

Canadian media. Much of the discussion revolved around a perceived vicious circle plaguing regional media coverage: Without sufficient popular interest in the Americas there will be no expansion of coverage, but without in-depth news coverage, popular interest in the Americas will not develop.

Some participants suggested that the media carries the responsibility of informing the public and stimulating debate on a broad range of issues, and that this is a critical role in all democratic societies. It was generally felt that increased coverage of the Americas required leadership on the part of news media 'gate-keepers' (i.e. editors and producers); leadership that would take the form of decisions to assign journalists to cover the region. Many also stressed the need for commitment on the part of news outlets, for example, by opening a bureau or starting a section in the newspaper devoted to Latin America. Until there is a commitment to Latin America, coverage will continue to be inconsistent, and interest in the region among the general public will likely remain minimal.

At the same time, however, in order for editors to make the decision to commit funds and human resources to Latin America, Canadians need to demonstrate a clear appetite for Latin American news by engaging with specific news outlets and demanding expanded coverage. It was stressed during the meeting that news editors do listen to public pressure, and the best way to promote coverage is to manifest a genuine desire for it. If an appetite for news is demonstrated and editors believe increased coverage will bring new readers, deepened coverage can be expected.

Another strategy to increase regional coverage could involve training and awareness building programs on regional issues for journalists. Possible options include programs to immerse journalists in the region, as well as institutional linkages between Canadian and Latin American news agencies. If journalists have access to, and understanding of, regional news, they may pressure their editors to expand coverage. Those with an interest in the Americas were encouraged to establish deepened ties with individual reporters covering foreign affairs. Given the influence that well-established journalists often have with their editors in pitching stories, groups may increase the likelihood of expanded coverage by providing background information and contacts directly to journalists.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing those who demand an increase in regional coverage is to prove to Canadians that the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean are newsworthy. Participants were largely in agreement that Canadians have a limited appetite for foreign news, and thus Latin America and the Caribbean must compete with other parts of the world for attention from the general public. Canadians, and news media 'gatekeepers' in particular, will have to be convinced of the importance of regional issues for Canada before a change in attitude occurs. This responsibility falls on the shoulders of all public organizations working on hemispheric issues in Canada.