

Complex Challenges Shape Strategic Plan

At the beginning of what would be called “the American Century,” in the midst of a world at war and in economic turmoil, Robert Brookings concluded that rigorous thinking and independent, disciplined research were essential to governing a modern, industrial democracy. The Institution he helped create aimed at educating U.S. policy-makers and informed citizens in how to address complex challenges. With the dawn of the 21st century, Brookings’s mission is more important than ever—both in the United States and around the globe.



As Brookings approaches its centenary, we are committed to ensuring that America’s most experienced, most trusted, and most influential think tank rises to the economic and national security crises of our own time. Drawing on input from Brookings’s leadership, staff, trustees, and friends of the Institution, the Brookings Board approved a strategic plan in 2007 for what the Institution should do—and be—by our 100th birthday in 2016.

The agenda for our tenth decade is built on the foundation of our research programs, each of which stands at the top of its field. The strategic plan also identified five particularly pressing challenges facing the nation and world that cannot be addressed by any one research program alone: competitiveness, education, energy security, health care, and migration (see stories pages 8, 13, 16, 21, 24).

Beyond those five “All-Brookings Priorities,” the strategic plan established a flexible internal management system that allowed us to work across research programs and disciplines on topical crises. From responding to the growing mortgage and credit crisis that threatens the entire economy, to launching a new Latin America Initiative, to envisioning integrated and multi-dimensional work on the nation’s infrastructure challenges, Brookings experts created research products where the whole was greater than the sum of the parts.

The strategic planning process also forged a consensus among our scholars, our staff, and our trustees that maintaining the Institution’s core virtues—quality, independence, and impact—requires disciplined management and leadership. With that in mind, 2008 was a year of reflecting on past success and plotting the course ahead.

To maintain our quality, we intend to remain focused on retaining and recruiting the very best experts. Best-in-class recruits such as Vice President Darrell West and Senior Fellows Rebecca Blank, Mauricio Cárdenas, and Eswar Prasad all bring extraordinary expertise to Brookings at a time of great change in the makeup of American political and economic institutions. For instance, Mauricio Cárdenas will direct the new Latin America Initiative, managed jointly by the Global Economy and Development and Foreign Policy programs. Already it’s a hub of high quality, interdisciplinary research, with an extraordinary commission to advise on fresh recommendations on how the next president can engage Latin America.

To increase our impact, we are seeking to inform policy-makers more directly—and in a way that demonstrates the depth and breadth of the Institution. Perhaps our most



ambitious effort in this regard was Opportunity 08—an All-Brookings outreach project that actually began in 2007. The 2008 elections offered an exciting opportunity to shape the debate around key policy issues, particularly since this election featured a historic anomaly: Neither party’s primary featured an incumbent president or vice president, something that had not happened in 80 years. Opportunity 08 aimed to help presidential candidates and the public focus on critical issues facing the nation, providing ideas, policy forums, and information on a broad range of domestic and foreign policy questions. For over 20 months, scholars from across Brookings worked together to develop position papers and candidate indices on more than three dozen topics. Brookings hosted forums on the full



Dominic Barton (left), chairman of the Asia region for McKinsey & Company, confers with Foreign Policy Vice President and Director Carlos Pascual (right) and Trustee Richard Kauffman during a Foreign Policy Program Leadership Committee meeting.

range of policy options, including issue-focused town-hall meetings in the early battleground states of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada, and general election battleground states such as Ohio and Florida. Led by a bipartisan advisory council headed by co-chairs Ken Duberstein and Tom Donilon, the effort reached out to candidates and policy advisers from both political parties. That effort will transition this year into a unified effort to provide our best thinking to the president-elect.

Increasing our impact also means reaching out more proactively, both nationally and globally. Brookings was the most widely quoted think tank in the United States again this year, and created new partnerships with ABC News, *Politico*, and *Caijing* magazine. Our increasing global reach was seen in the early results of our redesigned Web site (brookings.edu), which has increased page views to 1 million per month. Subscriptions to our 24 e-newsletters jumped 85 percent over the past year, and approximately 25 percent of Web site visitors come from outside of the United States, from countries as diverse as India, China, and Germany.

Maintaining independence is also critical to our mission. According to an annual poll by Harris Interactive, Brookings is the most trusted think tank in America, winning extremely high marks from both Republicans and Democrats. Fostering and maintaining that independence requires financial support from donors who understand what’s at stake, both for Brookings and the world. With annual giving on the rise and an engaged Board of Trustees, we are poised to offer a new generation of policy-makers the trusted facts and fresh ideas that Robert Brookings recognized as critical in 1916. ■