

Friends of Mongolia

Newsletter

Oct-Dec 2023



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FOM Mission

Friends of Mongolia (FOM) is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational, and developmental purposes. Our mission is to develop partnerships with the people of Mongolia in furtherance of cultural exchange and human development. In fulfillment of this mission, our membership and fundraising supports the core programs, listed below, that contribute to the future of Mongolia.



Announcements!

Education:

-A huge “thank you” to the M11 cohort who raised money to sponsor a student for the coming 2024-2025 school year. We are thrilled by your cohort’s unity and continued dedication to serving the Mongolian community.

-Two more Rotary Clubs (Blacksburg, VA and Denver, CO) formally agreed to sponsor students as part of Mongolia 21|21.

Community Development:

-Keep your eyes open for announcements about upcoming projects regarding sanitation, virtual chess, wheelchairs, and peacebuilding camps. If something strikes a chord for you, please let us know so we can bring you into the planning and execution!

-Also, Peace Corps Volunteers are designing projects soon, we will share these projects with the community when get access to their designs!

Community Outreach:

-February 18th will be FOM’s Tsagaan Sar Celebration in the Washington D.C. area. There will be more information soon, but please consider marking your calendar and/or consider making the trip!

-FOM is planning on curating a non-academic, Mongolia-focused, document that features various authors and voices that explain HOW and WHY Mongolia matters to the United States. Stay tuned for more information!

-In a similar vein, FOM is planning on hosting a quarterly seminar/panel discussion exploring the Mongolia-Focus topics as well. We want to build a program that routinely attracts Mongolia-interested citizens across the United States. We will discuss the feasibility of a hybrid program.

-Lastly, FOM is exploring a new membership platform that automates membership dues rather than a labor-intensive tracking system. We will share more with you about this shortly.

Peace Corps Experiences

Daniel Lang

This fall has been a busy season for TESOL support around Mongolia. Nearly every month I felt grateful to find teaching and travel opportunities. Here are the highlights.

The U.S. Embassy's Regional English Language Officer Nabila Massoumi came in from Beijing for the first Erdenet TESOL Conference. The conference was held Nov 10–11, 2023 at the Erdenet Institute of Technology. To my delight, I presented alongside former counterparts with whom I'd served in Erdenet prior to the pandemic. Ahead of the conference, English Language Fellow (ELF) Scott Poteet also led a training alongside Fellows, a Fulbrighter and me, your Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV), at the American Corner in Darkhan.

Dec 1–2, PCVs Paul Reese and I headed to Bayanhongor, where we worked with the students and teachers. Originally intended for the spring, the program was similar to an English Mentor Teacher initiative for which I presented earlier this year in Dornogovi.

Dec 8, both Fellow Scott and I presented again, at the closing of this year's English For All student mentorship program.

Then Dec 15–16 saw the return of PCVs alongside the Metropolitan Education Department to co-judge the closing of English language initiatives sponsored by the mayor's office and Xtensive Reading partner Lingors. My counterpart and I organized the final two of three competitions. PCVs Chris Thomason and Connor Moore co-judged.

Following these, Peace Corps Mongolia held its In-Service Training for those teaching in Hentiy, Dornod, Övörhangai and Arhangai.

On Christmas Day, I received from the head of the education department an "apra зүйч багш" badge to commemorate my service to Mongolia's teachers and students. Riding the wave of joy, I'm looking forward to a trip this January to Uvs, where I'll support the Student Internship Program and local teachers at the American Corner. 2024 looks busy and bright!



Peace Corps Experiences

Sareena Khanal

In November I had the chance to work (again) with the Mongol Ecology Center (MEC), an NGO “established in 2010 to ensure a thriving future for Mongolia by transferring best practices to preserve the environment, natural resources and cultural heritage of Mongolia.” This time, along with two other PCVs, I attended the Teen Хуралдай — Байгальд Ээлтэй Залуусын Чуулган (Teen Khuraldai — Summit of Youth that are Environmentally Friendly). Teen Khuraldai is a reference to Их Хуралдай (Great Meeting), a meeting of nobles and influential peoples during the era of the Mongol Empire where various political, economic, and cultural issues were discussed and decided.

For the Teen Khuraldai, MEC chose 90 kids from all 21 provinces of Mongolia to come together for the weekend and discuss the theme “Preserving Our Past, Shaping Our Future: Navigating Climate Change's Impact on Cultural Heritage in the Digital Age.” The event was made possible by funding from the European Union, who supports MEC’s Youth Sustainability Corps program, the category this youth summit falls under. The teens listened to various experts in different fields, worked as groups, sought advice from mentors, debated, made action plans, and of course, made a lot of new friends and had a lot of fun!

Us three PCV’s had a great time observing, interacting, learning, and entertaining these kids! As volunteers who are “little a” American ambassadors with diverse ethnic backgrounds, it was meaningful to represent America and help provide an international perspective to the event. These youths are creative, passionate, and inspired — Mongolia is in great hands!



Peace Corps Experiences

Christopher Wizda

In the heart of UB, every stitch tells a tale of empowerment, the Mongolian Quilting Center stands as a unique location of innovation and social enterprise. This remarkable organization doesn't just create beautiful handcrafted pieces; it promotes the empowerment for disabled individuals and lower income women in the local community. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, the aims of this organization aligned well with the PC goals as well as my own interests in enterprise development. Myself along with another PCV, Darcy Maier, have begun collaborating with the Mongolian Quilting Center and GerHub to work on the expansion of their organization. Their primary mission is to illuminate the rich cultural designs of Mongolia in unique modernized and crafty ways to sell products as well as promote sustainability and upcycling by using discarded fabrics and old clothes. At the heart of this partnership lies a dedication to showcasing the talents of local women, empowering them through employment opportunities and preserving Mongolian traditional designs with an unique modern twist through upcycled materials. Each crafted piece narrates a story of resilience, creativity, and community.

This holiday season, we are amplifying the festive spirit by hosting "Stitchmas" and a series of holiday-themed events in collaboration with the Mongolian Quilting Center and GerHub. These events promise to be a celebration of culture, creativity, and compassion, offering unique gifts and home decor that carry the essence of Mongolian tradition. Through active involvement in the development of marketing strategies and program evaluation, we are playing pivotal roles in expanding the Mongolian Quilting Center. My personal efforts were concentrated in content creation, decoration/design advice, and outreach activities including a successful ornament workshop. The efforts have not only amplified sales but also brought an increased popularity to the exquisite crafts while magnifying the positive impact of the organization's initiatives. For those eager to be part of this movement, keep an eye out for Stitchmas and other festive events hosted by this incredible organization. Together, let's stitch joy, celebrate tradition, and empower communities. Where every thread is a tale and every creation, a masterpiece, join us in weaving a brighter future, one stitch at a time!



Smiling Sun Small Grants Recipient



As part of the "Smiling Sun" project, several training sessions were held on September 27, October 11, and 23, 2023. The sessions were conducted by experts in child development and protection, including O. Mandalsuren, Child Rights Inspector of the Department of Family and Child and Youth Development, N. Narantul, a specialist in children's issues, psychologist S.Khishigtogtokh, and O. Sarangoo, Smiling Sun project coordinators and Ts. Munkhzul, a preadolescent doctor . During these sessions, participants were provided with valuable information on topics such as sexual health, child protection, and soft skills. Additionally, they were made aware of the importance of calling the child protection hotline numbers 108 and 107 in case of any emergencies.



On October 7, 2023, the Smiling Sun project organized the "We Love Nature" event among students in order to make teenage students love their mother nature, help their peers, and understand and respect each other. During this event, psychologist S.Khishigtogtokh provided individual and group counseling about ways to overcome problems for the students. During this event, the students voluntarily cleaned the garbage along the riverbank and took it to the garbage dump.



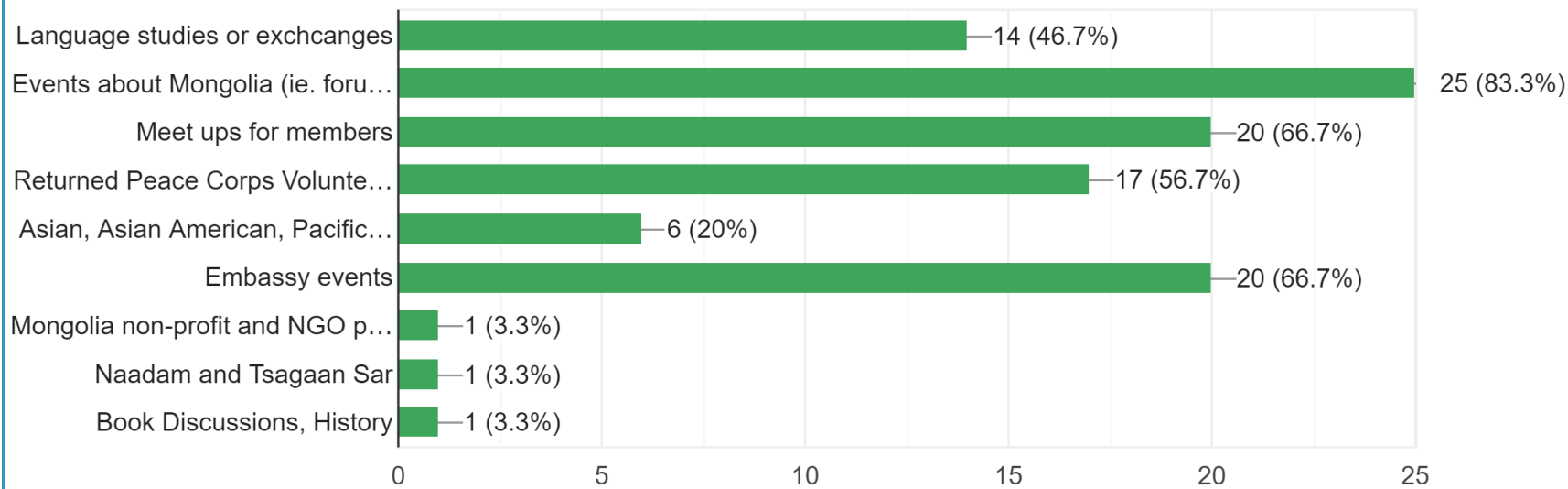
October



In October, the FOM volunteers and students did not hold any official meetings as both work and school took priority. However, we did collect input from FOM members about FOM activities. Here are some of the snap shots.

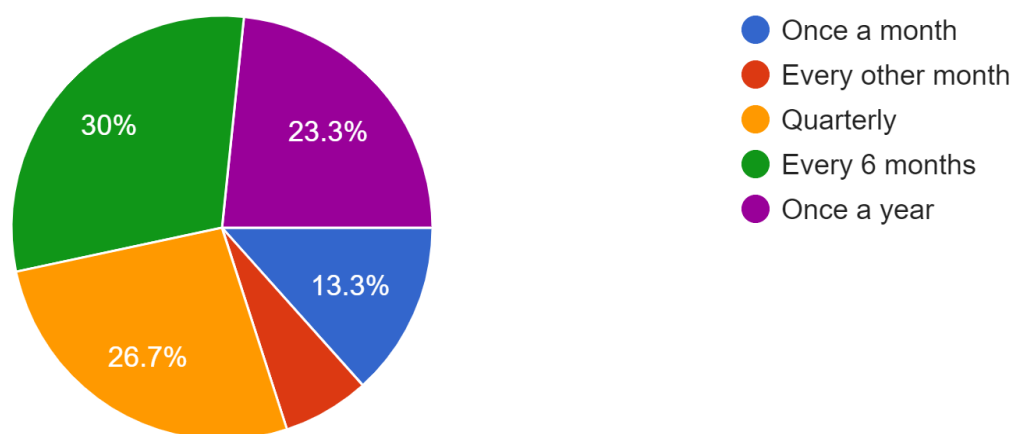
What kind of events would you like to attend? (Please select all that apply)

30 responses



How often would you like to attend Friends of Mongolia events?

30 responses



The survey was very helpful for FOM officers to lay a foundation for the 2024 Community Outreach pillar in the United States. Some of the additional recommendations included involving Mongolian food (as a fundraiser), and holding events/establishing branches across the US, especially the San Francisco Bay area. We appreciate everyone's insight and input regarding this survey. We understand our community members are exceptionally busy, but this feedback is valuable for charting out our new path and making sure that we provide you the services you want.

November



November was an exceptionally busy month for the team, with numerous meetings with both partners and students in Ulaanbaatar. We met with Mongolian Rotarians, the Rotary International President, and Peace Corps staff to discuss projects for collaboration.



Mongolian Rotarians, Peace Corps staff and volunteers, and FOM officers met to discuss opportunities for collaboration regarding virtual engagement, sanitation initiatives, Peacebuilding camps, and routine meetings.



At Peace Corps!



Mongolian Rotarians, PCVs, FOM officers meeting to discuss joint projects.

December



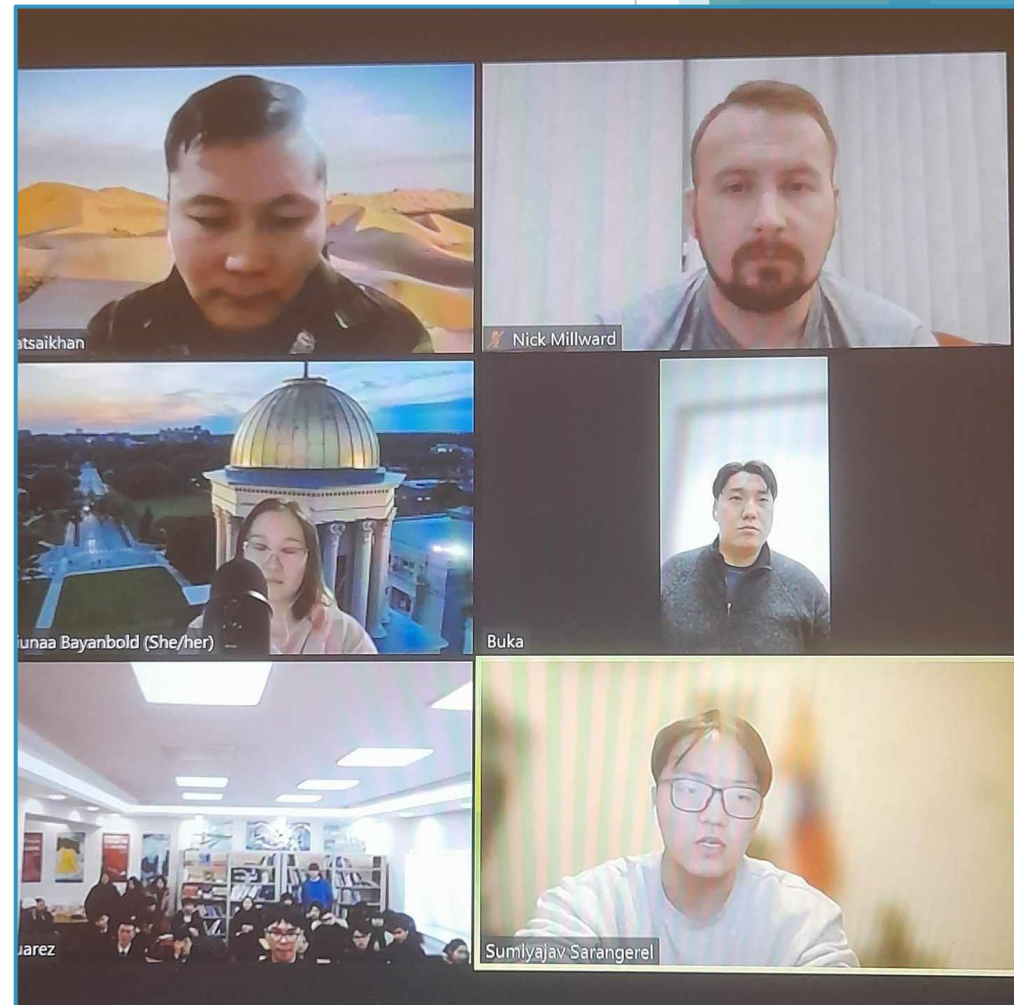
Another busy month of meetings and engagements. It was a very productive month as FOM laid a foundation for the coming year. Board members in Washington D.C. met to discuss fundraising efforts for the coming year. Students and officers met in Ulaanbaatar, before exams and the winter break. Some of our scholarship recipients also joined youthINC and Rotaract for service projects.



Holiday Dinner in UB for our volunteers and students.



3 Mongolia 21|21 students assist Rotaract in the Little Heroes Project.



FOM members joined a virtual call with a Fulbright ETA and students in Khovd Province to discuss student life in the US.

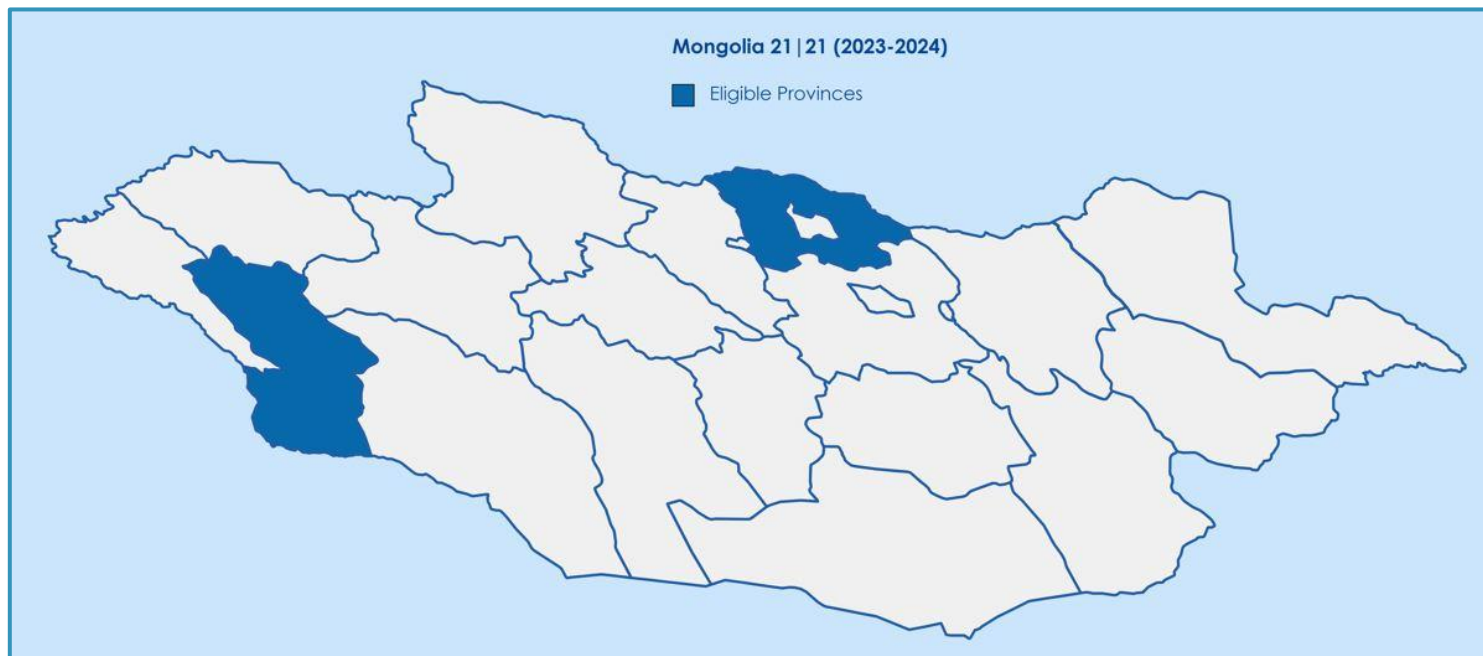


Board Members and officers meet in Virginia!

Mongolia 21 | 21



Objective: Collaborate with 21 Rotary clubs in the US to partner with FOM in providing a full-tuition scholarship to a student from every province in Mongolia by the 2025-2026 academic year.

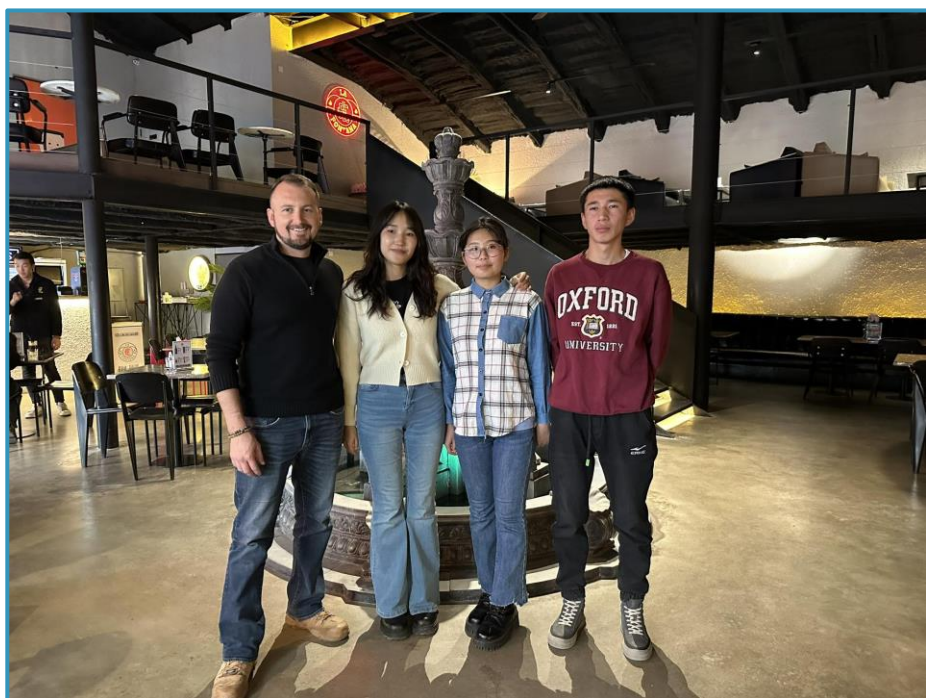


Updates

FOM has been collaborating with the Allentown West Rotary Club and the Rotary Club of Oakdale, California to refine and improve the Mongolia 21|21 initiative. The first five students in this program are featured on the Mongolia 21|21 website: <https://mongolia2121.org/>. The discussions and partnership has led to the official inclusion of 2 more American Rotary Clubs, from Blacksburg, Virginia, and from Denver, Colorado for the 2024-2025 year.

FOM officers had the unique opportunity to meet with Rotary International President, Gordon McInally and his wife, Heather, during their visit to Mongolia. We are excited to be in a unique juncture that enables FOM to facilitate collaboration between American and Mongolian Rotarians, Active and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and the youth. Discussions about joint led and resourced projects in sanitation, peacebuilding, education, and cross-cultural penpal initiatives will hopefully produce fruitful results.

Mongolia 21|21 is just the beginning, and if expand it beyond the scholarship component, we can see more meaningful collaborations between FOM, Peace Corps, and Rotary. Our students volunteered alongside Mongolian Rotaractors in the Little Heroes Project. Mongolian Rotaract puts together holiday gifts for children in childcare facilities and visits the facilities as "Snow Grandpa."



Upcoming Opportunities

Friends of Mongolia was designed to only be limited by the capacity and resources of its members. We are eager to collaborate with individuals, organizations, and businesses to expand our impact, both in depth and breadth. Feel free to contact us with ideas!



Opportunities to Serve or Connect

-FOM operates solely on donations. We appreciate any amount you can spare. This money goes to our three core programs (nothing to the volunteers). Please share our organization with friends and family, or anyone who has an interest in Mongolia. We want to serve as a centralizing hub for community relations.

-We are looking for potential partners (individuals, cohorts, Rotary Clubs, etc) to help us with the Mongolia 21|21 Program. In the coming years we are hoping to provide full tuition scholarships for a student from each province. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org

-We are interested in supporting formalized and informal/nascent Sister-City relationships, especially in Denver, Fairbanks, Bellingham (Washington), Irving (Texas), and St. Louis. If you are in or around these cities and interested in learning more, please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org. If you aren't in these cities but still want to participate in events, let us know and we could potentially help you arrange something local.

-We are looking to build a new initiative closely linked to Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Cohorts. We want to establish a relationship with each of the 32 Mongolian cohorts and provide a scholarship per cohort, or have a cohort support a Peace Corps Volunteer's development project. If you are interested in helping us connect with your cohort and design a project/scholarship. Please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org.

-We will soon be advertising for positions within the FOM team. We are eager to bring on a Membership Coordinator (US), Treasurers (US and Mongolia), and a Social Media Manager (US or Mongolia). If you have some time to spare and want to get involved in our growing organization, look out for our announcements via email and Facebook or contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org.