structures that promote flexibility. It has also been lucky to have access to unrestricted funds. Continuing to hone these characteristics will be especially important as MFAN seeks ways to work in the current political environment.



### Coalition Effectiveness

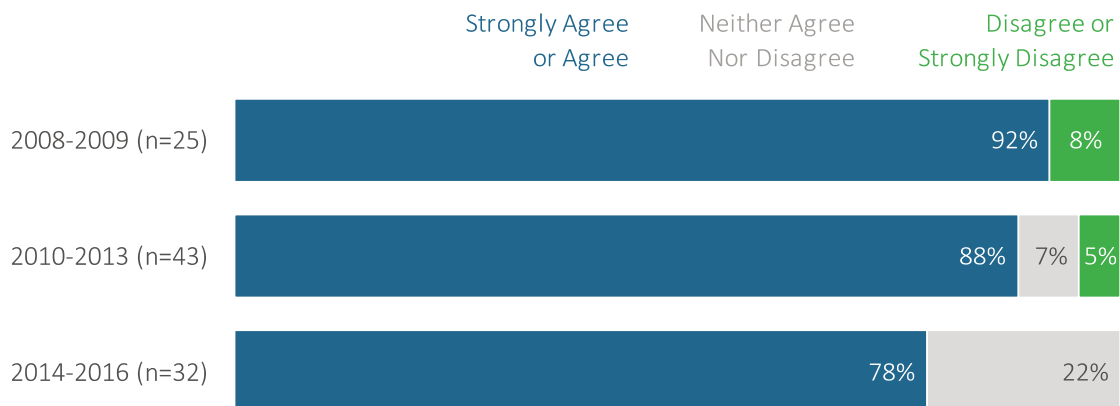
A coalition's effectiveness is determined by the ability of members to focus collectively on a common purpose and shared goals; align their assets to create opportunities they would not have alone; and take joint action together.<sup>24</sup> This section explores the effectiveness of MFAN's coalition during each of its phases, with a focus on MFAN's purpose, its structure and leadership, and its decision-making process.

## Common Purpose

The purpose and goals of the MFAN coalition were clearly stated and agreed to by the vast majority of members throughout MFAN's history (Figure 7). With the publication of *New Day, New Way* in 2008, MFAN laid out a bold, shared agenda for reform. This was followed in 2011 with the publication of *From Policy to Practice*, which specified a set of common principles for redesigning U.S. policies to have maximum impact and "achieve broad-based, sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty in developing countries." Members were asked to agree to these goals, agenda, and principles before they joined MFAN.

<sup>24</sup> Jared Raynor, March 2011, What Makes an Effective Coalition? TCC Group, [http://www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/What\\_Makes\\_an\\_Effective\\_Coalition.pdf](http://www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/What_Makes_an_Effective_Coalition.pdf).

Figure 7. MFAN’s purpose and goals were clear, although this diminished over time.<sup>25</sup>



Agreement was strongest during 2008 and 2009, when MFAN’s agenda was being formulated, and there was a high degree of alignment among a small group of like-minded people who were optimistic that enacting comprehensive foreign aid reform was possible. In MFAN’s middle years, purpose and goals remained clear, even with more members participating, which made reaching near-consensus decisions more challenging. In the 2014–2016 period, an increased percentage of members were neutral on whether MFAN’s purpose and goals were clear. Several MFAN members had difficulty reconciling MFAN’s previous focus on agenda setting and broad policy goals with the decision in 2014 to focus on two “narrower” issues, country ownership and accountability.

## MFAN Structure

Several elements of MFAN’s structure have been consistent since its inception, including the positions of co-chairs, principals, and plus ones/deputies. MFAN has been supported throughout its existence by a secretariat (the Hub) and consultants. In earlier years, MFAN included functional working groups: communications, advocacy, and a legislative group (which became the Hill sub-working group). The Hill group continued, while the others did not. In 2014, MFAN added thematic working groups.

**Co-chairs:** Co-chairs are the public face of MFAN and their stature demonstrates MFAN’s credentials to lead bi-partisan aid reform. MFAN’s original co-chairs both worked at think tanks. They volunteered to co-chair MFAN during its initial formation in 2008, and were highly motivated to shape and guide MFAN’s agenda. It was a time of great optimism about reform that was signaled by Obama’s election, and some MFAN members from CGD and CAP were interested in joining the new administration. After the election, both co-chairs indeed left MFAN to enter the administration. Two new co-chairs were appointed, both from NGOs. They reoriented MFAN to focus on advocacy in Congress. After the 2010 election, a third co-chair was appointed to increase MFAN’s ability to reach out to Republican leaders. In 2014, two of the three co-chairs stepped down, and two new co-chairs came in. The third remained for continuity.

In general, the co-chair model has worked well. Since 2010, it has ensured that the leadership of the coalition represents a diverse cross-section of members; and it distributes leadership responsibilities among co-chairs who have busy roles within their own organizations. However, MFAN has no clear process in place to appoint and transition co-chair leadership. The co-chair transition in 2014 was

<sup>25</sup> The n’s reflect the number of survey respondents who were active in MFAN during each period listed and who responded to the question.



especially challenging, when MFAN was also setting up an independent Hub, re-organizing its leadership structure, and establishing two new working groups.

**Principals:** Principals are the key group that MFAN co-chairs consult to make decisions for MFAN. Principals most often lead MFAN member organizations or key programs within those organizations, or they are influential individuals because of their past policymaking roles. In MFAN's first phase, there was a small group of principals who were senior leaders from think tanks and NGOs, as well as former policy officials. Many already had pre-existing working relationships with each other, so there was a high degree of trust and like-mindedness.

The number of principals expanded during MFAN's middle years (2011-2013) with more NGOs, sector-focused organizations and others invited to join MFAN. Expanding the number of principals to 36 and increasing MFAN members' diversity made the process of reaching near consensus more difficult, which at times was frustrating for members and Hewlett staff. At the same time, the prospects for broad reform had diminished.

With the decline in principal participation, a structural change in the role of the principals was needed. Therefore, in 2014, MFAN leadership created the Executive Committee and made it open to principals who were willing to attend regular MFAN meetings, act on behalf of MFAN, and also bring along a deputy who could commit time to MFAN's efforts. Eighteen principals joined the committee, while other principals remained members of MFAN, but had no role in decision-making. This creation of an executive committee with a smaller number of principals, along with adopting a more focused agenda, made decision-making more efficient.

A smaller principals group aligned around a clear set of priorities was more successful at reaching near consensus on pointed policy positions, such as those that existed in MFAN's early years and in the 2014-2016 time period.

**Plus ones/deputies:** Plus ones/deputies represent principals, produce policy papers, and drive the agenda of working groups. In MFAN's earliest years, plus ones were senior leaders in their organizations, and they met weekly to develop MFAN's foundational document, *New Day, New Way*. Several key plus ones left MFAN in 2009 to join the Obama administration. The remaining plus ones, who were in some cases more junior, did not always have the same level of experience or expertise to contribute at the same level.

In MFAN's middle years, plus ones began meeting every other week instead of weekly, and focused their agenda around activity updates rather than substantive discussion and debate, as had occurred in the early years. Communication between principals and plus ones ebbed, as plus ones' roles became less clear (see Figures 8 and 9).

In MFAN's internal restructuring from 2013 to 2014, plus ones – now called deputies – began leading and taking more active roles in MFAN's three thematic working groups. They continued to meet as deputies to coordinate and align efforts across the working groups, but had a less clear role in MFAN agenda setting and decision making for the coalition as a whole. Several MFAN members complained that principals and deputies were not communicating with each other about their organizational positions, which made decision making more challenging.

Plus ones/deputies are most effective when they have strong ties to principals who are committed to using their organization's ideas, assets, and resources to advance of MFAN's priorities. When the agenda is not aligned with member organization priorities, or when a member organization's capacity to invest staff resources is limited, then the quality of plus one/deputy participation declines. Committed member

organizations and strong principals with good communication skills, and a secretariat with good organizing skills are essential elements for plus one/deputy effectiveness.

**Working groups:** MFAN has experimented with working groups throughout its history. Its first working groups focused on function, such as communications or legislation. They operated on an as-needed basis and followed MFAN's overarching policy agenda. MFAN also established an advocacy subcommittee comprised of broader community organizations that were not all full-fledged MFAN members, but were interested in reform and willing to advocate on it. They met biweekly, but had no decision-making authority. The contribution of these working groups was inconsistent, because they did not have a clear policy purpose, and, in some cases, did not meet regularly.

In the 2013-2014 reorganization, MFAN formed two thematic-focused working groups on accountability and country ownership. Both had a policy focus, met regularly, and had decision-making authority. An Emerging Issues Working Group was also formed, but did not create a clear policy focus.

- The Accountability Working Group got off to a strong start. Its co-chairs were high-level deputies with time available to dedicate to working group tasks. They were well-positioned to help advance FATAA legislation, since they had both recently left the Hill and deeply understood the legislative process. Thus, they were successfully able to align member contributions and make effective strategic decisions.
- The Country Ownership Working Group (COWG) faced early challenges. There was disagreement between its co-chairs and some members on strategy. The working group co-chairs wanted to produce a metrics policy paper, while some working group members were pushing the group to engage more on the Hill with the appropriations process. These differences led to frustration among some members, which was exacerbated, because the metrics policy paper was taking a long time to be completed.

In retrospect, it is difficult to say whether there were missed opportunities. The metrics policy paper was issued in July 2015, and according to one MFAN member who had been a skeptic of the paper's value, "it was immediately embraced by the [USAID] Local Solutions team. It got them moving in the right direction. They had asked us for help, and this paper landed at USAID and made a positive impact quickly." In fact, the metrics paper might not have been published without the focus it received from the first COWG co-chairs, and USAID staff have repeatedly indicated how valuable that paper was to their thinking about how to develop metrics for sustainable local ownership.

- An Emerging Issues Working Group was also formed in 2014, but it never had a clear agenda. It was designed to be opportunistic and push reforms not covered by the two pillars. There was a series of four conversations on emerging issues during the first year, but after that, the group did not meet regularly. With limited bandwidth on the part of both working group co-chairs and an unclear process for deciding in which policy projects to invest time and resources, the group floundered. One co-chair reflected that for the group to have been really helpful, "they [would] have [had] to be ahead of the curve on ascending issues."

Working groups are most effective when they have a clear policy purpose and target for coordinated member activity. They function best when they have co-chairs who are well-positioned to engage and facilitate a collaborative process to align member efforts, as well as a committed membership with shared goals and shared accountability.

**Consultants:** Consultants were instrumental in developing MFAN’s brand and message, and conducting outreach to Republicans. In 2008, MFAN hired the *Glover Park Group (GPG)* to do messaging work for the coalition. Within the first year, GPG’s work expanded to also provide leadership for the Hub. Through 2013, GPG coordinated the Hub, liaised with the principals and co-chairs, and acted as primary convener of the plus ones. GPG also provided communications counsel to the coalition, assisting with media outreach and materials development, as well messaging and website content.

In 2009, MFAN hired *Capitol Management Initiatives* and later the *Kyle House Group (KHG)* to conduct outreach to Republican policymakers and thought leaders. KHG continues to serve as chief strategist and executor of outreach to Republicans for MFAN, meeting weekly with the MFAN Hub to discuss strategy.

Consultant arrangements have varied over time. In MFAN’s early years, GPG was instrumental in the formation and management of MFAN. MFAN benefitted from having a skilled, well-connected consultant in establishing its brand. In 2012 and 2013, when MFAN lost some focus and momentum, Hewlett program officers questioned the cost of having a consultant assume so many responsibilities. MFAN leadership, in consultation with Hewlett, decided to create an independent hub and bring all communication and management functions in house.

The use of consultants is often warranted when the coalition and its member organizations do not have the capability to provide the access or services the coalition needs to advance its agenda. The challenges are the cost of paying consultants over time, which is high, and the outsourcing of relationships to consultants, with the danger that those relationships are lost if the consulting relationship is ended.

## Secretariat (Hub) Structure

**The Hub’s role was to coordinate MFAN’s outreach, education, and communications work.** It was housed in an MFAN member, Bread for the World, and managed by a consultant, Glover Park Group, from 2008 through 2013. This arrangement was awkward for MFAN Hub staff, since at times they were taking direction from both Bread for the World and GPG. Tensions also emerged between GPG and Bread for the World about who was responsible for coordinating with the co-chairs. The process became even more complicated when Bread for the World’s executive director also became an MFAN co-chair, although the process also had the benefit of granting the Hub easy access to an MFAN co-chair and senior staff. Nonetheless, these challenges and the expense of funding two entities led to a decision to create an independent hub in 2014.

When MFAN created an independent hub, its staff included an executive director, a communications and policy manager, and a program associate. In 2015, MFAN promoted the program associate to program and membership coordinator, and hired a deputy director and senior policy advisor. Creating this position significantly increased the Hub’s capacity to engage with Congress and coordinate policy activities among member organizations.

**The existence of a dedicated and independent secretariat or Hub has been critical to the overall functionality of the coalition.** The secretariat or Hub has been best able to serve MFAN when its reporting lines, role, and authorities have been clear. This happened when the Hub was made independent and its role clarified after the 2013-2014 transition. Adequately staffing the secretariat has ensured MFAN’s ability to coordinate and align member contributions, making sure that the infrastructure and process for an effective coalition are well-functioning, and messages are communicated.

## Decision-Making Process

**Overall, MFAN’s decision-making process has worked well and contributed to significant policy outcomes throughout its history, although at times its near-consensus model has been cumbersome and missed opportunities.** From the beginning MFAN used a near-consensus model of decision making (i.e., discussing issues and making decisions that the vast majority of members consent to without formal voting). This model worked smoothly when the coalition was smaller and less diverse, during MFAN’s early years. Figures 8 and 9 below indicate high levels of agreement among principals and plus ones that the rules, procedures, and decision-making process were clear, efficient, and effective in these years. However, some members said MFAN’s near-consensus decision-making process may have impaired its ability to respond nimbly to the quickly changing environment in the summer of 2010, just before the release of PPD-6. Interviews indicate MFAN may have missed opportunities to press its agenda due to slow decision making, although whether this had a negative impact on the directive is uncertain.

**Using the near-consensus decision-making process became more cumbersome in MFAN’s middle years when principal and plus one membership expanded, and MFAN’s membership became more diverse.** Near consensus was harder to reach; according to one co-chair that meant MFAN had to “mitigate, water down, and take the edge and boldness off of its proposals.” This led to some friction between think tank members and NGOs about the trade-offs between bold and innovative on the one hand, and what was doable to deliver a win on the other. As a result, the co-chairs and the Hub took more control of the decision-making process. This made the process more nimble, but it also reduced members’ engagement.

In Figures 8 and 9 below, only about half of MFAN members agreed that MFAN’s decision-making process was clear, efficient, and effective in these middle years. Members were still engaged as needed by the co-chairs and the Hub to take actions in support of GPA, FATAA, and USAID Forward, and to counter anti-reform stakeholders in Congress and the development community, but they were not as fully engaged in proposal and strategy development as the early principals and plus ones.

**After MFAN’s restructuring in 2013 and 2014, MFAN decision-making was more distributed, with working groups having more autonomy to decide how to implement their agendas.** With deputies in working groups doing much of the week-to-week decision making, there was a less clear need for deputies to meet separately as a group. They also did not communicate as frequently with their principals, and did not partner as closely with them on developing their policy positions.

**In the later years, MFAN had a multi-layered decision-making structure.** The MFAN co-chairs, the Hub, and the Executive Committee decided on MFAN’s overarching agenda. Working group co-chairs had the authority to propose their own agendas and decide as a group the issues on which they wanted to work. According to one MFAN co-chair, the process for coordinating MFAN’s agenda and the working group agenda was a give-and-take process, with working groups sometimes not taking up an issue, because it did not fit into the overarching MFAN agenda. At other times, the lack of clarity about who had authority to make which types of decisions led to some confusion and miscommunication between the working group co-chairs and the MFAN co-chairs. More clarity regarding the relationship between the two roles was required.

Figure 8. The clarity of rules, procedures, and the decision-making process diminished over time.<sup>26</sup>

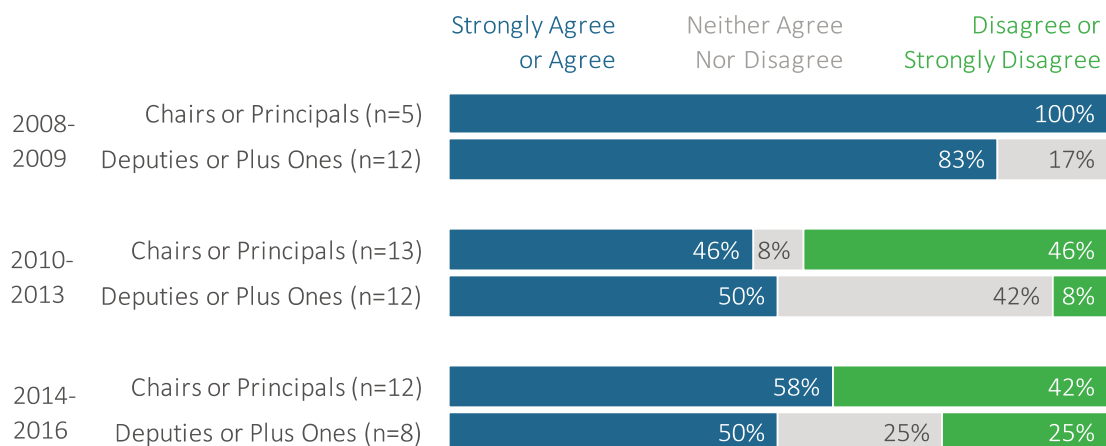
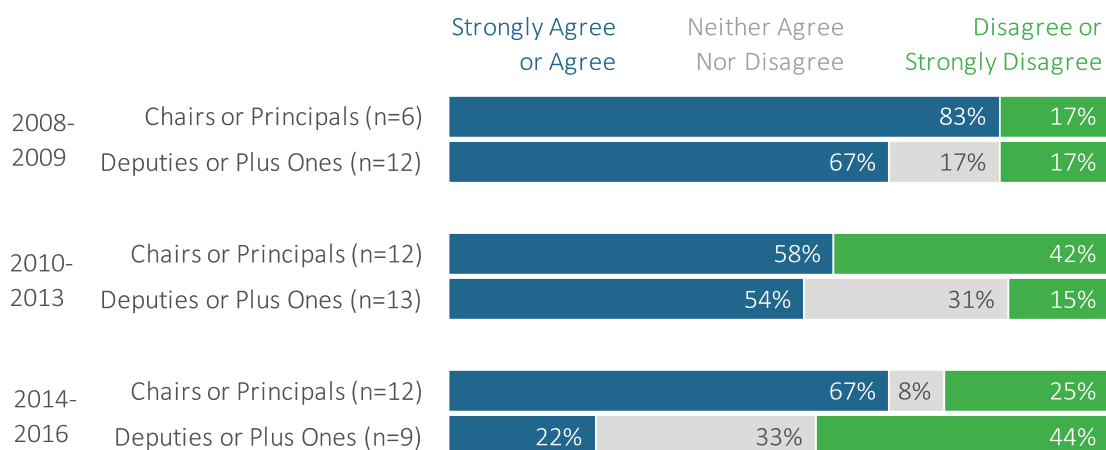


Figure 9. The efficiency and effectiveness of the decision-making process diminished over time.<sup>27</sup>



<sup>26</sup> Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding numbers. The n's reflect chairs and principals and deputies/plus ones active in each period listed and who responded to each question.

<sup>27</sup> Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding numbers. The n's reflect chairs and principals and deputies/plus ones active in each period listed and who responded to each question.



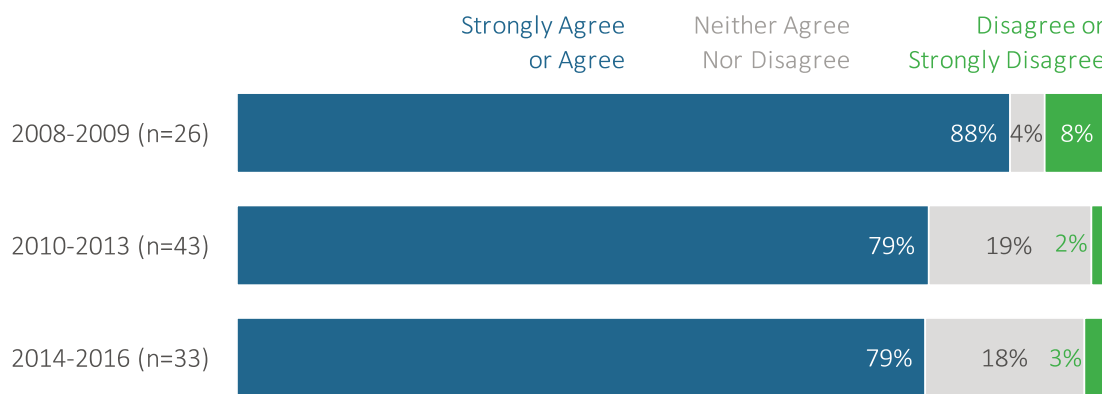
## Membership and Engagement

The composition, size, and level of participation by MFAN members has varied over MFAN’s history, as the coalition has adapted to internal and external opportunities and challenges. Throughout, MFAN members have had the stature, expertise, and commitment to make progress on MFAN’s priorities. While sustaining high levels of member engagement in MFAN’s activities has been challenging at times, the outcomes have been significant.

### Membership Composition

The composition of MFAN membership has had both strengths and weaknesses over time, resulting in a mixed assessment of MFAN’s ability to influence policy outcomes. The vast majority of members agreed that “together coalition members had the right access to policymakers to help achieve coalition goals” (Figure 10). This has remained quite consistent over MFAN’s eight-year history.

Figure 10. Together coalition members had the right access to policymakers to help achieve coalition goals.<sup>28</sup>



From 2008 to 2010, MFAN had sixteen principals representing think tanks, NGOs, and individual experts (primarily former policy officials). Some members thought that MFAN’s membership in its early years created “too much of an echo chamber,” and MFAN needed the reach of more organizations with larger advocacy capacities, such as NGOs, that had more influence with Congress, if it was going to effectively push its policy agenda. “We needed them in here, even if it meant softening our agenda some,” said one co-chair. MFAN expanded its membership significantly after 2011 to include more sector-focused organizations and NGOs. In addition to making consensus harder to reach, the larger coalition also made it difficult to keep members engaged.

Many of the external actors interviewed describe MFAN as a bipartisan organization. After the Republicans won the majority in House in 2010, MFAN actively recruited more Republican members and appointed a former Republican policymaker as an MFAN co-chair. MFAN also benefited from the creation of the Consensus for Development Reform (CDR), consisting of conservative and private sector leaders committed to fostering dialogue among a group of pro-development Republicans with an agenda that complemented and helped advance MFAN’s core priorities. CDR has encouraged greater interest in U.S. foreign assistance

<sup>28</sup> The n’s reflect MFAN members active in each period listed and who responded to the question.

reform among Republican members of Congress, and they played a critical role in helping the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) advance in the House.

**However, while the MFAN and CDR leaderships benefit from an overlap in membership, how the two entities communicate and coordinate between their members is less clear.** Although there is some membership overlap between MFAN and CDR, which improves alignment, a few MFAN members questioned the wisdom of having two separate structures. CDR is recognized for its conservative membership, which makes it more difficult for MFAN to be perceived as truly bipartisan.

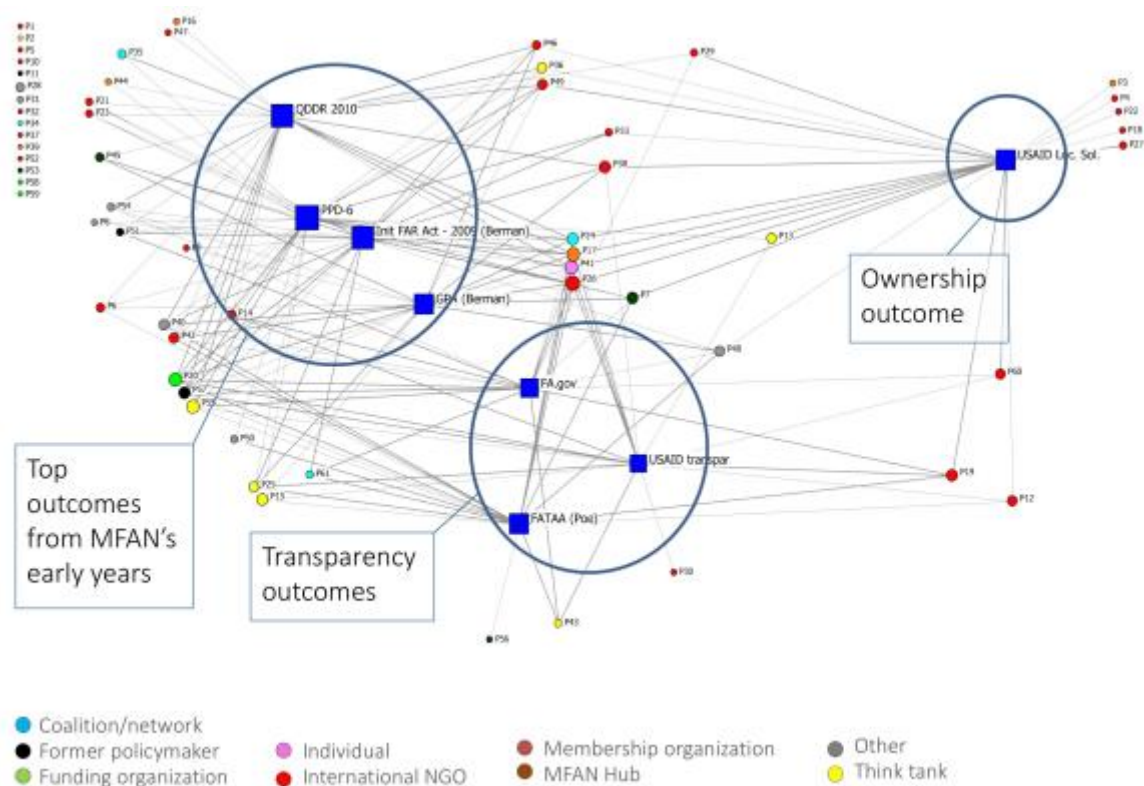
**Beginning in 2014, a few members became less active in MFAN because they wanted to address advocacy issues beyond what MFAN had prioritized.** NGOs continued to dominate the MFAN membership, with fewer think tank members participating as full members. This once again has opened MFAN to the criticism of being an echo chamber.

## Membership Engagement

**Engagement levels in MFAN have been uneven over the years, with MFAN co-chairs and the Hub often struggling to fully leverage the talents and contacts of principals and member organizations.** Think tanks were more engaged in the early years. With the election of President Obama, think tank members saw an opportunity to set a bold reform agenda, and several members had personal ambitions to enter the administration, which in part drove their engagement and commitment. In MFAN's middle years, senior-level engagement in MFAN – particularly by think tank members – ebbed. There was less urgency around the reform agenda, since the administration had adopted many of its parts, and opportunities for major reforms after the elections of 2010 diminished. The coalition considered disbanding in 2013, but MFAN and Hewlett reached an agreement on a more focused two-pillar agenda, and recruited members to work on these issues through an executive committee and working groups. This structure increased the engagement of some members, but others who were interested in a broader reform agenda became more disengaged.

**Half of MFAN member survey respondents indicated they were active or very actively engaged in working on outcomes in MFAN's early years,** including PPD-6 (51 percent), QDDR 2010 (49 percent), and the Initiating Foreign Assistance Reform Act of 2009 (48 percent). In the network map below (Figure 11), the concentration of nodes on the left side indicates high levels of activity in the early years. The levels then drop some and remain lower when ownership and transparency outcomes were a main focus.

Figure 11. MFAN members were most involved in MFAN’s early policy goals.<sup>29</sup>



## Relationships with Key External Actors

MFAN members had multiple relationships with key external actors, including policymakers, allies, and opponents, although the frequency and quality of these relationships varied. Nearly all MFAN member survey respondents indicated having a relationship with USAID leaders and staff. USAID has been a primary policy target throughout MFAN’s history. MFAN was an effective external advocate for pushing USAID to make progress on embedding and institutionalizing local ownership across the agency, helping to neutralize some internal opposition. One USAID staff member said, “MFAN advocated for a very new way of doing business. It was very helpful to have an external advocate that could help. When you are trying to make change, the forces are often quite strong.” MFAN was also a valued source of research and new thinking. One USAID senior staff member commented, “The research that has come out has helped us clarify our thinking around local ownership and Local Solutions. We are not always able to do that research, so it’s very helpful to have external stakeholders who can inform how we respond to implementing this.” USAID staff also relied on MFAN to share information about what was going on behind the scenes in Congress, and to neutralize opposition to local ownership among congressional appropriators who were being lobbied by private contractors.

<sup>29</sup> The squares represent the top eight outcomes in which MFAN was engaged, as identified by MFAN members. The circles represent MFAN member survey respondents who report being actively engaged in influencing each outcome, color-coded based on how they categorized themselves. Some survey respondents did not list themselves as actively engaged in influencing these outcomes. This network map was produced by Connective Associates, <http://connectiveassociates.com/>.



**MFAN members had far fewer relationships with Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) staff, and considerably less with the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) staff, even though these agencies were also potential targets for advancing country ownership.** In 2008, MFAN recommended a “triple-hat authority” for USAID over MCC and PEPFAR, but the plan was never realized. Only later did MFAN develop relationships with the Department of Defense and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Some members felt that MFAN missed an opportunity to more closely coordinate aid reform efforts among all of these entities, so that they collectively could have tackled the aid system more broadly, advocating for more standardized approaches and procedures.

**MFAN reported having strong bipartisan relationships with Democratic and Republican congressional leaders and staff, including leadership and members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC).** In the early years, when Democrats controlled Congress, MFAN worked more closely with Democrats. However, after the 2010 elections, MFAN successfully cultivated relationships with many moderate and some conservative Republican leaders, including Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), who were the lead sponsors of FATAA, HFAC Chairman Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA), and SFRC chairman Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN). It guided the creation of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Effective Foreign Assistance, with which it continued to work closely on educational events. MFAN worked over a six-year period to educate congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle to pass FATAA. However, there is also a sense that MFAN could do more to reach more Freedom Caucus members. In addition, while MFAN has built strong relationships with authorizers, until recently, it has invested less effort building relationships with appropriators.

**Responding to criticisms about why MFAN had not pursued relationships with more policymakers in the administration and Congress, two MFAN members offered three explanations.** First, building relationships takes time, and because of limited bandwidth, MFAN has been selective in the relationships it has built and maintained. Second, MFAN did not do a landscape analysis of the U.S. government, but was rather, in cases, doing “what we were used to doing.” Third, while sometimes MFAN recognized the need to connect with certain entities, it has not always known the specific people to connect with, and it has taken time to identify those individuals.

MFAN has sought to resolve these concerns in three ways: hiring consultants (such as the Kyle House Group), and partnering with like-minded entities (such as the Consensus for Development Reform) to build relationships with Republican members of Congress; hiring a deputy director/senior policy adviser for the Hub, which greatly increased the Hub’s bandwidth; and adding new members.

In its early years, when it was focused on agenda setting and raising foreign assistance reform as a policy issue, it cultivated relationships with the private sector and foreign policy community, since these groups could add heft to its efforts. During its middle and recent years, MFAN members established strong relationships with sector coalitions like those focused on food aid reform, and advocated that principles like country ownership be embedded in sectoral legislation.

## Dedicated Resources and Funding

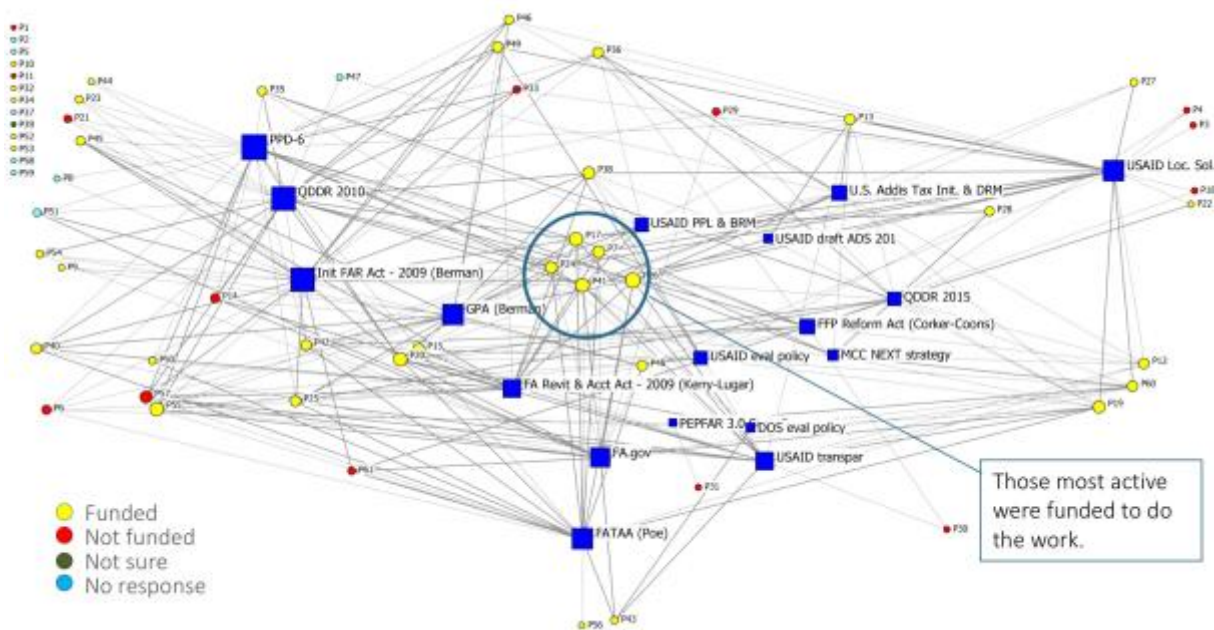
**Having dedicated resources to fund the MFAN Hub and key members and member organizations has made MFAN a go-to source on aid reform, and allowed members to invest significant staff time to advance MFAN’s agenda.** Hewlett has been the primary funder of MFAN. Between 2010 and 2013, Hewlett invested over \$12 million dollars in nine organizations (both think tanks and NGOs) to reform U.S. development aid.

From the outset, the Hewlett Foundation was deeply engaged in forming and fostering MFAN. Without Hewlett’s support, MFAN’s stature and influence would have been diminished. Hewlett hired an advisor to interface with MFAN co-chairs and the Hub, and to report weekly to program officers on MFAN activities, progress, roadblocks, challenges, and missed opportunities. The advisor documented MFAN’s process and progress, and gave Hewlett a voice at the table. The advisor also played a supportive role for MFAN, and helped the Hub and co-chairs achieve their goals.

**Dedicated funding from Hewlett enabled members to enhance their effort and engagement with MFAN.** One member commented, “without the funding, we’d have less content and less engagement ... we’ve been able to put more time into it with the funding.” Another said, “I cannot emphasize enough how important it was to have funding. It was not just for the MFAN Hub, but other organizations. Those are the members who showed up, took assignments, and did the work.” Many members demonstrated a commitment to advocate for aid reform prior to receiving funding, so the funding both honored their previous efforts and supported their continued engagement.

Seventy percent of MFAN member survey respondents indicated they received funding to work on U.S. foreign assistance reform through MFAN at some time in the past eight years (see Figure 12 below, noted by yellow dots in the map). Those who were most active on a variety of MFAN issues (located in the center of the map) all received funding. The map also raises questions: Is the network viable, and can it continue to influence outcomes without additional funding to support the work of its members?

Figure 12. Those who were most active working on MFAN-related goals were funded to do so<sup>30</sup>



<sup>30</sup> The squares represent the top outcomes in which MFAN was engaged, as identified by MFAN members. The circles represent MFAN member survey respondents who report being actively engaged in influencing each outcome, color-coded based on whether or not they were funded to work on foreign assistance reform. Some survey respondents did not list themselves as actively engaged in influencing these outcomes. This network map was produced by Connective Associates, <http://connectiveassociates.com/>.

**MFAN member survey respondents were eight times more likely to have received funding to work on MFAN from Hewlett than from other sources.** Hewlett’s program officers recognized the challenge of funding most organizations to participate in MFAN. Especially during the middle years, they wondered if the primary reason organizations were participating was because they were receiving funding. Hewlett was concerned that the Hub and members were becoming complacent, and were disappointed about the “value add” of their investment.

**Having one primary funder created several complications. First, it meant that Hewlett could drive the agenda by deciding whom to fund.** One of MFAN’s co-chairs believes that in the early years, Hewlett was “one of equals around the table in setting the agenda.” However, another member stated that the “coalition was built around Hewlett funding, not around co-equals coming around the table. Yes, they came around the table, but Hewlett was playing [its role] as a donor with an agenda.” Hewlett’s role in directing the agenda was more explicit in the 2013 transition year, when Hewlett defined the two pillars it was willing to fund. Some members felt Hewlett acted with a heavy hand, and worried MFAN would miss opportunities to work on other issues. This led to the establishment of the Emerging Issues Working Group. Another MFAN member supported the decision to focus on ownership and transparency, as “on balance, the right one” because it led to a clearer sense of direction that helped MFAN positively contribute to accountability initiatives, such as the ForeignAssistance.gov website, and USAID’s success in embedding local ownership in its operating procedures for its Missions and implementing partners.

**Second, several very active MFAN members who had received funding in the past for their participation in MFAN, expressed concern that, absent funding, they and/or their organizations would not be able to dedicate as much time and energy to MFAN’s work.** Organizations often do not have access to unrestricted funds for this purpose. While funders aim to fund those good at what they do, the risk remains that the higher profile organizations and better fundraisers will get the funds, which could mean that some who could add value to MFAN’s work cannot afford to participate.

**Interviewees and, more generally, experts on the roles of funders in coalitions disagree about the appropriate role of funders in a coalition.** They agree that funders can have undue influence, because they bring money to the table, but their presence and commitment can also be critical for convening and launching new efforts, and for getting coalitions back on track when momentum has been lost. On the other hand, with one primary funder, the coalition’s sustainability is at risk if the funder pulls out. In Hewlett’s case, there was strong alignment between their global development portfolio and MFAN as a vehicle for advancing their goals. The Gates Foundation took a different approach to funding MFAN. They provided unrestricted funding to support MFAN’s aid reform agenda.

**Gates and Hewlett needed to coordinate more on what they were funding, and how their portfolio of grantees could work together effectively,** according to one MFAN member. Another member said that both foundations also funded groups that focused on sectoral issues, such as health, without requiring those grantees to adhere to aid reform principles. As a result, they were funding, according to this member, “some organizations that were natural foes of our agenda,” and there needed to be a “more strategic [discussion] about priorities” to mitigate some of the political challenges that were created.

**In 2016, Hewlett announced that, due to its shift in strategy focus, it was winding down its funding of MFAN and member organizations.** This caused MFAN members to rethink their roles and whether they could participate fully without funding. Hewlett has been actively engaged in the transition by funding this evaluation. Nevertheless, MFAN’s future depends on both the Hub and member organizations securing resources. Because MFAN’s success depends on member engagement, absent funding for both, MFAN’s long-term viability is uncertain.

## Constraints of a Coalition Approach

**Eight out of ten survey respondents agreed that being a member of MFAN did not constrain their organization's actions on foreign assistance.** In fact, being part of a coalition gave some members cover to push reforms within their own organizations. One member described how having her organization sign on to MFAN's principles made it easier for her to hold her organization accountable for taking actions that "pass the aid effectiveness test." Being a member of MFAN did constrain some members from advocating openly for earmarks – a constraint that MFAN intended.

**At times, some members felt that MFAN was too slow to act.** One commented, "The amount of energy it took to bring everyone in a coalition up to speed on things versus just running with things, it is such a laborious process. I'd rather do things with one or two other people." This member decided to take a less active role in the coalition, but this was rare. Others were sometimes frustrated by MFAN's lack of nuanced understanding of how the aid procurement process worked, for instance, but continued to work with MFAN on issues of mutual agreement while pursuing other priorities outside MFAN.

## Achieving More Together

### ➤ MFAN characteristics that allowed it to achieve more

**The MFAN platform has allowed members to connect with one another across their diverse organizations, build trust, and share information.** MFAN has brought together a variety of experiences and expertise: congressional policymaking, executive branch policymaking, and development expertise with firsthand experience in a range of countries. From time to time, MFAN has identified gaps in its experience and expertise that it has then worked to fill, such as when it brought on more NGOs to bolster its advocacy capacity. In 2009, MFAN contracted with Capitol Management Initiatives and later the Kyle House Group to lead Republican policymaker outreach efforts.

**MFAN is unique in its concentrated focus on U.S. foreign assistance reform.** For members, aid reform may be on their issue list, but is not usually a top priority. Through engagement with MFAN, they can more effectively contribute to this issue, and align their efforts with others for greater collective impact.

**Many policymakers see MFAN as principles-focused, which helped it appeal to both Democrats and Republicans.** MFAN was not seen as favoring one side or the other. It remained in the middle, based on substance. As a result, MFAN was able to encourage both Democrats and Republicans to co-sponsor and vote repeatedly for legislation, like FATAA, in a highly partisan political environment.

**MFAN members have stature that gave them access, influence, and convening power with the Obama administration.** While that same stature may not open as many doors with the current administration, MFAN members have already identified a few potentially sympathetic voices with whom they do have access.

### ➤ Cost-benefit of working together

**Without MFAN, no individual organization would have had the credibility and reach to place the issue of foreign assistance reform on the policy agenda.** MFAN members working together inspired and supported the effort to rewrite the FAA, and helped enact FATAA among other accomplishments. MFAN has contributed significantly to making foreign assistance reform principles mainstream. For those interested in foreign assistance reform, these accomplishments are worth the cost of managing a network.

**Members strongly agreed that participating in MFAN helped them advance their organization's goals, and that they had benefited a lot from information shared at MFAN meetings.** One member described how MFAN amplified what their organization was trying to achieve. "As a small shop, having MFAN as a community, source, place to go to compare notes and share information has had enormous value in understanding the landscape, players, and how to make a more effective reform pitch." Another member noted, "With the size of our platform and resources, going our own way would have been counterproductive."



# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

## Conclusion

Based on this evaluation's findings, MFAN plays an essential role in advancing U.S. foreign assistance reform, due to its singular focus on the topic, its nonpartisan approach, and the quality and engagement of its membership.

**MFAN members achieve more together as a network than they could individually:**

- MFAN raised foreign assistance on the policy agenda and made foreign assistance reform principles mainstream.
- MFAN has helped build a bipartisan constituency in Congress in support of foreign assistance reform.
- MFAN played a critical role in advancing legislative and policy changes that reflect key foreign assistance reform principles (e.g., GPA, FATAA).

**Yet, MFAN has missed some opportunities.** Findings indicate that the reasons included MFAN's small size and limited bandwidth, its tendency to engage with familiar policy targets, the time required to build new relationships, as well as MFAN's occasional unwillingness to push its members, allies, and officials in the administration. During MFAN's 2013-2014 transition, a lack of clear guidance on roles and responsibilities related to MFAN's new structure and leadership meant MFAN lost some momentum.

**Since its inception, MFAN's agenda has evolved, and it has used a variety of structural models to support it.** Findings indicate successes in all phases, regardless of agenda and structural model. This evaluation indicates that other factors, such as members' stature and expertise, members' relationships with key policymakers, dedicated resources, and monitoring the policy environment and adaptability, were more important. Even in challenging political times, the coalition stands ready to find opportunities and advance reforms that no one else will prioritize.



# The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN)

Evaluation Report: 2008-2016

## Recommendations

Based on its findings, the evaluation team for this study identified the following recommendations to help MFAN further strengthen its effectiveness as a coalition and contribute to aid reform in the years to come. Recommendations specific to the 2017 presidential transition are presented in a separate policy memo.

MFAN and its members should:

- **Focus** | Maintain focus on the importance of U.S. foreign assistance and making it more effective. MFAN’s singular focus on and nonpartisan framing of this issue appeal to a broad spectrum of policymakers.
- **Strategic priorities** | Continue to regularly and systematically assess the policy landscape (including Congress, the administration, and the development community), and adjust priorities accordingly.
- **Membership** | Continue to identify and work closely with members who share MFAN’s priorities, have committed to work on foreign aid reform through MFAN – even with uncertain funding, and have convening power, access, influence, knowledge, and expertise about congressional and administration policymaking and technical content. Also, identify additional actors to bring in, depending on MFAN’s agenda and the gaps it needs to fill. Maintaining a membership that includes think tanks, NGOs, and former policymakers gives MFAN the breadth of perspectives, experience, and expertise needed to generate innovative ideas and grounded policy proposals.
  - **Balancing policy sharpness with political heft** | Do not compromise policy sharpness when aiming to increase political heft, since MFAN’s value is in the strength of its message. MFAN’s political heft results from the stature, influence, and involvement of its members, as well as from the number of MFAN members positioned to influence key audiences.
  - **Clear guidance for members** | Clarify the expectations and obligations of coalition members, when members’ organizational agendas differ from MFAN’s. While the broad purpose and principles of MFAN are widely shared, MFAN members do not necessarily have a shared understanding about what it means to model and put these principles into practice. Clarifying this will strengthen MFAN as a coalition.
- **Dedicated resources** | Encourage MFAN funders to require that grantees focused on sectors, such as health or education, also adhere to aid reform principles. Also, encourage MFAN funders to coordinate with each other to maximize the impact of their investments. Members need to identify funding sources or other mechanisms that can support their aid reform work and participation in MFAN.
- **Structure** | Establish a streamlined structure that: represents the minimum required for MFAN to advance its agenda, in order to facilitate decision making; reflects members’ skills and resources; and ensures the easy flow of information among members. When MFAN’s agenda is broad and focused on agenda setting, a core group of highly committed principals and deputies meeting regularly can achieve that purpose. Thematic working groups are effective at addressing narrower issues focused on policy adoption and implementation.
  - **Leadership** | Clarify the process of transitioning co-chair leadership. Appointing co-chairs with credibility with different MFAN constituency groups, and who are able to work together across their different experiences is one of MFAN’s strengths and should be continued. Clarifying the relationship between MFAN co-chairs and working group co-chairs would help prevent unnecessary conflicts. Distributing leadership increases MFAN’s bandwidth to engage on multiple fronts; however, it requires some loosening of control around the outcomes, and cultivating group accountability. MFAN co-chairs must strike a clear balance between the need to increase MFAN’s bandwidth and controlling its message.

- **Secretariat** | Maintain a dedicated, independent secretariat adequately staffed to fulfill its functions to ensure MFAN's overall effectiveness. At a minimum, the secretariat, in addition to its executive director and someone in a support role, should have two senior staff members focused on advocacy and communications. The secretariat or Hub has been best able to serve MFAN when its reporting lines, role, and authorities have been clear.
- **Principals and deputies** | Ensure principals and their deputies work closely together to present a unified organizational voice that clearly contributes to MFAN.
- **Working groups** | Select working group co-chairs who are well-positioned to facilitate a collaborative process to align member efforts. Also, select as working group participants committed members with shared goals and accountability.
- **Consultants** | Continue to use consultants to fill key roles that MFAN members themselves cannot adequately fill. By treating consultants as MFAN members, MFAN can bring the relationships that the consultants build into MFAN.
- **Decision-making process** | Develop more explicit guidelines for how decisions are made in order to increase coalition effectiveness within a larger and more diverse MFAN that has a more complex structure than in its earlier years. For example, MFAN should clarify the authority working groups have to make decisions, and when they need to consult with the Executive Committee and co-chairs. The near-consensus decision-making model and absence of clear governance rules worked best when MFAN was a smaller, more homogenous group.
- **Fostering relationships with allies** | Foster relationships with allies to expand MFAN's political heft without losing its policy sharpness. This can be done through participating in ad hoc efforts, such as the USGLC-led campaign on the budget; bringing others into MFAN's working groups, such as allies dedicated to MFAN's priorities; or participating in others' working groups, such as those at InterAction. In these relationships, connecting and building awareness among members, in addition to top leaders, will help maximize the influence and results that MFAN and its allies can achieve.
  - **Strengthening MFAN's relationship with CDR** | Strengthen MFAN's relationship with the Consensus for Development Reform (CDR) to increase its influence with Republican members of Congress and the current administration. For many in MFAN, its relationship with CDR lacks transparency. Increasing this transparency will help MFAN members better understand the nature of this relationship and how to leverage it to advance aid reform.
- **External relationships with policymakers** | Undertake a formal landscape analysis to understand key leverage points, and regularly update this analysis. Create a process to allow MFAN to prioritize its relationship-building efforts, so MFAN can increase its influence and avoid missed opportunities. MFAN needs to continue to reach out to members of the Freedom Caucus, either directly, through MFAN members, or via the Kyle House Group and the CDR. MFAN also needs to foster stronger relationships with appropriators and other committees within Congress, such as Armed Services. Additionally, MFAN must build relationships with strategically positioned members of the administration who value foreign assistance and want to increase its effectiveness.
  - **Consistent engagement** | Continue to support policymakers with consistent engagement. This will help MFAN build trust and partnerships with policymakers. It will also help busy policymakers prioritize effective aid.
  - **Engagement with the executive branch** | Build stronger relationships with more people in more agencies, so that the change that MFAN influences in the executive branch reaches beyond individual agencies to the system as a whole.

- **Public outreach** | Determine whether strengthening public support for modernizing U.S. foreign assistance is important to achieve MFAN's goals. If it is, create and implement a strategy to engage the public or particular constituencies within the broader U.S. public.







