CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Technological innovation for policy research for think tanks

Eligible countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

The Open Society Foundation's Think Tank Fund (TTF) invites proposals from think tanks, policy research organizations, and advocacy groups with in-house research capacity for projects on using data for policy relevant research and evidence-based advocacy.

Background

Though the role of technological innovation and data visualization has been contested among think tanks and policy researchers, the Fund believes there is a strong need to understand these tools, their place in the work of policy research organizations, and potential to further and enhance policy research. Data visualization can advance policy research goals by introducing think tanks to a different set of tools and resources. Such innovations can open doors to engage new audiences and help retain existing target groups through more captivating analysis. In an age when think tanks, policy research organizations and advocacy groups compete for the attention or support of their target audiences with blogs, multimedia channels, social media, interactive news outlets, and other innovative communications platforms, the ability to capture public interest through visualized data has arguably never been more important.

Data and analysis are the features that set think tanks apart from commentators, pundits, and opinion-peddlers. That is why they should keep their comparative advantage – i.e. sophisticated analysis based on reliable data. While data visualization is not a substitute for a well-crafted political, policy or advocacy strategy, it helps level the playing field in communicating research between think tanks and other actors by making the former more influential in policy debates.

The potential for high-impact, low-cost output makes data visualization the tool which think tanks in Central and South-Eastern Europe can use to leap-frog over their counterparts in developed countries and compete as an equal in the international policy scene. Data visualization need not be solely web-based. In fact, it can be used to open doors for more creative thinking about other applications, including offline. While it may be necessary to change a communications medium to reach those without web access, the message itself would remain the same and display visualized data in public spaces.

Moreover, technology and data visualization can have profound impact in the current environment with a growing number of fact-free public debates. Use of data, innovative

technology, and visualizations can supplement existing knowledge and help move the discussion into the fact-based realm by reintroducing evidence- based analysis and arguments in a way that makes them more meaningful and engaging for a wide spectrum of users.[1]

The purpose of this call is to promote such advancements across think tanks in the region. Since think tanks respond differently to the listed challenges and opportunities, they form a mixed community of practice. Differences in engaging with data, technology and visualizations offer an opportunity to share practices, build on proven successful examples, and further develop approaches to data management and outreach. In response to this opportunity, TTF invites proposals in five targeted support schemes.

Support Schemes

1. Micro-grants for technological innovation and exchange of know-how

Though innovative technological tools can complement think tank research and advocacy, their creation is beyond in-house capacities of many organizations. In many cases, replication of pre-existing and openly available tools is the best strategy for think tanks to improve their outreach and visibility without diverting efforts from their core mission of policy research and analysis. TTF invites proposals from think tanks that would like to incorporate pre-existing and tried-out technological tools in their policy research projects. The projects can cover simple one-way adaptation of a technological or visualization tool, or mentoring and cooperation with think tanks experienced in using data for research projects to facilitate knowledge transfer.

Maximum budget: $5,000.

In your concept note, please specify:
- the policy research project which you would use for a specific technological innovation. The project can be a new initiative or an ongoing one. Spell out your research and advocacy goals, research methodology, and the audience(s) you would like to reach;
- the tool you wish to replicate and justifications for how it would enhance your policy research impact;
- if you are seeking a mentor, please identify the organization you would like to work with and its suitability for the task at hand.

2. Technological fellowships

Think tanks working on technology-intensive projects lack in-house technical expertise. This hinders project design and implementation. Even if they recognize this problem, think tanks struggle to attract or cannot afford technical professionals, such as developers, programmers and designers, as full-time staff. TTF technological fellowships will support the engagement of technological experts for the entire duration of a specific policy research project -- from the design phase till outreach and dissemination of a policy product. We believe working with

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[1] You can find examples of visulaizations done by think tanks here:
http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/visualizing-data-data-driven-policy-research-projects-central-and-eastern-europe

such experts on a continuous basis helps such initiatives succeed by ensuring that the creative process is followed through and consistent.

Maximum budget: $10,000 –expert's fee not to exceed $7,000.

In your concept note, please specify:
- the policy research project for which you need an expert. Spell out your research and advocacy goals, research methodology, and the audience(s) you would like to reach;
- the following technical parameters: a) what kind of expertise is needed and how it would enhance the success of your project; b) what specific tools/data visualizations/ games/ other instruments will be developed;
- expert(s) you plan to recruit;
- how the technology will enhance your policy research and/or foster your advocacy goals.

The fellowship **will not cover**:
- engagement of experts for one-off, short-term tasks on ongoing projects;
- the salary of employees already working (part- or full-time) at the organization.

3. Replication projects

Technological tools that complement data-intensive policy research projects and enable wider engagement of the public have proliferated in such thematic areas as state budget monitoring, performance ranking of state institutions, etc. Think tanks often spearhead the creation of such instruments. In many cases, the specific problem these tools address is common or comparable across regions and countries. By making these tools available for replication, think tanks not only enhance the capacity of other policy organizations to engage with the public and offer better policy solutions, but also increase their leverage as experts in the national and international arena. Once shared, these tools create a basis of comparative knowledge for further research and exchange. TTF invites project proposals that aim at creating an open toolkit out of technological instruments developed as part of existing policy research projects. Such toolkits should enable organizations working on similar topics to integrate these innovative instruments and methods into their research and advocacy efforts.

Maximum budget: $25,000.

In your concept note, please specify:
- the background information about the tool(s) at hand with a description of the initial policy research project it complemented. Spell out your research and advocacy goals, the research methodology, and the audience(s) you would like to reach;
- the use of the technological tool and short technical specificities;
- justification of its replicability;
- your strategy to disseminate the tool and transfer knowledge to other organizations.

4. Methodological Innovation for data driven policy research projects

Social media, e-governance, data mining of open data and so-called 'big data' have opened new horizons for policy research. Technological innovation impacts policy research not only at the stage of advocacy and communications of research findings, but also during the selection of research methods and data sources. For example, some think tanks have experimented with surveying supporters of particular organizations or political parties on Facebook. Others have been data-mining Twitter feeds to extract dominant discourses. These projects are an opportunity for policy research organizations to catch up with technological novelties. TTF invites think tanks to submit policy-relevant research projects that build on innovative, technology-driven sources of data and research methods.

Maximum budget: $25,000.

In your concept note, please specify:
- the specific policy issue you plan to address;
- your research project, including your research and advocacy goals, research methodologies – both traditional and innovative- and the audience(s) you would like to reach;
- relevance of the methodological innovation for your research and ways it may yield better results than conventional methods;
- any risks associated with the suggested methods/technologies.

5. Integrated data projects for evidence-based policy research and advocacy

This funding line will support projects that bring new data sources to light (through collection and publication); expand existing data sources (scaling or adding new sources); process or re-use data sources (enabling mashups, comparisons and cross-referencing); and improve the usability and interactivity of data (development and deployment of front-end, dashboards, APIs). Projects should enable concerned citizens, activists, and advocates to use existing data for evidence-based policy arguments, develop policy alternatives, and engage in well-informed policy discussions. We particularly encourage applications that propose new uses of data for advocacy, target non-traditional stakeholders, develop challenging and complementary information sets for broader application, or use datasets to challenge commonly accepted facts in an under-researched policy area.

Maximum budget: $25,000.

In your concept note, please specify:
- the specific policy issue you plan to address;
- your proposed research project, including your research and advocacy goals, research methodology, and the target audience(s) you would like to reach;
- the relevance of the data for your research and the way it enables a new policy debate or introduces new evidence to an ongoing policy discourse.

Application Process

The application process will take place in two phases: (1) concept note submission and (2) full proposal submission phase. In both phases, TTF will evaluate the materials and provides feedback to applicants. Below you can find a detailed description of the application process and deadlines.

Concept note

All interested think tanks[2] should submit a brief concept paper of no more than 2,000 words. All applicants should indicate a specific support scheme (1 to 5) and provide the application materials requested for that scheme. In addition to the issues listed under each scheme, the concept note should include the following sections:

- one paragraph describing your website;
- links to your most successful policy project or policy outcomes;
- proposed budget and implementation timeframe;

Note: You can add appendices to the concept note with your Organizational ID, background information on the policy issue/project under consideration (if applicable).

Your concept note should be submitted via: http://bit.ly/ttftechcall

Full proposal

The Think Tank Fund will use the concept paper to determine whether the project meets our current funding priorities. After reviewing your concept note, TTF will invite successful applicants to submit full funding proposals and notify rejected applicants. TTF will provide additional guidelines to those invited to develop a full proposal.[3]

Exclusion criteria

This program will not support:

- maintenance of pre-existing technological tools/websites, or alike;
- updates or creation of organizational websites;
- academic research without concrete policy advocacy goals;
- projects focusing exclusively on open data and citizen engagement

Expected Timeline and Submission Deadlines

15/09/2014 – Deadline for submitting concept notes.
10/10/2014 – Deadline for submitting full proposal and organizational survey.[4]
1/12/2014 – Starting date for funded projects

For further information please get in touch with TTF staff at ttf.applications@opensocietyfoundations.org.

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[2] TTF will consider proposal by think tanks and hybrid organizations that spend more than 50% of their activities in designing and carrying out research as well as advocating its results.

[3] Invitation to submit a full proposal does not mean automatic funding for the proposal.

[4] We encourage early submission as we assess concept notes on a first come first serve basis. Applicants should be ready to develop the full proposal from the concept note phase in two weeks. Full proposal guidelines and invitation to organizational survey are shared upon invitation to submit full proposal.

About the Open Society Foundation's Think Tank Fund

The **Open Society Foundations** work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. The Foundations seek to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, the Open Society Foundations implement a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, we build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption and freedom of information. The Foundations place a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities.

The **Think Tank Fund** works to ensure decision-makers and relevant stakeholders in the countries of operation use high quality, evidence-informed research to develop and implement policies that lead to and sustain more open and prosperous societies.
The Think Tank Fund supports independent policy research centers that strengthen democratic processes by identifying political, economic and social problems, researching them in a non-partisan and policy relevant way and providing policy alternatives that enrich public debate. Think Tank Fund also examines the various roles and functions that think tanks play in the political and policy arenas. As such, it serves as a knowledge hub and advocate for evidence-informed policy research.