



**Robertson Foundation
for Government**

2026-2029 Strategic Plan



A Message From Our President

It is with great pleasure that I present the long and hard work accomplished by the Strategic Planning Committee, our consulting team, the Board of Directors, advisors, and our partners. Through months of research, landscape analysis, SWOT assessment, and in-depth interviews, we have updated our strategic plan to meet the moment. While this is not a complete departure from our past work, it represents an important evolution.

Founded in the early 1960s, the Robertson Foundation for Government (RFG) remains dedicated to defending and extending freedom around the world by preparing and empowering U.S. public service leaders. For us, freedom means dignity, opportunity, and participation for all people, safeguarded by strong democratic institutions and sustained through global cooperation. In today's era of rising authoritarianism and complex global challenges, this work is more important than ever. We are investing in the capabilities of a new generation of leaders with integrity, vision, and commitment to carry this mission forward.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JULIA ROBERTSON
RFG President



Foundation History

Over sixty years ago, President John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to service, declaring: *“Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country... ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”*

His call inspired a generation to pursue meaningful careers in government—shaping U.S. foreign policy, navigating Cold War crises, and laying the groundwork for America to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Charles and Marie Robertson shared Kennedy’s vision. In 1961, moved by their love of country, they endowed Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School with the goal of “strengthening the Government of the United States” by preparing young Americans to defend and extend freedom worldwide. As Charles wrote, echoing the words of philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau: *“As soon as public service ceases to be the chief concern of its citizens, the state is not far from its fall.”*

That belief gave rise to the Robertson Fellowship at Princeton University. The Robertsons dedicated \$35 million to cultivate future diplomats, intelligence officers, negotiators, and leaders who would carry forward the values of freedom, democracy, and service to the country. Today, the Robertson Foundation for Government (RFG), a private nonpartisan foundation independent of Princeton, remains true to its founding mission—ensuring the nation’s strength by building the acumen, policy expertise, and problem-solving skills of its globally engaged public servants who advance a more peaceful, sustainable and interconnected world.

Current Challenges

3.5
BILLION
people living
in poverty

Political and economic globalization present benefits and also complexity and risks that affect us all. With 3.5 billion people living in poverty¹ and 2.4 million children dying from malnutrition annually,² these global issues and other interconnected challenges, such as climate change, health crises, and geopolitical conflict, demand coordinated responses, with governments, inter-government organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) playing crucial roles.

2.4
MILLION
children dying
from malnutrition
annually

In addition to this, public trust in the U.S. government continues to decline³ and projections for fiscal year 2026 show U.S. foreign aid spending falling to approximately \$50 billion—a significant decrease from prior years—as the U.S. Agency for International Development has been dismantled and the **Department of State continues to implement substantial reductions across global health, humanitarian, and development programs.**^{4,5} This has led to plummeting morale and a huge loss of talent and experience from federal public service.

25
MILLION
fewer people
received
life-saving aid

RFG recognizes that federal investments and job trends will ebb and flow. Regardless of short-term changes, there will continue to be ongoing needs over the long term in the U.S. for globally engaged international affairs public service leaders.

37
PERCENT
reduction in U.S.
humanitarian aid
funding

-
1. World Bank. "Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis," 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-prosperity-and-planet>.
 2. Ritchie, Hannah. "Half of All Child Deaths Are Linked to Malnutrition." Our World in Data, September 9, 2024. <https://ourworldindata.org/half-child-deaths-linked-malnutrition>.
 3. Partnership for Public Service. "The State of Public Trust in Government 2025 • Partnership for Public Service," August 12, 2025. <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/the-state-of-public-trust-in-government-2025/>.
 4. Tamonan, Miguel Antonio. "The \$50B US aid budget: What's in it for development?" Devex. January 26, 2026. <https://www.devex.com/news/the-50b-us-aid-budget-what-s-in-it-for-development-111751>.
 5. Vigersky, Sam. "The Great Aid Recession: 2025's Humanitarian Crash in Nine Charts." Council on Foreign Relations. December 23, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/great-aid-recession-2025s-humanitarian-crash-nine-charts>.

RFG Focus

Building on the Past, Moving Forward

The United States has one of the strongest and most respected systems of higher education in the world—particularly in the field of international affairs and its related disciplines, including diplomacy, public policy, human rights, development, technology, security, and economics. RFG continues to believe that one of the greatest opportunities for impact lies in educating and empowering young Americans who have already demonstrated a commitment to international affairs and public service. Through the study of international affairs, students develop a deeper understanding of how actions in one region can influence others; gain insights into diverse cultures, beliefs, and values; build skills in conflict resolution and negotiation; learn to critically assess information from multiple sources and perspectives; and cultivate the ability to navigate complex global landscapes and engage in strategic decision-making.

Therefore, the foundation supports [graduate school education fellowships](#) that provide financial support for tuition and related expenses in the fields of international affairs and public policy. By investing in the education and professional development of globally engaged, public service-oriented graduate students, we equip them for meaningful careers in government or other public service fields. This sustains future generations of globally minded leaders ready to serve.

RFG also recognizes the power of investments in earlier pathways that inspire young people to pursue careers in public service and prepare them for graduate-level study, particularly the transformative power of [experiential learning and network development](#). Therefore, we offer grants to organizations that provide experiential learning and career advancement opportunities. By investing in pathways that spark young people's interest in public service and prepare them for advanced study, RFG helps ignite a lifelong commitment to making a difference. These investments build momentum—cultivating curiosity, nurturing ambition, and guiding future leaders with the awareness, opportunity, and preparation to succeed.

RFG further recognizes the power of [professional development and career advancement opportunities](#) for current professionals working in the global public sector. We seek to reinforce their call to service and help propel them forward into leadership roles, so that their contributions can help shape a more peaceful, sustainable, prosperous world.

We also [convene and cultivate the RFG network](#), helping to build lasting relationships among RFG Fellows, alumni, schools, grantee organizations, partners, and other leaders in the field.

Lastly, RFG uses its position to [champion global public service](#) by communicating about its impact and showcasing stories of its fellows and successful international affairs leadership.

Our Vision

A peaceful, sustainable, and interconnected world shaped by the contributions of globally engaged U.S. public service leaders.

Our Mission

To strengthen peace and freedom around the world by cultivating the next generation of globally engaged U.S. public service leaders.



Our Values

The following core values underpin RFG’s strategic plan and inform every facet of our priorities, strategies, and partnerships.

Public Service Global public service is a noble and important profession, typically carried out by government agencies or employees (at the local, state or federal level) or nonprofit organizations to serve others, protect the people, and advance equity and opportunities essential to building lasting peace.

Diplomacy Effective diplomacy—the practice of conducting negotiations and maintaining relations between countries—is essential for national strength. Peace abroad fosters peace at home, and global U.S. public service leaders uphold it through cultural competence, collaboration, and building mutual respect.

Democracy Democracy—a system of governance that ensures representation and participation of the people—and good governance, supported by diplomacy, are the essential foundations of a peaceful and sustainable society rooted in human rights. Without these elements, the United States cannot build trust, lead with legitimacy, or effectively uphold its leadership on the global stage.

Human Rights Recognizing and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms for all individuals is essential to cultivating a peaceful and sustainable society.

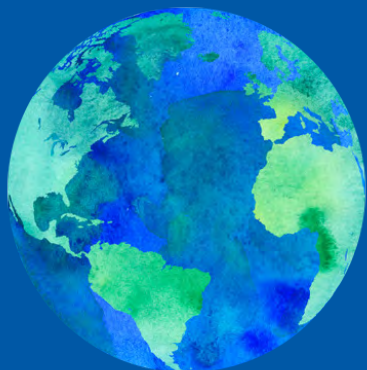
Idealism Idealism is a powerful force for change. Hope, optimism, and faith in a better future are driving forces of progress.

Leadership Development Developing globally minded leaders is an investment in the world’s future. We value investing in the growth and future success of internationally informed U.S. young leaders to support their success and impact in the world.

Theory of Change

The RFG theory of change defines how we make change in the world and achieve our intended impact and vision.

If globally engaged, public service-oriented leaders in the United States—ranging from students to seasoned professionals—receive financial support for their education, access to high-quality experiential learning and networking opportunities, and sustained exposure to the value of public service, then they will be equipped to build impactful careers in international affairs and global leadership. The next generation of U.S. public service leaders will be prepared to rise to senior decision-making roles where they can shape diplomacy, policy, and international cooperation.



✓ Critical Need and Opportunity

Talented, skilled, and dedicated public service leaders prepared to advance a safe, democratic society in the United States and engage effectively in international relations and foreign affairs.

✓ Focus

Globally engaged, public service-oriented leaders in the United States—ranging from students to seasoned professionals, with an emphasis on graduate school students.

✓ Powerful Resources

- 15-year history of successful fellowship program, over 220 RFG Fellows working around the world, experienced alumni community
- Relationships and partnerships with outstanding institutions and programs
- The legacy, values, and story of the Robertson family
- Cadre of accomplished senior advisors

✓ Investments

- Academic fellowships that provide financial support for international affairs graduate degrees
- Grants to organizations that offer professional learning experiences and career advancement opportunities to nurture globally engaged students and professionals
- Cultivate a dynamic RFG community and active network
- Champion the importance and impact of public service

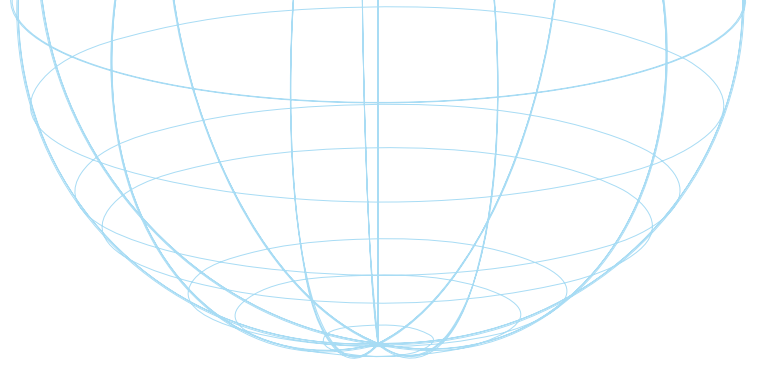
✓ Outputs

- Graduate degrees in international affairs successfully completed
- Public service positions secured across levels of government and entities that address government challenges
- Professional experiences, training, and opportunities realized
- International affairs public service career advancement by fellows, alumni, and beneficiaries of grants
- Public service success stories
- A network of colleagues, mentors, and employers as well as resources and opportunities from this network

✓ Intended Impact

The next generation of U.S. public service leaders will be prepared to rise to senior decision-making roles where they can shape diplomacy, policy, and international cooperation—advancing a more peaceful, sustainable, and interconnected world.

2026–2029 Strategy



RFG’s 2026–2029 strategy charts an ambitious path to cultivate and support globally engaged U.S. public service leaders. Through investments in graduate education, experiential learning, and career advancement, we will continue to strengthen the capacity of individuals committed to shaping a more peaceful, sustainable, and interconnected world. Our approach remains proudly nonpartisan, driven by a singular focus—advancing U.S. global public service.

Over the next four years, RFG will expand its impact through strategic grantmaking and partnerships with graduate schools and mission-aligned organizations that prepare leaders to meet global challenges—those who serve the public good, resolve conflict, alleviate poverty, and guide policy at home and abroad.

RFG will also champion a modern and inclusive vision of global public service—one that recognizes that American leadership extends far beyond federal agencies to innovative NGOs, influential think tanks, pioneering academic institutions, and forward-thinking state and local governments that engage globally.

Guided by this vision, RFG will target its investments to ensure a diverse, dynamic, and enduring pipeline of dedicated leaders who influence positive change on both domestic and global stages.





Strategic Priorities and Goals

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 →

Support Graduate Student Education

GOALA:

Establish and maintain partnerships with select graduate schools

ACTIVITIES:

- Seek up to 4 new partner universities with the capacity to advance RFG's mission. Grants will be provided for initial 4-year renewable commitments through an application process that assesses partner capacity.

Assessment criteria include: record of excellence in global affairs and foreign policy graduate education; motivation and capacity to promote the fellowship, recruit diverse, high-caliber students, and cultivate a fellowship community; support to secure internships and robust career services with a proven track record of graduates entering international affairs and public service; ability to provide matching financial and/or in-kind resources, and values alignment with RFG. A call for Letters of Interest will be shared with pre-selected APSIA members and other universities to indicate interest as prospective partners. Public higher education institutions are of particular interest, and schools that demonstrate intent to build meaningful collaboration.

- Develop a rubric to evaluate applicant schools for the criteria listed above.
- Refresh RFG's contract and terms required of designated partner schools in alignment with selection criteria and expectations.
- Nurture positive, trusting, and collaborative relationships with partner schools.



GOAL B:

Provide fellowships, including tuition subsidies, for U.S.-based international affairs graduate students

Working with partner schools identified in Goal A, we will continue RFG’s proud legacy of supporting graduate students through fellowships at these leading schools of global policy and international affairs. Partner institutions will distribute fellowship funds directly to students, covering tuition and related expenses while also promoting the Robertson Foundation for Government and its mission. Students who receive support will be recognized as RFG Fellows—a distinction that signals their commitment to global public service. Selection will be led by the partner schools, with RFG participating as a collaborative voice in the process. RFG Fellows will be future leaders—globally engaged public servants dedicated to advancing diplomacy, strengthening democratic governance, and promoting peace and freedom around the world.

ACTIVITY:

- Distribute fellowship funding annually to selected partner schools



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 —————>

Support Experiential Learning, Career Advancement, and Narratives of Public Service

GOAL: Provide grants to organizations

RFG will invest in organizations that specialize in providing professional development and other career advancement opportunities to inspire interest in and bolster the skills, leadership capacity and networks of students and professionals addressing complex societal challenges. Furthermore, we will award grants to organizations that shape narratives around and elevate the value of public service careers.



ACTIVITIES:

- Assess the landscape and potential partners that provide experiential learning, career advancement, and related opportunities to support U.S. public service.
- Design a simple grant-making process, including the call for proposals, evaluation rubric, evaluation committee, and award process.
- Call for applications from organizations in both categories (experiential and narrative) via an open request for proposals. As needed, request secondary details to determine awardees.
- Provide grants to organizations that offer key experiences and professional development opportunities, such as internship programs, study abroad, research conferences, training, networking, and other experiences. The objective is to invest in opportunities that enhance values-aligned students' and professionals' advancement into global public service.
- Support organizations that elevate the value of public service and work to remove structural barriers—economic, institutional, and cultural—that prevent Americans from fully engaging in and leading global change.
- Provide grants to organizations that shape narratives around and promote the value of public service careers.

Direct Programming and Operational Goals

The following direct programming and operational goals will support and strengthen our grantmaking activities.

A Cultivate a community and network of fellows, alumni, and partners

RFG will rely on partner schools to provide direct support for fellows; however, we will continue to nurture the community of RFG Fellows and alumni, fostering connections, mutual support, and belonging among and across fellowship classes and with partners, and provide opportunities to network with other leaders, organizations, and allies addressing global challenges.

B Champion global public service

RFG will promote the activities and accomplishments of current and alumni fellows, affiliated schools, grantees and collaborators that demonstrate the value and impact of public service and promote progress to achieving RFG's mission, vision and goals.

C Enlist a skilled, connected, dedicated, and engaged board of directors

RFG will cultivate an inspirational, networked, and experienced board to steer foundation operations and activities for maximum short-term and long-range results.

D Scale impact

RFG's long-term goal is to leverage resources to expand fellowship opportunities and amplify our impact. Through strategic partnerships and collaboration, we aim to grow the reach and influence of our programs while strengthening the pipeline of globally engaged U.S. public service leaders.

We will work with universities, fellowship programs, foundations, and funder collaboratives to align efforts, share resources, and expand access to graduate-level opportunities in international affairs and global public service. At the same time, we will engage our partners and alumni networks to champion RFG's mission and increase our impact by growing the fellowship program to more schools and value-aligned disciplines.

By investing in these relationships and pursuing thoughtful growth, RFG will broaden its impact and sustain a vibrant, interconnected community of public service leaders driving global change.

E Monitor, evaluate, and learn

Our approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning is designed to ensure accountability to our mission, measure progress toward our strategic priorities, and support learning to continuously strengthen our impact. RFG will:

- Conduct periodic evaluations of fellowship and grantmaking investments to assess impact and effectiveness.
- Share learnings with partners, fellows, and grantees through newsletters, reports, and communications.
- Conduct fellow, alumni, and school partner surveys.
- Ask alumni to report on and share updates with RFG about how they are contributing to a peaceful, sustainable, and interconnected world after graduation.
- Periodically review and adjust grantmaking strategies and practices in response to changes in the external environment and evaluation findings.

F Support organizational structure, governance, and staffing

RFG is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The board of directors is the RFG's principal oversight and governance mechanism. The foundation president oversees the strategic vision, financial investment strategy, and partnership development, and provides oversight and support to the staff. An advisory board may provide strategic advising, ambassadorship, and network connections for the foundation.



Glossary

- Public service** Any work or activity performed for the benefit of the general U.S. public, typically carried out by government agencies or employees at the local, state, federal, or international levels or nonprofit organizations.
- Global public service** Activities, programs, or initiatives at the international level, typically carried out by government agencies or employees at the local, state, federal, or international levels or nonprofit organizations, to promote the common good of all humanity, rather than serving a single nation or group.
- Globally engaged U.S. public service leaders** Individuals who dedicate their careers to strengthening American democracy and governance with an international perspective. They combine deep policy knowledge, cultural fluency, and ethical commitment to the public good with the skills to collaborate, communicate, and adapt across borders. By embodying integrity, inclusivity, and innovation, these leaders ensure that the United States can meet complex global challenges while advancing peace, security, prosperity, and justice at home and abroad.
- Government** A public institution established by the people to protect and serve the nation’s citizens, uphold justice, and advance the common good. Government exists to ensure the safety, dignity, and opportunity of all by managing shared resources responsibly, safeguarding individual rights, and fostering collaboration across communities and nations. In a democracy, its legitimacy derives from the consent of the governed, and its highest duty is to work for the public good through integrity, accountability, and service.
- Governance** The systems, principles, and processes through which decisions are made, authority is exercised, and accountability is maintained in organizations or societies. Effective governance ensures that power is used responsibly and transparently in pursuit of the public good. It balances leadership with oversight, participation with efficiency, and vision with integrity—creating structures that uphold trust, fairness, and long-term sustainability.
- Foreign affairs** An area of government activity concerned with a nation’s external relations, including diplomacy, trade, security, and cooperation with other states and international government bodies. In essence, foreign affairs is about how a country engages with the rest of the world, balancing national interests with global responsibilities.
- International affairs** The political, economic, social, and cultural relations between countries and other global entities, focusing on issues that cross national borders and affect the international community. Broader than foreign affairs, international affairs includes not only government-to-government relations but also roles of international organizations, NGOs, multinational corporations, and global civic society.
- Foreign service** A global force for diplomacy that represents the American people and advances U.S. interests abroad. From negotiating peace to managing international programs, Foreign Service employees serve on the front lines of policy and engagement, working in over 270 embassies, consulates, and missions around the world.
- Peace** The condition in which justice, safety, and mutual respect allows individuals, communities, and nations to thrive. It is not only the absence of conflict, but the active presence of equity, dignity, and cooperation that sustains a secure and hopeful future.
- Freedom** The ability of individuals and communities to live with dignity, make choices without coercion, and participate fully in society. It is sustained not only by rights and autonomy, but by justice, opportunity, and the shared responsibility to uphold one another’s humanity.

Thank you to our leadership and partners for helping to develop and inform our plan.

BOARD MEMBERS

Julia Robertson	Chair
Olivia Robertson-Moe	Secretary
Nils Moe	Treasurer
Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders	Member
Carmen Iezzi Mezzera	Former Chair
Jerica Lamar	Former Member

ADVISORS

Gregori Lebedev	Senior Advisor and Chair, Advisory Board
Ambassador Paula J. Dobriansky	Advisor
William S. Robertson	Advisor, Founding Board Member, First Board Chair, and Past President, Robertson Foundation for Government

Strategic Planning Process: This plan was developed through a thoughtful and inclusive process engaging RFG family members, staff, alumni, partners, board members, advisors, and other subject matter experts. The planning process was facilitated by Lyons-Newman Consulting. The research conducted grounded RFG's board, staff, and advisors in a shared understanding of its current state, unique niche, and constituent perspectives about its future and laid the foundation for the Strategic Planning Committee—along with ongoing input from family members, alumni, schools, and other partners—to determine the strategic priorities in this plan, which was adopted by the RFG Board of Directors in November 2025.

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Alexandra Ghara	Former Executive Director
Nils Moe	Treasurer
Julia Robertson	President
Dr. Michael Schneider	Advisor
Carmen Iezzi Mezzera	Former Chair

STRATEGIC PLANNING CONSULTANTS

Belinda Lyons-Newman	Principal and Founder, Lyons-Newman Consulting
Erica Harrell	Senior Consultant, Lyons-Newman Consulting

EXPERT INFORMANTS

(in addition to Strategic Planning Committee members, board members, and advisors)

Rachel Bowen Pittman	Executive Director, United Nations Association of the USA
Margot Conrad	Consultant, Volcker Alliance
Lisa Gilbert	Co-President, Public Citizen
Sara Mogulescu	President, Volcker Alliance
Daniel G. Newman	President and Co-Founder, MapLight, and author of <i>Unrig: How to Fix Our Broken Democracy</i>
Robert C. Orr	Professor, Senior Fellow, CISSM, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland
Chandrika Rallapalli	Assistant Dean, External Relations, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland
Cynthia Robinson	Past President, Robertson Foundation for Government
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