The Think Tank Field Guide

As think tanks have grown in number and influence, a handful of distinct breeds have emerged. Here's a guide to telling the wonks from the water carriers.

**The Policymakers**
These organizations enjoy a competitive advantage over their rivals when it comes to government contracts and research. They have the know-how and PR skills that ministers, bean counters, and bureaucrats seek.

- Rand Corporation, United States
- Urban Institute, United States
- Overseas Development Institute, Britain
- Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil
- Institute for Research on Public Policy, Canada

**The Partisans**
These ideology-driven organizations generate the leading ideas on the right and left, develop new political talent, and offer a home to out-of-power party leaders.

- Heritage Foundation, United States
- Center for American Progress, United States
- Adam Smith Institute, Britain
- Civitas, Britain

**The Phantoms**
Designed to look like NGOs, these organizations are in fact arms of the government. They've emerged as a favorite strategy for authoritarians to mask their diktats as flourishing civil society.

- China Development Institute, China
- Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, Russia
- Center for Political Studies, Uzbekistan

**The Scholars**
The stars of the think tank world, these powerhouses of policy are regularly relied upon to set agendas and craft new initiatives.

- Brookings Institution, United States
- Council on Foreign Relations, United States
- Chatham House, Britain
- Danish Institute of International Studies, Denmark

**The Activists**
These do-gooders don't simply advocate for important causes. They've become top-notch policy and research hubs in their own right.

- Human Rights Watch, United States
- Centre for Conflict Resolution, South Africa
- Amnesty International, Britain
### Top 15 U.S. Think Tanks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Think Tank</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Annual Budget</th>
<th>Specialties</th>
<th>Boldface Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brookings Institution</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$60.7 million</td>
<td>U.S. foreign policy, Middle East</td>
<td>Strobe Talbott, Kenneth Pollack, Alice Rivlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rand Corporation</td>
<td>Santa Monica, Calif.</td>
<td>$251 million</td>
<td>Military strategy, political economy</td>
<td>Edwin Meese, Peter Brookes, James Jay Carafano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Heritage Foundation</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$48.4 million</td>
<td>Tax policy, missile defense</td>
<td>James Dobbins, Gregory Treverton, William Overholt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$34.5 million</td>
<td>Regional studies, democracy promotion</td>
<td>Lee Hamilton, Haleh Esfandiari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cato Institute</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$19 million</td>
<td>Libertarianism, deregulation</td>
<td>David Boaz, Edward Crane, Christopher Preble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hoover Institution</td>
<td>Stanford, Calif.</td>
<td>$34.1 million</td>
<td>Defense policy, conservatism</td>
<td>Larry Diamond, Michael McFaul, Victor Davis Hanson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$35.5 million</td>
<td>Human rights, international justice</td>
<td>Kenneth Roth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Peterson Institute for International Economics</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$9.5 million</td>
<td>Trade, globalization</td>
<td>C. Fred Bergsten, Anders Åslund, William Cline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Top 10 Non-U.S. Think Tanks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Think Tank</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Specialties</th>
<th>Boldface Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chatham House</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>$12.4 million</td>
<td>International economics, regional studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>International Institute for Strategic Studies</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>$15.3 million</td>
<td>Nonproliferation, counterterrorism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stockholm International Peace Research Institute</td>
<td>Solna, Sweden</td>
<td>$5.3 million</td>
<td>Arms control, conflict management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>$25.9 million</td>
<td>International development, humanitarian issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Centre for European Policy Studies</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>$8.6 million</td>
<td>EU affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Transparency International</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>$13.3 million</td>
<td>Anticorruption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>German Council on Foreign Relations</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>$6.4 million</td>
<td>German foreign policy, international relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>German Institute for International and Security Affairs</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>$16.4 million</td>
<td>German foreign policy and security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>French Institute of International Relations</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>$8.1 million</td>
<td>Trans-Atlantic relations, European affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Adam Smith Institute</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>Free-market and social policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Top Think Tanks for Innovative Ideas

1. Cato Institute
Cato's libertarian stance, once viewed as fringe, is now considered respectable. With its anti-incumbent, anti-Washington attitude, Cato has antagonized liberals with its push to privatize Social Security, as well as conservatives with its vigorous opposition to the Iraq war.

2. Brookings Institution
From healthcare reform to recommendations on closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Brookings has a breadth of expertise that allows it to offer innovative fixes for nearly every critical issue facing the United States today.

3. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Carnegie's role in opposing the invasion of Iraq and providing critical research on issues such as Iran's and North Korea's nuclear weapons programs places it at the heart of some of Washington's defining policy debates.

Best New Think Tanks
(of the past 5 years)

1. European Council on Foreign Relations
Populated by European heavyweights like Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari and former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, the ECFR aims to craft a common foreign policy for an increasingly integrated Europe.

2. Bruegel
Funded by EU member states and located in Brussels, Bruegel specializes in driving European economic growth and making the continent more competitive in the global economy.

3. Center for American Progress
Thanks to its all-star roster of experts and savvy use of new media, CAP has emerged as the intellectual center of Democratic D.C.

Most Impact on Public Policy Debates

1. Brookings Institution
When important debates occur in Washington—whether over Middle East peace, global finance, or urban strategy—it's a fair bet that Brookings is driving the conversation.

2. Heritage Foundation
A partisan approach, obsession with the latest policy issues, an effective marketing strategy, and proximity to the seat of power (it is steps away from the U.S. Congress) give Heritage an influential edge.

Best Think Tanks By Region

Latin America:
Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales, Argentina

Middle East & North Africa:
Al-Ahram Center for Political And Strategic Studies, Egypt

For More Online:
For the complete Think Tank Index, including more rankings, go to ForeignPolicy.com/extras/ThinkTankIndex.

Asia:
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China

Sub-Saharan Africa:
Centre for Conflict Resolution, South Africa