Call for Proposals

Think Tank Initiative
Understanding Think Tank - University Relationships in South Asia

Date issued: March 18, 2013

Deadline for submission of proposals: April 10, 2013 at 23:59 EST (Ottawa time)

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is pleased to announce a call for proposals as part of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI), a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening independent policy research institutions in developing countries. This project aims at generating a better understanding of the relationships between think tanks and universities within the South Asian research knowledge environment, producing evidence to help inform thinking on policy research capacity building, and providing lessons for effective collaboration.

This document contains the following sections:

1. Information on IDRC and TTI .................................................................2
2. Background, rationale and key objectives of the Call ........................................2
3. Priority research questions and focus ...................................................................4
4. Funding scope and duration ..................................................................................5
5. Eligibility criteria .................................................................................................5
6. Selection process ..................................................................................................5
7. Submission process and guidelines .......................................................................6
8. Evaluation criteria ................................................................................................8
9. Country clearance requirements .........................................................................9
10. IDRC standard grant conditions ......................................................................9
11. Communication with applicants .......................................................................10
12. Permission for use and disclosure of information ...........................................10
1. Information on IDRC and TTI

IDRC is a Crown corporation created in 1970 by the Parliament of Canada. IDRC builds the capacity of people and institutions in developing countries to undertake the research that they identify as most urgent. It works with researchers as they confront contemporary challenges within their own countries and contribute to global advances in their fields.

IDRC supports research in four broad areas, making knowledge a tool for improving lives across the developing world through the following program areas.

- Agriculture and the Environment
- Global Health Policy
- Social and Economic Policy
- Science and Innovation

IDRC builds on decades of work on gender issues, international relations and global governance, and the role of information and communication technologies in development, and integrates these dimensions into all research themes.

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) is a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening independent policy research institutions — or think tanks — in developing countries, enabling them to better provide sound research that both informs and influences policy. Forty nine institutions from 22 countries are currently supported by TTI.

One of TTI’s three main objectives is to capture and share learning about strategies for supporting and managing policy research organizations in order to influence the future activities of the funding partners, think tanks, and other development actors. To help achieve this outcome, TTI is launching a research project to advance the understanding of the relationships between think tanks and universities in South Asia, produce evidence to help inform thinking on policy research capacity building, and provide lessons for effective collaboration.¹

For more information on TTI, please visit www.idrc.ca/thinktank and www.thinktankinitiative.org/

2. Background, rationale and key objectives of the Call

Think tanks and universities are important institutions in the research knowledge environment. They can play key roles in improving the living conditions of people in South Asia through the production of high quality research that addresses local policy challenges. The Think Tank Initiative intervenes in the research knowledge environment by providing core funding and technical support to think tanks. Yet there are different views amongst international donors, governments and experts about the relative benefits of supporting universities and think tanks.

¹ TTI works in the following countries in South Asia: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
There are questions, for example, about the impact that supporting one type of institution may have on the other, and the degree to which capacity building support may influence the relationship between these institutions. There are views that the relationship between universities and think tanks – each having its own structure, rules and incentives – is competitive, or that think tanks have displaced universities as the locus of research activity, or that the output of research in universities has declined while the output of research by think tanks has grown. There are also views that the relationship between the two organizations is complementary and mutually reinforcing, through collaborative research, think tanks influencing graduate teaching and curriculum, and universities building capacity of future think tank researchers.

The reality is probably nuanced. Think tanks and universities, both heterogeneous groups of institutions in their own right, have a multi-faceted relationship that may be synergistic in some respects and possibly competitive or uncooperative in others. Nonetheless, there is a need to better understand the relationships between these two important institutions within the South Asian research knowledge environment, to inform thinking on policy research capacity building, and provide lessons for effective collaboration. This improved understanding should contribute to the body of knowledge on the relationship between think tank capacity building and institutional outcomes at research universities in South Asia, and help to strengthen the overall research knowledge environment in the region.

The core objectives of this project are to:

- Generate a better understanding of the relationships between think tanks and universities in the South Asian research knowledge environment, and the ways in which externally-provided support may affect these relationships;
- Contribute to the shaping of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will guide future research on this issue;
- Generate a set of recommendations for support to think tanks in ways that foster mutually beneficial relationships and/or generate positive outcomes for both think tanks and universities;
- Widely disseminate research results among local, regional and global stakeholders with a view of influencing policy and practice.

This project seeks to identify and gain insights from ways in which think tanks and universities have developed mutually beneficial relationships, particularly in cases where support provided to one has generated increased value for the other. It aims to identify cases where both universities and think tanks appear to flourish within a specific environment, for example through higher goal achievement or successful performance in areas such as resource allocation, staff recruitment and retention, research quality, policy engagement and gender equity. It intends to highlight the characteristics within that environment, including different types of support provided, that appear to generate such positive outcomes for both types of institution.

The project also seeks to highlight cases where universities and think tanks appear to perform less well in relation to each other within a specific research knowledge environment. It will explore the characteristics and forms of support that appear to contribute to these less positive outcomes, in
order to help understand better how their constraints may be reduced and their complementarities enhanced.

One research project will be undertaken by a research institution identified through an open call for proposals, with a base and strong regional experience in South Asia.²

### 3. Priority research questions and focus

Proposals should seek to answer the following questions:

1. **What are the most important drivers, features, and consequences of the relationships between think tanks and universities in the South Asian research knowledge environment?** What are the different types of relationships between these two institutions?

2. **How are the relationships between think tanks and universities in South Asia affected by (externally-provided) support to policy research capacity building?** How does providing support to one type of institution (think tanks) affect these relationships?

3. **What are the ways in which think tanks and universities have developed mutually beneficial relationships, particularly in cases where support provided to one has generated increased value for the other?** What are the characteristics within a given research knowledge environment that appear to be conducive to positive outcomes for both types of institution? What explains cases where universities and think tanks appear to perform less well in relation to each other?

4. **What can be learned for support to think tanks, to universities, and to policy research more broadly, in South Asia?**

Cutting across these questions is a commitment to support research to bring about positive change to policy and, ultimately, to people’s lives. The knowledge produced through this study will not only advance our understanding of the relationships between think tanks and universities in South Asia, but also help ensure that investments for policy research capacity development are informed by evidence of what works best.

The findings of this project will be conveyed in a final report that structures the empirical findings of the case study analyses, and contributes to the body of knowledge on the relationship between think tank capacity building and institutional outcomes at research universities in South Asia. It will also highlight implications for support to policy research capacity building in the region.

---

² With a specific focus on the South Asian region, the project builds upon a study already underway examining the nature of university-think tank relationships in Africa, and will be complementary to a further, similar study in Latin America.
4. Funding scope and duration

As a result of this call, one grant of up to CAD $250,000 will be awarded.

The project should be completed by the end of February 2014, including all research activities and final reporting.

5. Eligibility criteria

Only applications that meet the following eligibility criteria will be considered for funding:

- Proposed projects are to be undertaken by – or in the case of a research consortium,\(^3\) led by – a research-oriented institution\(^4\) with legal corporate registration, based in South Asia.
- Proposed projects are to be carried out in South Asia.
- Proposed projects are scheduled to be completed by the end of February 2014.
- Applications are complete and submitted to IDRC by 23:59 EST on April 10, 2013.

IDRC reserves the right to cancel the process at any time without prior notice.

6. Selection process

The three-staged selection process is outlined below.

Stage 1: Call for Proposals

In a first step, applicants are required to submit an application – which includes a research proposal – and supporting documents. Applications deemed to have complied with all eligibility criteria will be reviewed internally by IDRC program staff according to the evaluation criteria outlined in section 8.

- Deadline for submitting application: April 10, 2013
- Two applicants will be shortlisted and interviewed (by video conference) by April 19, 2013

Stage 2: Final selection

\(^3\) Research consortia comprised of up to three institutional partners may also apply, however one partner must be designated as the lead institution. The lead institution will sign the grant agreement with IDRC and as such be responsible for receiving and administering the funds, and ensuring that all grant conditions are met. Applications to IDRC should be submitted by the lead institution on behalf of the consortium.

\(^4\) Research-oriented institutions can include academic, private sector and non-profit organizations.
If required, IDRC will carry out a risk review of the short-listed institutions. These risk assessments will assess the capacity of the institution to manage and report on the financial aspects of the project activities. In addition to this, IDRC country clearance requirements will be determined by IDRC and communicated to the short-listed institutions for information and action if necessary. A risk review must be completed to IDRC’s satisfaction (see Section 9).

Following the interviews with short-listed applicants and informed by the institutional risk assessment, TTI program staff will select one proposal for approval.

- All Applicants will be contacted about the status of their application by April 30, 2013

**Stage 3: Project approval and grant negotiation**

Once the project has been agreed to by TTI staff, IDRC will conduct internal project approval and grant negotiation processes, as per IDRC’s standard rules and procedures. IDRC will determine milestones and other grant terms and conditions (see Section 10).

- Signature of grant agreements and start of the project (subject to internal approval and grant negotiation process): early May 2013

### 7. Submission process and guidelines

- Applications must be submitted by no later than **April 10, 2013 23:59 EST**.
- Applications can be submitted in **French or English**.
- Applications received after the deadline will not be considered.

Applications received before the deadline and deemed by IDRC to be compliant with the requirements set out in this Call for Proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the process outlined herein.

Proposals should be submitted to [thinktank@idrc.ca](mailto:thinktank@idrc.ca) marked for attention of Peter Taylor, TTI Acting Program Leader, IDRC.

Applications should be concise and presented in single-spaced text with a maximum length of up to **15 pages** (not including abstract and annexes). Documents can be submitted in PDF and/or Word format.

For an application to be considered complete, each section of the application form should be filled, and all supporting documents should be provided. Incomplete applications, or applications received after the deadline, will not be considered for funding. Complete applications received
before the deadline and deemed by IDRC to be compliant with the eligibility criteria set out in this Call for Proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the process outlined above.

**Applications should include the following:**

- Short project title
- Abstract of the full proposal
- Background, problem statement and approach
- Detailed methodology
- Expected results
- Timeline and implementation plan
- Strategy for effective synthesis and communication of research results to promote uptake
- Identification of anticipated risks and mitigation strategies
- Budget (see below)
- Ethical considerations that may arise in the implementation of the research and approval procedures that will be followed before an ethics review body in the recipient institution
- Institutions and personnel: proposed principal investigator (PI) and study team - information on expertise and previous work in this area for each member of the core research team. Proponents may identify institutions or individuals whom they intend to partner with for the purposes of this research.

**In addition to the completed Application, the following supporting documents should also be provided:**

- A letter of intent
- CV of the principal investigator and proposed team members, which should include a list of publications
- Two (2) research samples (e.g. publication, research report, etc.) produced by the principal investigator and/or the proposing/lead institution
- A bibliography

**Proposals must include the following (in an annex):**

- Copy of the legal documentation by which the applicant organization was founded or created in the location in which it is based
- Copy of the most recent audited Financial Statements

- Tentative budgets should include projected expenses per budget category (as per IDRC eligible expenses) as follows:

  - **Personnel:** Includes all remuneration, allowances, and benefits paid to staff and advisors hired for a specific project. Project advisors are people hired for long periods (more than 1 year) and paid on a regular basis. The payment of replacement salaries (to release academics from teaching commitments) or of core salaries (i.e., of existing staff) must be justified in the context of research capacity building. As a general rule, IDRC does not pay salary supplements, i.e., honorarium for full-time employees in addition to their regular salaries or higher salaries than the institution would normally pay.
- **Consultants**: Consultants provide expert professional advice and usually work on a fee-for-service basis. Compared with project advisors (see Salaries), consultants are contracted for shorter periods to work on specific assignments. Payments to consultants include all expenses related to the services of a consultant for a specific activity within the project. Please indicate the daily rate used to calculate the consultant’s fee, the estimated travel costs (if applicable), and any other related consultant costs.

- **International Travel**: Includes all costs related to international travel incurred by project staff. Allowable costs include ground transportation, accommodation, meals, airfare, departure taxes, and other related expenses. Daily costs cannot exceed IDRC per diem rates.

- **Research expenses (include funds provided to any third-party organizations)**: Includes services and materials required to carry out the research. Costs include remuneration of persons who gather data and information or provide casual labour; maintenance and operation of project vehicles; consumable goods and non-capital equipment; computer services; training for project staff for implementation of research activities; in-country travel; reference materials; rent paid for land or premises used in a research activity; and translation of project-related documents.

- **Indirect project costs**: Includes administrative costs not directly related to the research. Costs may include clerical, accounting, or secretarial help; general office expenses; office rental and utility charges; non-capital office furnishings; communications costs; and photocopying. IDRC expects the recipient to absorb the indirect or administrative costs of a project as part of its local contribution. In exceptional cases, IDRC will consider a contribution towards indirect costs. The maximum contribution is 13% of all recipient-administered costs, including capital equipment.

8. Evaluation criteria

The Think Tank Initiative aims at supporting research excellence and applications will be evaluated (by a Committee) based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance (20%)**
   - Clear demonstration of how the research will add value to existing knowledge and theoretical debates, citing past work done on the theme and in South Asia – both by the applicant organization(s) and by other researchers.
   - Clear demonstrated understanding of the assignment.
   - Extent to which research responds to the priority research questions of the Call.

2. **Research merit and effectiveness (30%)**
   - Evidence of innovation, clarity of research questions and objectives.
   - Conceptual soundness, rigorousness of methodology and research design.
     - Mix of qualitative and quantitative methods.
Use of disaggregated data.
- Multi-disciplinary approach.
- Capacity to generate results within the lifetime of the project with potential for scaling up and out (applicability and replicability).

3. Feasibility (20%)
- Sound strategy for mitigating safety and ethical risks for researchers and research participants.
- Feasibility in terms of project concept, timeline and budget.
- Inclusion of appropriate monitoring and evaluation plan.

4. Organizational and team capabilities (20%)
- Demonstrated knowledge of the field of research to policy in developing countries.
- Strong track record of applied research at a regional (South Asia) level.
- Capacity to integrate a range of disciplines, approaches and methods in relation to research on think tanks and universities in developing countries.
- Demonstrated publishing record, including in peer review journals.
- Commitment to developing research capacity in South Asia on issues of research to policy.

5. Potential for research uptake (10%)
- Compelling strategy for effective synthesis and communication of the research results to promote uptake.
- Commitment to gathering and systematizing local stakeholder voices in the research and to feeding research findings back to local constituencies.

9. Country clearance requirements

IDRC has conducted general agreements for scientific and technical cooperation with a number of governments. These agreements establish the framework for IDRC cooperation with that country by defining the rights and obligations of both IDRC and the government. As such, the applicant institution may be required to obtain country approval in accordance with these agreements prior to receiving funding from IDRC.

In addition, each proposal will be subject to IDRC’s risk management process which assesses the ability of IDRC to support programming in proposed countries or territories taking into account Canadian law and IDRC’s knowledge of the research setting, and ability to monitor activities. IDRC reserves the right to reject applications proposing research in countries not appearing on this list if the research location or approach is deemed unacceptable to IDRC.

10. IDRC standard grant conditions
Any selected proponents shall be required to sign IDRC’s standard grant agreement, as amended by IDRC from time to time. For a sample of the general terms and conditions, please refer to the following link:


11. Communication with applicants

All inquiries related to this Call should be sent to thinktank@idrc.ca marked for attention of Peter Taylor, TTI Acting Program Leader, IDRC.

12. Permission for use and disclosure of information

By way of submitting an application under this Call for competitive grants, the applicant consents to the disclosure of the documents submitted by the applicant to the reviewers involved in the selection process, both within IDRC and externally. The applicant further consents to the disclosure of the name of the applicant, the name of the lead researcher and the name of the proposed project, in any announcement of the elected proposal.