



FORUM COUNCIL TASK FORCE

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE FORUM'S STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS

Draft: April 2018

This proposal stems from the development of The Forum on Education Abroad's 2017-2021 [Strategic Plan](#). Out of the process of crafting the plan came a recognition that The Forum is in a different place from where it started, having grown to an organization of approximately 800 member institutions, with the status of a Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad, as recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission. The Forum now employs a full-time staff of nine highly trained professionals working closely with a cadre of volunteers and experts around the world, ready to assist. With such success comes a need to examine how the organization carries out its work, so that the voice of its membership remains vibrant, and that together staff and volunteers support the implementation of the Strategic Plan, all while operating within The Forum's stated [values](#) and the framework of its [bylaws](#).

Task Force Charge

In March 2017, Forum Board Chair Mary Anne Grant (ISEP) appointed a Forum Council Task Force, with representatives from the [Board of Directors](#), [Forum Council](#), and [Staff](#): Nick Gozik (Task Force Chair, Boston College), Amelia Dietrich (The Forum), John Lucas (ISEP), Donna Scarboro (George Washington University), Alicia Stanley (Grinnell College), and Annmarie Whalen (The Forum). The task force was asked to address the following topics:

- What is the proper division of labor between volunteer Council members and professional staff?
- How do we ensure dialogue and input from practitioners in the field regarding content of various Forum products and services with the need to move things forward in a timely manner?
- How is the Council's agenda set, by whom and in what time frame?
- Processes and procedures
- Relationship of the Council with Board

Additionally, the Task Force has considered the balance of roles, to ensure that there is a shared leadership and strong partnership between the Board, Council, and staff.

Recommendations

We welcome feedback from all parties on the proposed changes below, with the goal of making sure that any changes implemented do their best to serve the entire Forum community.

I. The Forum Council:

Council members work collaboratively with Forum staff to produce member programs, services and benefits.

Recommendations include:

- The Council should be viewed as part of the leadership of The Forum, along with the Board and staff, with the idea that a strong partnership among these three entities allows for a healthy flow of ideas, permitting the organization to evolve with the field of education abroad. There should continue to be regular check-ins between the leadership of the Council, Board, and staff, either as a group or individually, based on the work at hand.
- The Council should continue to consider diversity in recruiting new members, both in terms of personal background and institution represented. Beginning in spring 2018, one person on the Council Nominations Committee will be assigned to identify and actively reach out to diverse candidates.
- The Council should maintain a key role in content formation, along with members of staff, however the work should be organized differently. Over the past decade, excellent work has come out of The Forum's five [Standing Committees](#): Advocacy, Curriculum, Data, Outcomes Assessment & Research, and Standards. However, it has proven difficult to maintain Committee momentum aside from annual and biannual projects. To be more effective, it is proposed that:
 - The five Standing Committees should be replaced with working groups/committees with clear objectives and proposed start and end dates.
 - Existing committees outside of the five Standing Committees, such as the Annual Conference Planning Committee, European Conference Planning Committee, award selection committees, etc. should be maintained.
 - Members of working groups/committees should continue to be recruited through an open call to all members.
- The work of the Council and working groups/committees should be driven more clearly by the Strategic Plan. With any new project, members should consider and articulate, along with staff, how it supports the Strategic Plan.
- The Council should make a concerted effort to meet regularly with members at large, such as at conferences, to gain input and ideas.

II. The Forum Staff

Staff members work with volunteers to complete projects efficiently and in response to the needs of the membership and field at large, and are integral to the work of The Forum. Staff growth, in terms of number and degree of professionalism, has meant that much of what had been accomplished solely by volunteers has been absorbed by fulltime professionals. Staff depend on the experience and knowledge of volunteer professionals and at the same time recognize that volunteers have limitations in the time that they can devote to individual projects and initiatives due to other commitments.

Recommendations:

- Staff should continue to seek regular input from the Council and other members of The Forum community before, during, and after projects.
- A discussion should take place between Council and staff when a new project arises as to whether a working group/committee should be formed, or whether the project can be done entirely by staff, depending on the nature of the work.
- Recognizing volunteer time limitations, staff should be given the opportunity to take an active role and leverage staff expertise and skills when needed, such as developing first drafts of a new resource to be vetted.

III. The Board of Directors

The Task Force does not recommend significant changes to the Board, understanding that the Board is responsible for the overall mission and goals of the organization as well as fiduciary and legal oversight.

Recommendations include:

- The Board should continue to meet regularly with the Council and staff at least once per year, ideally during an overlapping Council/Board summer meeting. Discussions should be organized around topics that relate to the Strategic Plan and/or will have a significant impact on membership.
- In recruiting new members, steps should continue to consider diversity within the Board, both in terms of candidates' backgrounds as well as the institutions that they represent.
- The Board should make a concerted effort to meet regularly with members at large, such as at conferences, to gain input and ideas.

Timeline

This proposal suggests a number of changes which will impact how the organization works. To make sure that all is carried out smoothly, the process below is being followed:

- March 2017: Formation of Forum Council Task Force
- July 2017: Initial ideas submitted to the Forum Council, Board, and staff
- December 2017/January 2018: Draft proposals submitted to the Council and Board
- March/April 2018: Presentation at The Forum conference, followed by soliciting of input from members
- May 2018: Final version of the proposal to be voted on by the Board
- July 2018: Implementation of any approved changes

Questions & Feedback

The Task Force welcomes feedback on the proposed changes. Please submit your questions or ideas using the [online form](#).