

BACKGROUND

PURPOSE

The North American Forum (NAF), a project of the World Affairs Council of Northern California, is Co-Chaired by former US Secretary of State George P. Shultz, former Mexican Secretary of Finance Pedro Aspe and former Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed. Its purpose is to advance a shared vision of a resilient North America—able to avoid shocks when possible and to withstand and rebound from shocks when necessary. The Forum’s method is to convene leaders from the public, private and citizen sectors to identify those steps that can be taken to advance security, prosperity and quality of life on the continent. The NAF explores actions that governments and private actors can take. Invited participants are selected based on their commitment to these goals and their ability to effect positive change.

MISSION AND HISTORY

The mission of the NAF is to create the political and conceptual basis for increased cooperation among countries and sectors to achieve better informed public policy. The NAF identifies actions that governments and private actors can take to help build societal resilience. NAF members are selected based on their commitment to the NAF mission and goals and their ability to effect positive change in their sphere of influence.

To this end, the annual meetings draw together by invitation 75 public, private and non-profit sector leaders with expertise in a broad array of security, economic, social and foreign policy issues of shared concern. While these experts are drawn from all sectors, including the media, meetings are held off-the-record, following Chatham House rules. The NAF format provides a safe haven for practitioners, scholars and governmental decision-makers to explore policy alternatives with their counterparts from neighboring countries. A heavy emphasis is placed on the role that non-governmental actors can play to complement official actions. Over time, the NAF seeks to enhance cooperation and improve relations on the continent.

The annual meetings are meant to build community; to incubate and test ideas; to serve as action-forcing events that (a) encourage experts to envisage a regional approach to security, prosperity and improved quality of life; (b) encourage an approach to conceiving and addressing problems that crosses disciplinary, sectoral and national boundaries; (c) identify steps to be taken by private actors, including commercial actors as well as civil society leaders, to build resilience in the North American continent; (d) to prompt policymakers to think imaginatively about opportunities for future cooperation; and (e) to expose both

BACKGROUND

private actors and governmental policy-makers to the rationale and the opportunities for such cooperation.

The agenda for each meeting is tri-national in scope and design. The inaugural meeting in California in 2005 set the goal—developing societal resilience in the face of strategic challenges, focusing on the close linkages among security, prosperity and quality of life. The 2006 and 2007 meetings in Canada and Mexico turned to more intensive exploration of demographic trends; the relationships among security, prosperity and migration; and the goal of greater energy independence. The fourth annual North American Forum meeting is being held in Washington DC in June 2008.

PARTICIPANTS AND OUTPUTS

A core group of participants from Mexico, Canada and the United States are invited each year, along with experts able to contribute to each year's agenda. While this core group is comprised of non-governmental actors, by and large, they have feed-back loops to their respective governments. Senior representatives of the three governments are among those invited. The three co-chairs are assisted by a Core Group of Advisors, comprised of former government officials and leaders of policy and educational organizations in Canada, Mexico and the United States. Furthermore, they are supported by a Secretariat, which is housed at the World Affairs Council of Northern California.

The Co-Chairs do not intend to make public pronouncements advocating specific policy approaches on the NAF's behalf. Rather the outputs of the NAF will be ideas and approaches that are individually pursued by participants, at their own initiative and in their own name.