

Call for Proposals Core and Institutional Support to Think Tanks

The Think Tank Fund of the Open Society Foundations requests proposals for core and institutional funding from independent,¹ multi-issue public policy centers working in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine.

What is a think tank?

Although the term “think tank” is hard to define, to assess applicants for this call that claim to be think tanks we will use the following definition: “Think tanks are independent 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

Why support think tanks?

Policy development and debate are critical components for effective governance within a functioning democracy. Development of and access to policy alternatives, however, continues to be a serious challenge for many of the countries in which the Think Tank Fund is active. The result has been a dearth of high quality applied research with clear policy implications. Throughout the region only a small number of non-governmental organizations have emerged with a clear policy agenda. Using a variety of approaches, these organizations are producing relevant research, identifying and analyzing policy options, engaging with various stakeholders (including the government, civil society, media, businesses and the public) to advance their recommendations, and creating openings for civil society in the policy development process. Think tanks have a critical role to play in ensuring that evidence-based research contributes to a robust policy-making process and ultimately to better policies.

What is core funding?

Core funding encompasses partial coverage of basic institutional costs (such as payroll, rent and maintenance) as well as expenses for primary programmatic and organizational development (like professional training). Core funding enables an organization to step beyond the current projects and donor priorities in order to consider its overarching strategy and explore new areas of work. In their proposals applicants should emphasize institutional development and growth rather than simple maintenance of existing activities. Think tanks are encouraged to focus on the knowledge, policy gaps and issues they see most pressing for their society and act on them.

The Think Tank Fund does **NOT** support:

- project funding – i.e. one-time policy research on a specific idea
- scholarly research
- academic fellowships and scholarships
- one-off event (workshop, seminar, conference)
- research in art and natural science
- technical assistance projects OR provision of technical assistance to public institutions

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 action 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. Yet, think tank is a contested term and there are number of working definitions. Some examples that we consider important for understanding this type of organizations 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>

What are our values?

The Think Tank Fund supports primarily those groups that examine economic, political and social reform issues in their countries with an emphasis on government responsibility and effectiveness. The TTF strategy does not support specific issues or themes, but encourages an approach that promotes inclusive policy change through a combination of research and advocacy methods. Policy centers must undertake thorough, high-quality research and develop thematic expertise to inform the public discourse in a responsible and accurate manner and to position themselves as credible partners for the government and other public actors. Recognizing that different issues will require different means of engagement, organizations should be able to influence the government and other public stakeholders in defining priorities and developing policy options. A meaningful communication strategy and public advocacy are, therefore, essential ingredients to the contribution think tanks make to the policy development process. By taking into account specific features of a grantee and peculiarities of a national policy context, each TTF grant underwrites a unique combination of programmatic and organizational expenses that help an organization advance its research and advocacy, improve the quality of analysis and outreach, and increase internal organizational capacity.

Who is eligible to apply?

To be considered for core funding, your organization has to meet the following criteria:

- Be a legally registered think tank in one of the twelve countries listed above³
- Examine economic, political and social reform issues in your country with an emphasis on government responsibility and effectiveness
- Embrace an inclusive approach to policy making
- 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.

How to apply?

Applicants should send a brief concept paper of no more than four pages by email only to tff_applications@osi.hu.

The concept paper should include:

- Brief description of main policy areas and rationale for identifying these areas, overall programmatic strategy, goals, methodology and planned activities reflecting applicant's mid-term strategy
- Information about the applicant organization, brief history, list of main accomplishments, and a brief strategy for organizational development
- Rationale, purpose, and timeframe for the requested core and institutional funding accompanied with a brief description of the expected added value to the current applicant's work and funding.
- Estimated amount of the requested core funding, information on the overall organizational budget for the current year and the granting period.
- Any supporting documents exceeding the page limit should be sent as a separate attachment.

The Think Tank Fund will use this paper to determine whether applicants and their proposals meet the Fund's current funding priorities and guidelines. Successful applicants will then be invited to submit a full grant proposal. At that point the TTF staff will provide an applicant with our proposal and budget development guidelines.

When is the submission deadline?

Ongoing. Due to variations in the programmatic cycle, please contact us via email as soon as you have a concept note ready to obtain a specific timeline for your application.

Where to direct your inquiries?

Think Tank Fund - Open Society Institute
E-mail: tff_applications@osi.hu
Tel: +36 1 882 3210
Fax: +36 1 882 3101



³ In most of the countries participating in this call, think tanks are registered as not-for-profit citizen associations.