

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

June 2026

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

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Dear Readers,

The past few months have been busy for Friends of Niger: the second time was the charm for our Annual Member Meeting on Zoom, the FON Rendezvous in DC was a delightfully good time, and the FON Board gathered for a productive, thoughtful retreat.

Board member **John Baird** is retiring after serving in practically every capacity since 2009. We can't thank him enough for his commitment, his kindness and his enthusiasm. We're now in the throes of Grant Review season. Our (all-volunteer!) review teams have been sifting methodically through dozens of great proposals and making difficult choices about which projects to fund. This is the core of what FON does, and **you can still be part of this year's body of work as a Project Champion** (read more below).

Another opportunity to contribute to our mission: Volunteer as FON's Bookkeeper! It's a great way to get involved without committing to serving as a board member. If you're a numbers person and have an hour or two each month, please consider the opportunity to support our mission.

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

Newsletter team: *Scott Youngstedt, Brittany Gallagher, Amy Wilson*

1) Virtual Member Meeting

Members gathered on Zoom to meet the Board, check in on how the grant program is going, and hear updates on the state of the organization as a whole. We had a great mix of old-timers and more recent folks and a great representation of interests.

We're including a few data highlights shared during the meeting below. While these provided a solid quantitative overview of FON's work, we were also reminded how great it is to connect with folks with whom we share the life experience of living and working in Niger.

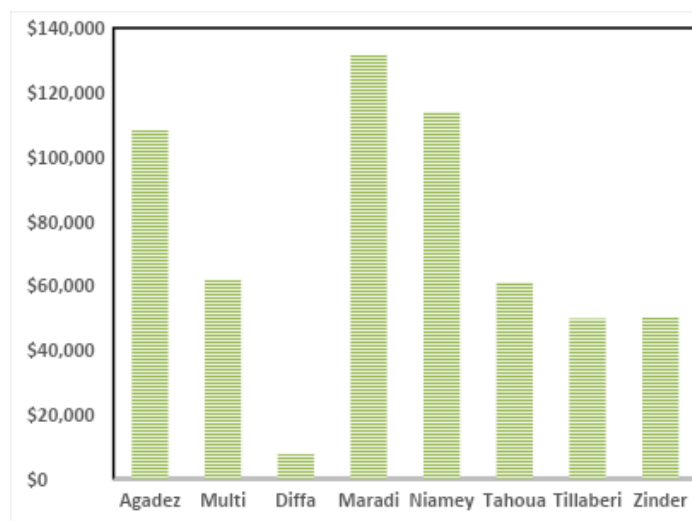
We shared some impressive stats:

For the 2025 calendar year:

- 1862 Members
- \$130,955 Donations received
- 23 Volunteers reviewing grants
- \$101,040 in Grants Awarded

Over the last 24 years of grant making:

- More than 212 grants made
- \$676,660 sent to Niger
- More than 75 community and nonprofit groups funded



Historic distribution of funds by region

2) FON Rendezvous: Member Soirée in DC & Board Retreat

A great turnout! A wonderful venue! Delicious food!

More than 70 people gathered to see old friends and make new acquaintances. We are so thankful to member Daryn Warner for hosting us in lavish style: He provided the penthouse event space in his apartment building, met all our needs for serving supplies, AND provided beer and wine. What a host!

While Niger's Ambassador Bare was unable to attend, we did welcome her representative, Nigerien Defense Attaché Senior Colonel Abdel Aziz Toure Seydou. We were happy to see former board members Penni St Hilaire, Jude Andreasen, Christy Collins and Yari Rabiyou.



The food catered by Ramatou and her crew was a big hit with everyone.

We even had a vivacious Nigerien TikTok celebrity hang out with us, interviewing people in Zarma. *Aicha la Nigerienne* has more than 608k followers (!) and her videos from our event garnered thousands of likes and hundreds of comments! Watch [Aicha's interview with Amy](#) on Tiktok here and [her chat with Madina \(aka FON member Alexandra Towns\)](#).

3) Board retreat

FON's Board of Directors had a very productive retreat in Washington, DC – our first retreat since we gathered in Chicago in 2024. As people arrived on April 24, we enjoyed informal conversations and catching up. We met formally for the full day on April 25 to take care of key business items. We covered a lot of ground, including strategizing about ways to build our membership, defining more volunteer roles and specific ways for our members to be involved, our financial status, educational outreach initiatives, perfecting our grant review process, and brainstorming ways to ensure the long-term sustainability of FON. Most importantly, we reaffirmed our core mission of supporting Nigerien-initiated development and humanitarian projects, educating people about Niger, and connecting people who care about Niger.

Our deliberations acknowledge that members play a very important role in who we are and what we do. We encourage all members (**that's you!**) to reach out to your Niger-connected friends and make sure they are tuned in to FON. Do they get the newsletter? Are they in the FaceBook group? Can you convene a regional social event? We will be sharing more volunteer opportunities throughout the year, and we are always eager to hear your ideas to advance our mission. We encourage you to reach out to a board member to get more involved.

4) Honoring John Baird: 17 Years of Board Service

Heading to Niger from Decatur, Illinois in 1968, John Baird may not have realized he was making a lifelong connection to a place and a people. He worked with a farm cooperative, adult literacy and small-bore wells near Maradi and Chadakori, but the lasting souvenir for John (as for many of us) was the warmth and depth of friendships made in Niger.



2011 visit to Niger and meeting his counterpart—43 years later!

John joined FON in 1988 and joined the Board in 2009. For years as Membership Chair, he helped maintain the membership list and sent out the newsletter in small batches so that spam filters would not reject them. When he started the list was a mere 300 and it is now over 1800!

In true appreciation of each contribution, he garnered tidbits of information about members and wrote personal notes with donation acknowledgements. During a moment of FON transition -- and at the urging of all the board members -- he stepped up to be president. Recognizing that his career as a piano tuner might not have prepared him for that role, John enrolled in a workshop for non-profit leaders to learn more about board leadership. His gentle yet strong leadership reflected he had it in him all along. Filling in wherever needed, John has learned a lot and contributed more.

Speaking of contributing, John has always donated generously. And he has drawn in friends and family through donations 'in honor of' thereby adding friends and family members to the mailing list. It is pretty clear that everyone in John's life knows he holds a dear spot in his heart for Niger and has demonstrated that commitment with his actions. **We can't thank him enough!**

5) Volunteers needed: bookkeeping and project champions

Part of our commitment to keeping FON's overhead as low as possible is maximizing the power of volunteers! You can get involved with a short-term or ongoing FON position and make a big difference for our collective work.

A big thank-you: Our recent grant intake process was made much easier with the help of volunteer **Adriane Seibert**, who helped log proposals and get them ready for the reviewers. That role involved some intense, time-sensitive effort. Other jobs are more flexible and less demanding. See below for two open positions, and consider lending a hand!

Volunteer Position: FON Project Champion

Project Champions ensure grant funds are well spent and that grant recipients are supported. Each Project Champion facilitates communication between FON and a grantee organization, including maintaining project records in the FON Shared Google Drive.

Champions shepherd projects and grantees throughout the life of the project, from award notification to project implementation and oversight, through reporting project completion to FON. Don't worry, WhatsApp and automatic translation make communication easy!

Qualifications & Skills: Commitment to supporting locally-driven development in Niger.

Time required: Varies, but includes consistent, sustained engagement over the course of up to one year. More details may be found in the [FON Project Champion Guide](#).

Volunteer Position: FON Bookkeeper

Friends of Niger relies on donations to fund grants to support community-driven projects in Niger. Recordkeeping and grantee accountability are crucial to maintaining our non-profit status and being accountable to our donors.

The Bookkeeping role consists of reviewing receipts, logging donations, and tracking expenses on a monthly basis, entering details in a spreadsheet and allocating them in QuickBooks. All records and processes are online and do not require advanced experience with the software.

Qualifications & Skills: Affinity for numbers and record-keeping; Basic computer skills

Time required: Bookkeeping for FON works best as a regular monthly activity. Exact time required will vary depending on the time of year; generally expect to spend 1-3 hours per month from March-November and 5-8 hours in the months of December - February.

5) Grant Updates: Reviews Underway

We are in the midst of our busiest and most exciting time of the year—the grant proposal review process. **We welcome members to join us next year as reviewers, especially because we have received increasing numbers of applications every year!**

During this cycle we received 140 applications. The Grants Management Committee (GMC) did an initial screening and eliminated 25 as ineligible for various reasons. Then, the six members of the GMC screened the remaining 115 applications in batches of about 20 applications each, narrowing the pool to 47 applications.

We then held a Reviewer Orientation Meeting for our 21 reviewers via Zoom on May 26. This is always very important because of the complexity of the process -- even more so this year because our guidelines have changed slightly. Next, we divided ourselves into 5 groups of 4 to 5 reviewers each.

Over the next two weeks, each reviewer read all 9 or 10 applications in her or his group, taking the role of Lead Reviewer for 2 or 3 applications each. Using an interactive spreadsheet, reviewers ranked applications as High, Medium, or Low on 8 criteria and offered written comments. The criteria have been carefully developed by the Board and cover key elements of a successful project, including local support, sustainability, monitoring, and others. (Criteria are shared with project proponents in the application guidelines.) Reviewers also carefully considered proposed budgets. Then, each group met via Zoom for about two hours to reach consensus on which applications were most worthy of recommending to the GMC.

During this cycle, 25 applications were recommended for GMC's review. Their recommendations will then go to the Board for final approval. Announcements of grantees will be made by mid-August.

We are still in need of Champions for the projects being recommended (see above). As applications continue to grow in numbers and as their quality continues to improve, this is a challenging and rewarding process.

	<i>Recently completed tree nursery project. A mix of natives and moringa planted to provide a local source for reforestation and economic stimulation.</i>
	

6) Niger-related News & Info

Niger and Benin Negotiating to Reopen Border: The Presidents of Niger and Benin met on June 2 with both expressing commitment to reopening the border that has been closed since Niger's coup d'état of July 26, 2023.

<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1800663/politique/benin-niger-romuald-wadagni-et-abdourahamane-tiani-sengagent-a-rouvrir-la-frontiere/>

Niamey Airport Attacked: Niamey's Hamani Diori International Airport was attacked on June 18, leading to the deaths of 11 soldiers, 2 civilians, and more than 20 jihadists. Al-Qaeda affiliated JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack. This was the second time this year that the airport was attacked. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara claimed responsibility for an attack in January.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/6/18/niger-says-soldiers-civilians-killed-in-armed-attack-on-niamey-airport>

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20260624-latest-niamey-airport-attack-tests-niger-junta-as-terror-groups-adapt>

Nine French Media Outlets Suspended: On May 8, Niger's government announced the suspension of France 24, RFI, AFP, TV5, Monde, TF1 Info, Jeune Afrique, and Mediapart. The government claims that French media outlets threaten national unity in Niger.

<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20260510-le-niger-suspend-neuf-m%C3%A9dias-reporters-sans-fronti%C3%A8res-demande-la-lev%C3%A9e-de-la-d%C3%A9cision>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/5/9/niger-suspends-nine-french-media-bodies-watchdog-slams-abusive-decision>

Niger Creates New Literary Prize to Support Young Authors: Professor Antoinette Tidjani Alou, Coordinator of the Arts and Culture Program at Abdou Moumouni University in Niamey, announced that the Prix Sarrounia will support and promote young writers in Niger.

<https://nigerdiaspora.net/culture?view=article&id=22618:prix-sarraounia-2026-une-nouvelle-vitrine-pour-les-talents-litteraires-nigériens&catid=36>

Here are some sources of information to peruse and bookmark:

- 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

7) In Brief

Friends of Niger members are invited to the **2026 Annual Meeting of the Tuareg Diaspora Organization July 24th through July 26th in York, Pennsylvania.**

They write:

“It would be an absolute honor to have you attend, along with anyone else from Friends of Niger who wishes to join us, especially those who have lived or spent time with Tuareg communities. The program will feature live music, engaging panel discussions, and a traditional coming-of-age ceremony that we are working hard to revive. Additionally, we are thrilled to host a jewelry stand featuring the work of award-winning artisan Moussa Albaka. We are also planning a fundraiser during the event to support Malian refugees in Mauritania.”

For more information about their organization and this event please go to their website: tdina.org and FaceBook page: <https://www.facebook.com/share/1BAs8k8VJB/?mibextid=wwXIfr>
Email: tuaregdiaspora@gmail.com

African Cultural Festivals remaining in 2026

If you are missing the markets of Niger, attend an African cultural festival. Many traders from Niger attend these festivals. Know of another upcoming festival or event? Let us know so we can share it: newsletter@friendsofniger.org.

Brooklyn, NY, July 3-5: [International African Arts Festival](#)

Detroit, MI, July 10-12: [African World Festival](#)

Columbus, OH, Jul 18-19: [Columbus African Festival](#)

Saginaw, MI, Aug 14-16: [Saginaw African Cultural Festival](#)

Seattle, WA, Aug 22-23: [Sundiata at Seattle Center](#)

Nashville, TN, Sept 19-21: [African Street Festival](#)

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

Friends of Niger initiates and supports activities related to Niger and its people through three main strategies:

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

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.”

