OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Organizational Development Grants to Think Tanks

Open Society Think Tank Fund

The Open Society Think Tank Fund (TTF) requests proposals for organizational development grants from independent, multi-issue think tanks working in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine.

What is a think tank?

To assess applicants for this call we will use the following definition: "Think tanks are independent[1] policy research institutes containing people involved in studying a particular policy area or a broad range of policy issues, actively seeking to educate or advise policy makers and the public through a number of channels."[2] While academic research centers, consultancies, and policy units affiliated with political parties are also relevant contributors to the policy process, they do not match the definition above fully and cannot be part of this call.

Why support policy-relevant research and think tanks?

A robust policy process is critical to building open society. It offers a venue for wide public participation, enables a discussion of ideas informed by evidence, and prevents attempts to establish a monopoly on truth. Strengthening such processes is critical to OSF's mandate of ensuring justice, advancing human rights, promoting transparency, and ending discrimination. Out of the many participants in the policy process, TTF focuses on think tanks because they strengthen democratic processes by 1) identifying political, economic, and social problems, 2) researching them in a non-partisan and scientifically rigorous manner, and 3) providing policy alternatives that enrich public debate. Think tanks are vital not only because they advocate specific remedies, but also because these remedies are informed by carefully accumulated and analyzed

[1] Think tanks are considered independent when they have no partisan affiliation (explicit or implicit) or dependence on a single source of funding. Independent think tanks also pursue an active and autonomous policy research agenda and determine a set of problems to address and the ways to do so – an approach that sets them apart from consultancies and technical assistance providers.

[2] Source: Stone, Diane. 2000. Think-tank Transnationalization and Non-profit Analysis, Advice and Advocacy, Vol.14, No.2, Jan 2000. "Think tank" is a contested term and there are a number of working definitions. Some examples that we consider important for understanding this type of organization are provided at http://bit.ly/ttdef or http://bit.ly/waysto. A visual presentation of various definitions is available at http://bit.ly/whatstt.

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data, making them harder to ignore than emotional normative appeals or isolated instances of abuse.

What kind of think tanks does TTF support?

TTF supports think tanks that focus on multiple issues in their research agenda and contribute to democratization processes in their societies. The focus on several topics helps policy organizations participate effectively in the multi-faceted debates, which accompany any democratic transition, and supports think tanks' sustainability. While TTF does not prescribe the scope of issues or the nature of policy advice grantees are required to provide, it firmly believes their research must further open society values. Therefore, the applicant should go beyond merely technical analysis and recommendations to serve the bigger goal of facilitating democratization and reform in the countries of operation.

What is an organizational development grant?

The majority of donors operating in the field of policy research provide project funding for analytical materials on specific topics. As a result, both public policy centers and their funders focus almost exclusively on particular policy outputs and their immediate advocacy at the expense of pursuing deeper institutional development of think tanks. This creates a niche for the Think Tank Fund to assist the overall development of grantees in three specific areas: quality of research products, communications and advocacy capacity, and internal development and governance. Our mission is to contribute to building strong think tanks that produce high-quality policy analysis, deliver it to a wide range of audiences to galvanize public interest and debate, and operate as sustainable and internally robust non-profit organizations.

Organizational development grants aim to provide support for improvement in the three specific areas of think tank activity and operation mentioned above. The first area, *quality of research products,* encompasses mechanisms for external and internal review of written output, and development and choice of various research methods and formats for producing analysis. The second area, *communications and advocacy capacity*, deals with how organizations deliver their findings to the public, who they target as key audiences, and what approaches and tools they use for that purpose. The final area, *internal development and governance*, is concerned with how think tanks function as a non-profit organization and includes staff recruitment and retention, composition and functioning of governing bodies (like a governing or advisory board), and issues of strategic planning, fundraising, and sustainability. An organizational development grant can cover from one to all three areas for a period between **one to two years** based on an applicant's demands, merit of the proposal, and the time needed for implementing necessary changes.

How do organizational development grants work?

In the past, TTF provided core and institutional grants that supported three interdependent elements – sustainability, development, and seed funding. [3] Organizational development grants support only the *development* component.

[3] For more information, please read: http://onthinktanks.org/2013/06/03/supporting-think-tanks-series-from-core-and-institutional-support-to-organizational-development-grants/.

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Prior to receiving a TTF grant, applicants will have to analyze what does and does not work inside the organization. They will be the drivers of change by presenting a detailed plan for overall organizational development and clearly indicating in which of the three areas they require improvement and how they will implement it. TTF, in turn, reserves the right to choose which of the priorities identified by an applicant it considers most urgent or most worthwhile to fund and will carefully consider how the suggested improvements enhance an applicant's programmatic and strategic development.

Applicants will also be required to show how any grant expenses are tied to proposed changes in improving quality of research products, communications and advocacy capacity, and internal development and governance. For example, if a think tank applies for TTF funding to help make its policy briefs more methodologically rigorous, TTF would be able to cover part of the salary for a policy analyst or a fee to a peer reviewer, but not for an accountant or even a senior researcher if neither works on improving this aspect of work. At the same time, TTF believes that any change requires general organizational investment and is willing to cover part of an applicant's overhead cost.[4]

Who is eligible to apply?

To be considered for an organizational development grant, your organization has to meet the following criteria:

- Be a legally registered independent organization in one of the nine countries listed above[5]
- Be operational for no less than 24 months
- Be a multi-issue think tank as defined in the section "What kind of think tanks does TTF support?"
- Embrace an inclusive approach to policy-making, which implies making analysis publicly available and targeting a variety of public stakeholders
- Undertake thorough and rigorous research, and develop thematic expertise, to inform public debates in a responsible and accurate manner and to position itself as a credible interlocutor for the government and other public actors.

The Think Tank Fund does NOT support:

- TTF grantees who have received six years of TTF core and institutional funding
- Core funding that does not target one of the organizational development components listed above
- Thematic project funding or stand-alone policy research
- Academic research
- Assistance to public institutions
- Academic fellowships and scholarships
- One-off events (e.g., workshops, seminars, conferences, publications)
- Research in arts, humanities, and natural sciences
- Technical assistance projects

[4] Detailed guidelines will be provided after an applicant's concept note is approved.
[5] In most participating countries think tanks are registered as not-for-profit citizen associations.

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How to apply?
Applicants should upload a brief concept paper of no more than four pages using the following link: http://bit.ly/orgdevapp0715
Please compile all the information into a **single file** as you can attach only one file in the application system. Please attach (do not paste) your concept note to the "Project Description" field.

The concept paper should include:

- Description of major strengths and weaknesses in three areas of organizational development – quality of research products, communications and advocacy capacity, and internal development and governance;
- Analysis of how the organization would like to tackle these weaknesses using a TTF grant, including a timeframe for TTF funding and expected improvements;
- Estimated amount of the requested grant, total organizational budget for the last calendar year, and total projected organizational budget for the current year. When developing your budget request to TTF, please remember that in accordance with OSF regulations, the total amount of **all OSF funding** to your organization **cannot exceed one-third** of your institution's overall organizational expenditures for the last calendar year.
- Appendices:
  - ID of the applicant organization – historical overview, achievements, structure, programs, etc. (mandatory)
  - Organizational strategic development plan (if available)
  - Any supporting documents exceeding the page limit.

The Think Tank Fund will use this concept paper to determine whether applicants and their proposals meet the Fund's current funding priorities and guidelines. The applicants whose concept notes are considered to merit further engagement will be invited to fill out a baseline organizational survey to diagnose their needs and submit a full grant proposal. TTF staff will provide an applicant with appropriate guidelines and templates.

When is the submission deadline?
While applications are accepted on a rolling basis, organizations that would like to have their submissions reviewed in fall 2015 should send their concept papers no later than **July 1, 2015**.

Where to direct your inquiries?
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