



SCHOOL for  
THINKTANKERS

On Think Tanks



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# A FUNDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE THINK TANKS SECTOR - FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

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# SESSION OUTLINE

Introduction

Specific goals and method of this session

Your experience with funders / donor organisations

Scenario-based exercise: 'Funders in Action'

Follow-up conversations in small groups

Some observations, tips and tricks about donors of TTs and Q&A

# WARMING UP: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH FUNDERS / DONOR ORGANISATIONS

(INDIVIDUAL AND WORK IN PAIRS)

Each participant should think of

**a) a positive experience**, and

**b) a negative experience** with a donor.

**GREEN POST-IT:** key words / associations why it was a good experience

**RED POST-IT** key words / associations why the experience was not so good.

Once done, each participant should turn to her neighbor and briefly share their experiences  
- 2-3 minutes each.

# SOME PERTINENT ISSUES

- Relationship to a particular power dynamic and asymmetry
- Motives (similar or different...)
- Priorities (similar or different...)
- Issues of costs, budgets, administrative burden
- Level of knowledge and understanding of think tanks compared to other organisations in the field...
- Understanding of impact and managing expectations on both sides
- .... And many, many other issues

# SCENARIO-BASED EXERCISE: FUNDER DYNAMICS IN ACTION

You will work in **small groups of 4-5 participants**.

**Your task is to:**

- Understand the **core challenge** in the scenario.
- Reflect on how your own organisation or experience might respond.
- Extract one **key insight**, one **challenge**, and one **open question** you would like to pose to others or to our speakers.

**Each group will nominate a rapporteur who will present your findings briefly (2 minutes) in the plenary.**

The goal of this exercise is not to find perfect solutions — but to **deepen our understanding of power, values, and strategy** in funder–think tank relationships.

# SCENARIO-BASED EXERCISE: FUNDER DYNAMICS IN ACTION

## PRESENTATIONS

Each group presents one **key insight**, one **challenge**, and one **open question**

## SCENARIOS

1. **The Idealist but Inexperienced Funder**
2. **The Power-Oriented Funder**
3. **The Micromanager Academic**
4. **The Regressive Private Foundation**

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT DONORS OF TTS

- Funders geography: not all funders are the same
- Myths donors and think tanks are both guilty for
  - influence / impact
  - Older is not better
  - Myth of comparable political contexts
  - Myth of neutrality / TTs impartiality in influencing politics / TTs as force for good
- Think tanks and other actors (partnerships and competition)
- Issue of costs or funders free-riding

# SOME TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DEALING WITH DONORS

- Power dynamics (open and hidden interests)
- Bureaucracy vs. Content
- Thinking BIG vs small



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# Questions & answers

## **SUGGESTED READING:**

A DONOR'S PERSPECTIVE, TOOLBOX ARTICLE: [HTTPS://MERICS.ORG/EN/THINK-TANK-TOOLBOX/HOW-THINK-TANKS-AND-FUNDERS-CAN-GET-MORE-OUT-THEIR-RELATIONSHIP](https://meric.org/en/think-tank-toolbox/how-think-tanks-and-funders-can-get-more-out-their-relationship)

A PEER PERSPECTIVE: [HTTPS://ONTHINKTANKS.ORG/ARTICLES/FOUR-WAYS-TO-BUILD-GENUINE-DONOR-RELATIONSHIPS/](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/four-ways-to-build-genuine-donor-relationships/)

A QUICK BUT DEEP DIVE IN THE FIELD: [HTTPS://ONTHINKTANKS.ORG/ARTICLES/NOT-INFLUENTIAL-BUT-USEFUL-RETHINKING-HOW-WE-ASSESS-AND-SUPPORT-THINK-TANKS/](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/not-influential-but-useful-rethinking-how-we-assess-and-support-think-tanks/)

CAUTIONARY TALE: [HTTPS://BLOGS.LSE.AC.UK/IMPACTOFSOCIALSCIENCES/2017/09/18/HOW-FUNDER-PRESSURES-CAN-TORPEDO-THE-CREDIBILITY-OF-RESEARCH-THE-CAUTIONARY-TALE-OF-GOOGLE-AND-NEW-AMERICA/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/09/18/how-funder-pressures-can-torpedo-the-credibility-of-research-the-cautionary-tale-of-google-and-new-america/)

INTERESTING ADVICE: [HTTPS://ONTHINKTANKS.ORG/ARTICLES/EXPLORING-POLITICAL-PHILANTHROPY/](https://onthinktanks.org/articles/exploring-political-philanthropy/)



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# THANK YOU

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