

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

January 2026

Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503

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Dear Readers,

We recognize that many of you have had careers uprooted and thrown into chaos last year and we hope that the year ahead turns over a new leaf and brings health and prosperity. Those who were able, have donated generously and we are looking forward to offering another bountiful grant cycle. You are all a vital part of this great effort!

With chagrin, we realized our email-only audience have not yet received our annual letter and report. To that end they are incorporated into this newsletter. We recently had the opportunity to mobilize members to help with a humanitarian situation among diaspora—read more to appreciate the efforts of super star Tanout Natural Resources RPCV Jessica Garrels in Lansing, MI.

Consider joining us online **February 18** for our **second Annual Member Meeting**. We plan to share some great grant stories, respond to your questions and discuss current events impacting Niger. Also, if you are in **Washington, DC April 25** we will be organizing a social gathering to be held in conjunction with a Board Retreat. Let us know if you plan to attend or if you want to help organize.

Our sincere thanks to Nafissa Salihou for her service on the board. We welcome to Brittany Gallagher, a Natural Resources Management Volunteer in the Tillaberi region from January 2007 to December 2008. Please note that recent diplomatic issues have not affected Friends of Niger grant-making and support for grassroots efforts in Niger. We remain as committed as ever to this important work.

Merci, Fofo, Mun gode, Tanimert, Foma, Thank you --

Amy Wilson & Scott Youngstedt

1) Annual Letter and 2025 Grant Report

2025 Annual Letter from the Board

This year has been a challenging one the world over and this holiday season finds many of us anxious and unsure of what is to come. Here at Friends of Niger, we take comfort in the continued resilience and success of our Nigerien partners and hope that you will join us in supporting their worthy projects.

In 2025, we funded more projects than ever thanks to your unprecedented generosity. We maintained lasting relationships with some of our longtime partners, and were introduced to new community-based projects through our competitive grant application process.

Eighty-eight community-based groups applied for funding, and each application was carefully considered by our twenty-two volunteer reviewers before being presented to our Board.

Ultimately, we were able to fund twenty-eight projects, distributing more than \$105,000 to groups tackling everything from school latrines to renewable energy to village wells. As always, every project funded was conceived and executed by Nigeriens for Nigeriens.

Please take a few moments to read the informative 2025 Grants Report describing activities funded this year, and contact us if you would like to learn more or get involved. Your donations provide meaningful support for projects like these - designed by and for Nigeriens.

Please send donations to FON 4865 Hwy 234 White City OR 97503 or via PayPal at www.friendsofniger.org. Your gift to the Friends of Niger is tax-deductible and makes a real impact on people, families, and communities in the country we all love.

On behalf of our Nigerien partners and the entire Board of Directors, our sincere thanks for your continued support.

Please see our annual grant report [HERE](#)

Sincerely,

FON Board of Directors

****On a housekeeping note, if you did not receive a letter from us in the mail last November, please update your contact information so that we can add you and make sure we are not mailing to old addresses.**

2) Annual Member Meeting February 18 @ 7 pm Eastern/4 pm Pacific

Please join us for our Second Annual Friends of Niger Virtual **Member Meeting**. Come meet the board and learn more about what we do and how your donations have accomplished so many meaningful projects.

This is your chance to hear the latest, share ideas, and see old friends.



Time: Feb 18, 2025 7:00 PM Eastern 4:00 PM Pacific

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81954445601?pwd=WO5acSeT23YkeZaNVRFT5EgUTVtSAi.1>

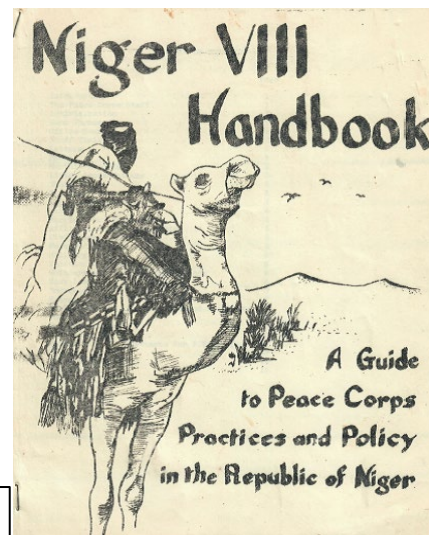
Mark your calendars--We'll follow up with a reminder notice and agenda the week before the meeting. Looking forward to spending time with you!

3) Member Soirée in Washington DC April 25

Join us in DC April 25 for an evening of camaraderie and conversation. The Board is planning a retreat at the end of April and one evening will be dedicated to meeting you. Plans are firming up as we speak. We are aiming for a convenient venue in the Brookland neighborhood. While the board is prepared to subsidize as needed, we will be asking attendees to support the event by paying for food to the extent they are able—we are always trying to direct all our funds to Niger!

About two weeks before the event we will be sending out a special email requesting RSVPs to better plan for food. It will really help if we folks respond.

Some nostalgia. About 1968? Artwork by ???



4) 2026 Grant Cycle Announced

This year the window to submit grant applications will be from **April 27 to May 10, 2026**. This shorter application period is in response to the growth of our program, with a whopping 88 grant applications received last year! Other changes to our process include, stricter adherence to screening out incomplete proposals so that we are reviewing only complete applications and streamlining the feedback we provide to unsuccessful applicants. Grant forms and guidelines have been updated and all the information is available on the website.

We will be sharing the details directly with potential applicants in our newsletter to partners and applicants "*Nouvelles des amis du Niger*". This newsletter goes out in French at least twice a year. We share information about the grant application process as well as promoting and celebrating some of the accomplishments of grantees among their peers. "*Nouvelles*" is emailed to over 250 contacts for organizations in Niger. Copies of the newsletters and grant application materials in French are available on the website <https://friendsofniger.org/a-nos-amis-nigeriens/>

We also encourage our readers to **spread the word** and work with your friends and colleagues to help them firm up their plans and submit competitive proposals. The most common weakness in proposals is lack of description about what they plan to do. There are plenty of good ideas and needs to fill, and our competitive grant process is designed to select those projects that are most likely to make the best use of your generous donations.

5) Short-term work opportunity - paid or volunteer Program Assistant

In an attempt to manage our success, we are recruiting some help during the crunch period of the grant making cycle. We are looking for about 80 hours of program assistance at the end of April and beginning of May.

Program Assistant work will entail processing the applications that come in: initial screening, cataloging, assigning numbers, translating, and creating folders. Functional French is a must as well as effective use of Google Drive and basic software. The work will be virtual and candidates must provide their own computer and access to internet. Candidates must be self-directed, self-motivated, and able to effectively coordinate and communicate with volunteer team members.

Please contact us if interested!

Send us a note describing your skills and desired remuneration if you are interested. We would love a volunteer for the sake of prioritizing funds to Niger, but we would also love to offer some work to our members and diaspora. Please send an email to president@friendsofniger.org

6) Combining forces with diaspora to help a young widow return to Niger

A FON grant partner currently in the US contacted FON about a young Tuareg woman in distress in Lansing, Michigan. Suddenly widowed, she found herself with no means of support for herself and her 6-month-old baby. Speaking only Hausa and Tamashek she was understandably overwhelmed. In an amazing show of solidarity, the Tuareg diaspora stepped up in spite of the nearest Tuareg families being in Indiana. By reaching out to our membership FON found Jessica Garrels—an RPCV who worked in natural resources in Tanout, Niger-- living in nearby Grand Ledge, Michigan. She immediately dropped everything to help, taking a key role in on-site coordination of the effort. Jessica spent hours sitting with the traumatized young woman, researching options and communicating with the ad hoc care team.

The young widow wished vehemently to return to Niger. After several trips to Lansing from Indiana and many phone conferences with a diverse group of helpers, the team concurred that returning home would be best. The care team worked with the Niger Embassy to iron out paperwork and was able to find a Nigerian woman living in Minnesota who volunteered to accompany the young widow and her baby on the journey--a somewhat risky proposition given the current tension in U.S.-Niger relations. Jessica managed donations from the Islamic Center of Lansing, The Sudanese Community of Greater Lansing, the Tuareg diaspora community in Indiana, Washington, DC, and elsewhere, and created a Go Fund Me campaign which pulled in donations from FON members. An inspiring effort was made by a wide range of people including the Chadian family who took the young woman into their home for two months, a Nigerian Hausa man in Lansing, the African Studies Center at Michigan State University, FON President Amy Wilson, and Board member Scott M. Youngstedt. This was a complex matter involving issues of immigration law, family law, and working out travel documents with the Embassy of Niger in Washington, DC. With admirable organization and commitment, these challenges were overcome, sufficient funds were raised, and the trio of mom, baby and companion departed on January 26 and were met by the young woman's family in Niamey on January 27. (Fortunately, they were not at the Niamey airport during the incident on January 29: see news item.) FON was honored to play a small role in this humanitarian effort. It was very heartening to see so many people come together with such kindness and determination to support this young woman and her child during an extraordinarily complex and difficult, emotional time. Hats off to Jessica Garrels for her remarkable compassion, focus, and organization skills—she is a true superstar!

7) Niger-related News & Info

Niger's 46th Traditional Wrestling Championships took place in Tahoua from December 14-28. Hometown hero Noura Hassane emerged as the champion. He has awarded the National Saber, as has long been the tradition. Niger's wrestling championships promote national unity and valorize traditional cultures of Niger. The tournament was enjoyed by avid fans who packed Tahoua's wrestling arena as well as by those around the country via television and radio. The festive event featured traditional music, song, dance, jesters, and spirits in support of wrestlers.

<https://nigerdiaspora.net/les-nouvelles-du-pays?view=article&id=22221:46e-sabre-national-de-lutte-traditionnelle-tahoua-2025-tahoua-et-maradi-confirment-au-sabre-national-2025&catid=49>
<https://nigerdiaspora.net/les-nouvelles-du-pays?view=article&id=22223:sabre-national-kokowa-2025-tahoua-triomphe-a-domicile-noura-hassan-sacre-champion-du-niger&catid=49>

The 17th Festival de l’Air drew many participants December 3-5, 2025, to Iferouane in the Agadez Region after a two-year hiatus. The festival celebrated Tuareg culture, and featured Tuareg music, camel races, and a crafts market. Organizers hope to revitalize tourism in Northern Niger to promote national development and sovereignty.

<https://www.lesahel.org/17e-edition-du-festival-de-lair-sous-le-signe-de-la-valorisation-du-tourisme-interieur-de-lartisanat-et-de-la-souverainete-nationale/>

U.S. Bans Travel for Nigeriens and Niger Reciprocates Signaling continuing strain in U.S. – Niger diplomatic relations, the US announced a travel ban on Nigerien (passport holders) entry to the U.S. beginning on January 1, 2026, and Niger swiftly reciprocated. Nevertheless, the U.S. Embassy remains open in Niamey and the Niger Embassy remains open in Washington, DC.

<https://travelnoire.com/niger-travel-ban-american-citizens>
<https://apanews.net/niger-makes-tit-for-tat-visa-restrictions-on-us/>

Jan 29, 2026 Niger says gunmen attacked air force base in capital, resulting in heavy gunfire, explosions. The motorcycle-riding gunmen invaded the air base within the premises of the Diiori Hamani International Airport but were repelled by security forces, Niger state television said, in the latest cycle of violence in the conflict-hit country.

<https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/law-order/3786661-niger-says-gunmen-attacked-air-force-base-in-capital-resulting-in-heavy-gunfire-explosions>

Here are some sources of information to peruse and bookmark:

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- ActUNiger: <https://www.actuniger.com/>
 - Sahel Research Group – [sign up for email](#):
 - RFI in Hausa: <https://www.rfi.fr/ha/nijar/>
 - Agence Nigérienne de Presse :<http://www.anp.ne/>
 - <https://www.infos-niger.com/>
 - <https://tamtaminfo.com/>
 - <https://www.lesahel.org/>
 - www.nigerdiaspora.net

8) In Brief

▪ Niger RPCVs dominate an article on Book clubs in the National Peace Corps Association Worldview magazine

The article describes one place-based group in Portland with Niger RPCV Bill Stein and another group formed around their shared time of service led by Beth Wilson (Niger 1986–88) of Salem, Oregon and Dan Holic (Niger 1986–89). <https://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/reading-room-rpcv-book-clubs/>

▪ **Grant progress and accomplishments:**

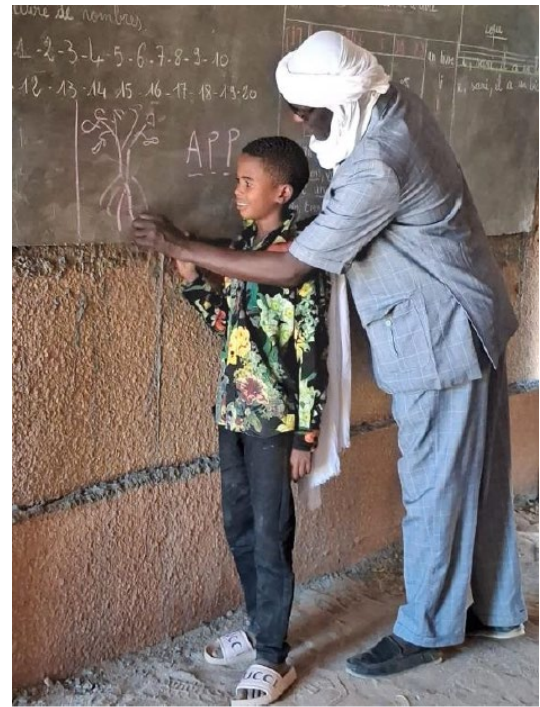
- ✓ EducaPlus organized advanced training in computer skills for 50 teachers and school directors in Diffa



- ✓ The organization MICA providing training to 50 girls in income generating activities to give them a better alternative to being guides for those who traditionally beg for a living (such as blind people)
Sensibilization was needed to convince family members that letting the girls receive training is worth the temporary loss of their help with chores at home. Training included knitting with machines, sewing with machines and literacy and computers for some.



- ✓ Working with the French NGO Les Puits du Desert, the Niger NGO TIDENE improved two school gardens in the Agadez region. The physical work is combined with academic lessons all while producing food for students.



YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

Friends of Niger is an organization to initiate and support activities related to Niger and its people. We pursue three main purposes:

1. Connecting and engaging people who have connections to Niger including diaspora, and those who have worked or are working in Niger,
2. Supporting development and humanitarian activities in Niger, and
3. Advocating for and educating about Niger.

Friends of Niger is an all-volunteer tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. EIN 65-1267451. To donate write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to
NEW ADDRESS: Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503,
OR go to www.friendsofniger.org to use PayPal.

Board of Directors

Officers: Amy Wilson/President, Alix Barstow Fedoruk/Vice President, Mary Abrams/Secretary & Grants Management Committee, John Baird/Past President; **At Large Board members:** Brittany Gallagher, Paige Pihl Buckley, Alhassan Ali Mamadou Souna, Douglas Steinberg, Scott Youngstedt, Soufiane Younoussi

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: **(Friends of Niger) FON**
- Submit news topics and articles: camelexpress@friendsofniger.org
- Contact President Amy Wilson, president@friendsofniger.org



“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”