

[AID Austin New Volunteers Handbook](#)

Dear friend,

Let us take this opportunity to welcome you to the Association for India's Development or AID for short. AID is a movement of individuals with a common vision - a vision of a better India. Our approaches, our methods may vary but in the end we all believe that together we can be an agent of change.

Sustainable development and holistic approach to development are the cornerstones of AID's philosophy. We are sure you would have questioned at some point of time – what are the problems ailing India and the world? Well some say if we solve the population issue we will be all set. Some think corruption is the root cause of all the evil. There are others who believe that education is the necessity of the hour. While all of them are correct in their thinking, it is our belief that all these issues are interrelated. One problem gives rise to another and feeds on another. For example, even if there is a school, a malnourished child is not able to study. Even if a child is healthy, education is denied because the child happens to be a girl and it is difficult to get an educated girl married without paying enormous dowry. These are everyday issues and they are complex. It is our belief that the solutions to the inter-related problems should be interrelated too. Hence we work in a holistic manner in the areas of education, health, women's empowerment, environment, livelihood generation and social justice.

From its humble beginning in 1991, AID has grown into a thriving community of over 50 chapters in six countries. You will see glimpses of some of our ideas, efforts and successes in the following pages. We encourage you to read the package and become involved in a manner that best suits your interests. We are here to answer your questions and suggest initiatives that might pique your interest. All you are required to bring is an open mind and an enthusiasm to challenge the preconceived notions on poverty and development.

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to your active participation in our movement. Like Khalil Gibran once said – 'You give but little when you give off your possessions, it is when you give off yourself that you truly give.'

Sincerely,

The AID Team

About AID

Five graduate students who wanted to start acting on India's problems founded AID in 1991 at University of Maryland College Park. It now has 52 chapters and around 500 volunteers all over the globe, including, India, USA, Australia, Canada, UK and Germany. All the chapters are independent of each other and we strive to have no hierarchy within individual chapters. AID volunteers cover various parts of the political, ideological and religious spectrum. We are a mix of students and professionals.

We believe that poverty, deprivation of rights, inequalities, illiteracy and unemployment are all interconnected and hence the solutions must be interconnected as well. We do not enforce our model of development on people we work with; rather we develop alternate models of development with people.

About AID Austin

AID Austin started in 1997 and has grown to more than 20 active volunteers. We meet once a week for CSH (Community Service Hour) at UT Austin. We are a nice blend of professionals and students with a high level of dedication, motivation and optimism. Through our work on field and our contacts with partners in India, we have come to the realization that Sangarsh meaning struggle, Nirmaan meaning constructive work and Sewa meaning responsible living are the three cornerstones of our social work and we strive to enrich our work with small changes in our work, lives, and attitudes.

We have currently the following elected executive body members:

President - Harish Sharma
Treasurer - Gayathri Manikuty
Fund raising - Satchi Mishra
Secretary - Alaknanda
Projects - Kavita Karandikar
Web - Sandhya & Bala

Meetings are held every Saturday at 5pm in ENS 115(Electrical Dept, UT Campus)

Directions -

Coming from Mopac take Windsor exit.

At the light go East (towards the University).

You will go below the Mopac bridge, cross Lamar and then will cross Guadalupe.

After crossing Guadalupe you are in UT area still on Windsor(it is called 24th street now)

Keep coming on 24th and you will cross Speedway.

After crossing Speedway enter the parking lot on your left and park

ENS is building adjacent to this parking lot (pls ask anyone there for ENS building)

Once you walk into ENS buliding look for room 115. It is on the same floor towards the rear side of the building.

Here is the UT campus map showing ENS

<http://www.utexas.edu/maps/main/buildings/ens.html>

What we do?

Our activities include project reviews and monitoring, fund raising, web site maintenance, organizing grassroots speakers sessions, leading campaigns on social issues and constantly bettering our own understanding of development. While we are passionate about what we do, we also want to have fun and that gets reflected in the AID dinners, scavenger hunts and dance parties that happen year round.

Projects

This is the core of AID. Interested in understanding how grassroots organizations in India operate? Interested in understanding how they solve their problems - be it lack of schools or lack of health facilities or lack of fresh water supplies? Interested in understanding how the marginalized learn to empower themselves? Then, join the projects team. The team diligently scrutinizes and analyzes every project received by AID-Austin. The work involves reading project proposals, talking to project coordinators in India, getting answers to volunteer's questions and so on. Please contact the EB chapter project coordinator.

All our project information is available on AID Austin website www.aidaustin.org/projects.html. This is a sample of the projects we have undertaken at AID Austin in various areas. Remember that we have more than 15 projects in many parts of India.

Education

Swanirvar Education festival – In November, 06 our partner Swanirvar organized an education festival for the underprivileged children in Calcutta. We are also working on a open learning project with Swanirvar

LSS/Prayas Summer camp – In chittorgarh district of Rajasthan there is a high drop out rate in high school. The summer camp acts as boot camp providing necessary skills and instilling confidence in children to pursue with their education

Alternate Energy

Vigyan Ashram Bio Gas project – Situated close to Poona, Vigyan Ashram provides vocational training to rural youth and we worked on the Bio Gas project with them
AID Rural Technology Center – ARTRC in interior Orissa is providing valuable income generating skills in pottery, tailoring, brick making and organic farming to the rural masses and we are proud to be working with them to setup the resource center

Women's empowerment

Utthan project – Utthan in Gujarat promotes gender equity by empowering women in decision making of community access to water resources and capacity building in local political process. Linking sustainable water resource management, community building & advocacy to gender equity is a model that Utthan is replicating in 3 districts
SAFAR project – Social Action Forum Against Repression is a project in Gujarat as well which aims to generate awareness amongst minority women about their rights

If you were wondering how much time is needed for supporting projects, it takes about 4 hours a week during the review phase and about 8 hours a month during approval phase, and it's totally worth it.

Campaigns

We believe that Sangarsh, Nirmaan and Sewa are the critical components of what we do and each reinforces the other. At AID Austin, we are engaged actively in the following campaigns:

Bhopal

It's been 2 decades since the gas leak at the then Union Carbide Factory killed more than 8000 people and the contamination has continued to affect more than 100000 people. DOW, which owns union carbide, refuses to own the liability for this injustice. We have several enthusiastic volunteers working on the campaign for justice to Bhopal victims (www.aidaustin.org/bhopal)

Water Issues, Mehdiganj

The struggle in Mehdiganj, UP focuses on unjust practices of a local Coca Cola plant which includes water exploitation and pollution. By means of various protests and Jal Adhikar Yatra, the local struggle has now joined hands with the nationwide struggle for water. Along with Lok Samiti at Mehdiganj, we at Austin are crystalizing our notion of the fundamental right to water. AID Austin is financially supporting Kala Manch, a group of local youth volunteers of Lok Samiti, performing street plays on issues like public distribution system, water rights, gender sensitization and right to information.

What does supporting a campaign mean to you? Some of the work that we do in the campaigns includes actions that complement our partners in India, voicing our concerns by phone calls/emails/faxes to relevant authorities in India, writing articles, letters to major newspapers. Learning these issues is a great and a critical step to our campaigns.

Awareness

Periodically we invite speakers who work at grassroots to understand the issues first hand. These sessions are open to the public and serve as excellent ways to generate awareness about our work. Here is a glimpse of speakers we had last year.

S.R.Hiremath, the force behind the Karnataka based NGO – Samaj Parivartana Samudaya (SPS), shared his experiences in the areas of environmental, forest, water and tribal issues. His talk focused on the latest policy changes related to Gram Panchayat and the importance of community control of local resources.

Chennai based writer and researcher Nityanand Jayaraman is one of the key people in Community Environment Monitoring (CEM), Cuddalore. Nity's talk focused on industrial pollution in India and the importance of corporate accountability. Nity shared his grass-root experiences in the areas of monitoring, regulating and reducing pollution in India.

Sanjoy Hazarika heads the Center for North East studies and policy research in New Delhi. His talk covered the unique nature of developmental issues in North East India. The event included screening of Sanjoy's film - "A River's Story, the Quest for the Brahmaputra" which describes the lives of the Brahmaputra riverine communities.

Fund Raising

AID Dinners

Home cooked dinners and a movie or games afterward are a good way to spend an evening with fellow AIDers and raise funds. Show off your cooking talents with 'out of the world' curries or a sumptuous dal. Monthly AID dinners help us generate \$200 easily and contribute towards admin funds or invite a speaker to Austin.

Penny Drives

A very easy way to collect 200-300\$ a year, place a jar at your house and/or your work place and encourage your friends/colleagues to put their pennies in the jar. When the jar gets full, just get the pennies transferred to notes and hand it to our treasurer.

One For India

OFI is an annual holiday-season fundraiser for AID. It is designed to be convenient for the year-end tax-deductible donations during the months of Nov, Dec and January which is also typically the season of giving. If you have ways to improve OFI talk to our fund raiser co ordinator. Check out www.aidaustin.org/OFI2006

Concerts/Events

If you excel at organizing events, fundraising events is always looking for more energetic and enthusiastic people. We conducted large concerts such as Aarohi, Aavartan, Aman and smaller concerts such as Shrishti and monsoon mehfil. We have organized the biggest Indian music concerts in Austin. Whatever your skills may be, events always can do with your talents. Some of the activities that are fun to take part in include coordinating the event, publicity, sponsorship drives, selling tickets, artist hospitality, media interaction and managing AID stalls. Your creativity and energy counts. Contact the fundraising coordinator if you have a brilliant idea for a fund raising event or want to coordinate the next event.

Credit Card/EFT Donations

Monthly credit card donations to AID is a very powerful way of raising money. The donations can be set up on a monthly basis or as one time donations. Electronic fund transfer deducts the money directly from the bank account.

Run For India

Some of our volunteers will be running the Austin half & full marathons in on Feb 18th, 2007 to raise money for AID-Austin projects. Check our www.runforindia.org for more details. Maybe you want to consider running for RFI 2008?

[Internal to AID Austin](#)

Web

Maintaining the web is very important for us as we consistently give our website to potential donors, sponsors. If you have the web design skills or want an opportunity to build your skill set, contact our web coordinator

AID Library

AID maintains a library of several books and thought provoking videos. Please contact Any of the current volunteers for more information on AID library.

Community Outreach

Local community outreach builds the goodwill when we extend to local community for donations/sponsorships. More often than not, the issues that we are working on are not relevant just in India, but right here in Austin. We regularly volunteer time and effort for community building exercise. Our local community outreach has included volunteering effort and hours at Capital Area Food bank, donation to Capital Area Food bank, supporting national Gandhi day service, supporting efforts for local youth summer camps for south Asians and so on. Contact the President for more information.

Fun Stuff

While we love arguing on different issues, we believe in having fun while doing serious work. Some fun stuff we have been doing last year:

Songs – AIDers have been very active in creative writing. May it be your own creation or words that have moved you, poems and songs by our volunteers Sastry, Prasanthi, Devashree and Haripriya have been very cherished.

Post CSH Dinners and an annual picnic in the local park are fun way to hang out with fellow AIDers playing cricket, frisbee and all kinds of fun stuff and catch up with friends.

Scavenger/Treasure Hunt – This is a team building exercise where teams compete to get the highest points doing a set of tasks through out Austin and show proof of your task by capturing on video. If begging/breaking laws/singing in unlikely places is not fun by itself, watching everyone make fool of themselves is all the more worth.

Hiking and Camping – Every once in a while AIDers take off into the woods or scenic America to hike and camp. It is totally a fun experience. In the last year we have been to Big bend National Park and Colorado river camping trips.