



OTT Conference 2025: Think tanks & impact

Session Proposal Guidelines

Think tanks play a vital role in shaping policy. They engage with a diverse range of actors within the policy ecosystem to facilitate dialogues, prepare future generations of analysts and decision-makers, and enhance the capacity of various entities, including political parties and the private sector.

However, measuring their impact requires a comprehensive approach beyond direct policy outcomes. This varies based on the institutional strength of the democracy they operate in and the funding environment. This complexity in balancing sustainability with impactful policy work strains how think tanks operate.

In situations where policymakers do not adopt the recommendations of think tanks, does this undermine their influence? Is policy impact the only way to measure a think tank's value?

To gain an in-depth understanding of their contributions, think tanks must also consider how they can benefit society in other ways—by generating and safeguarding ideas, supporting various actors, and building the capacity of organizations like political parties and the private sector. Recognising these diverse contributions not only highlights their broader societal value but also helps think tanks demonstrate their worth to funders, spaces they operate in, and challenges traditional methods of assessment.

With South Africa set to preside over the G20 in 2025, platforms like the T20 exemplify how think tanks can generate and advocate for policy recommendations on a global stage. This context underscores the importance of understanding their multifaceted roles and contributions within both local and international frameworks.

Join us at the On Think Tanks Conference 2025 to discuss about think tanks' impact.

Agenda

The Conference will take place on 16-18 June 2025 at SAIIA (public event) and New South Institute- GIBs Campus (venue), Johannesburg, South Africa.

The two days will feature a dynamic line-up of keynotes, parallel sessions, interactive discussions, and 'unstructured time', creating the space for emerging conversations and connections.

Proposing a parallel session: key information

Parallel sessions are designed to be dynamic, interactive and participatory, offering a space to exchange experiences, concerns and advice.

Session duration: Parallel sessions typically run for 1.5 hours, allowing sufficient time for engaging conversations.

Format: The format of these sessions is adaptable to suit the specific topic. Whether you prefer a roundtable discussion, a workshop, or a “fishbowl” format, the primary objective remains the same: to create an environment that fosters an engaging and participatory experience.

Avoid long or large panels: The OTT Conference is a space for dialogue. In our experience, panels make this harder. We therefore encourage you to avoid a panel presentation. Instead, we suggest having 2 or 3 people who can share a few key ideas to encourage a discussion or explore other formats that promote dialogue.

Conveners as facilitators: We encourage session conveners/leaders to take an active role in designing and leading their sessions. Your role as a convener is key to moderate the discussion and effectively manage the session. OTT team members will be on hand throughout your session to offer logistical support, ensuring that everything runs smoothly.

Inclusivity of speakers: We aim for a diverse range of speakers, and we do not accept all-male-led sessions. We recommend that the other session speakers represent various countries, regions, and backgrounds to enrich the Conference experience.

So what? We want the conversations to be useful. Ask yourselves, what do we want to get out of this session? Maybe it is a new initiative, ideas for a study or article, or insights to help address a problem that you and others are facing.

Avoid too much self-promotion: The OTT community looks for thoughtful and nuanced reflections about the sector. It’s always happy to celebrate successes but we aim to keep the focus on sharing the lessons and don’t shy away from talking about what doesn’t work.

Topics to address: While we encourage you to be inspired by the Conference theme, you are not bound by it. We only ask that you bring discussions of mutual interest to the sector and that you aim for a very high standard of discussion. For example, you could focus on the governance of think tanks, research agendas, staff, financial planning, fundraising, the impact of polarisation on think tanks or AI and think tanks.

Submit a session proposal

To submit your session proposal, please [complete this form](#). It will ask you the following information:

- **Session leader's name and email.**
- **Session title.**
- **Short session summary** (50-100 words). Be clear about the issue(s) you will address and what participants will gain from joining the session.
- **Session format** (a short description).
- **Potential speakers and facilitators.** Please remember that all speakers, facilitators or resources persons will need to register and travel to the Conference. As the session organiser, you will be responsible for coordinating this.

We are reviewing session proposals on a rolling basis. We will review your submission and get back to you within two weeks. The final deadline for session proposals is **31 January 2025**.

**Please note that OTT may propose combining your session with another one that shares a similar topic. We may also recommend speakers. These suggestions are made in the spirit of promoting international diversity and a wide range of perspectives.*

We will offer

- A suitable space for your session after reviewing its alignment with the Conference.
- Guidance and advice (if needed) on the session structure and content.
- Material and resources, where possible and available (e.g. post-it notes and flip charts). OTT team members will be in the session room to provide logistical support.

Session leaders' responsibilities

- Submitting the session proposal.
- Assuming responsibility for the overall management of the session including convening the session speakers and moderation, and preparing presentations (if any) and sharing them with us.
- Alerting us of any changes to the agreed session.
- Delivering the session along with the other speakers during the conference.

Questions and comments: contact Camila Ulloa at
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