



GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STARTING AN INSTITUTE

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.....INTRODUCTION.....

This guide is designed as a very basic introduction to think tank creation for individuals that are just getting started. It consists of ideas and advice that Atlas has developed and compiled from working with free market think tanks from around the world since 1981.

Keep in mind that Atlas works with think tank leaders, whom we call ‘intellectual entrepreneurs,’ from a variety of backgrounds — from young scholars to experienced businessmen — in places as diverse as Washington, DC and Nairobi, Kenya. Atlas calls think tank leaders ‘intellectual entrepreneurs’ because they need to have the intellectual ammunition to promote their ideas and policies, but also the business sense to be able to run an organization.

Given this diversity, it is impossible to prepare written materials suitable for everyone. Included here are general principles that Atlas has found to be helpful to a large majority of think tanks.

As the think tank industry is young and evolving, this guide should be viewed as a “work in progress.” As such, it will grow to address more topics with lessons from a wider variety of think tanks. If you have advice that you think should be included, please contact Colleen Dyble at colleen.dyble@atlasUSA.org. We look forward to partnering with you in our effort to promote freedom around the world.





..... GETTING STARTED

Aspire to Make a Difference

First and foremost, it is important that, as a new or potential think tank leader or intellectual entrepreneur, you set your sights high. Make a point to always remember the importance of the work you are doing. In deciding to create a market-oriented public policy institute, you are joining a fascinating group of people who are passionately committed to making a difference in the world.

By advancing the principles of freedom, you can help change the climate of opinion so the virtues of free enterprise, individual liberty, personal responsibility and voluntary action are better understood by the public at large. As a result, future generations will have greater opportunities to pursue their own dreams.

New institutes should be determined to exist for the long term...The most important thing is to be patient and invest regardless of short-term returns. The institutes should not be sectarian- they need to defend principles that are useful for every section of society.

(Atilla Yayla, Association for Liberal Thinking, Turkey)

Try New Ideas

The earliest market-oriented think tanks began around the middle of the 20th century. The movement began to grow substantially in the 1970s and that trend continues to this day. As we continue to learn about our industry, and its state of constant change, new intellectual entrepreneurs should not be afraid to try new ideas — it's the trial and error process that accelerates innovation.

At the same time, there is no reason to 'reinvent the wheel' when you can learn from other intellectual entrepreneurs that have already started think tanks. Atlas and most of the people in our network of think tanks sincerely want to help newcomers.

A think tank entrepreneur therefore has to move on to step two by getting in touch with as many groups as possible, to seek strategic advice on fundraising, staffing, and development of the vision and mission of the institute.

(James Shikwati, Inter Region Economic Network, Kenya)

Intellectual entrepreneurs who have the right attitude — a humble desire to learn from those who have gone before, matched with a willingness to ask “but why not try it this way?” — can make great strides over a short period of time.

Mattias Bengtsson of Centre for New Europe (Belgium) and formerly of Timbro (Sweden) says that the most important characteristic of an intellectual entrepreneur is:

the ability to be intellectually curious and creative, to be able to see new ways of applying our fundamental convictions in an ever-changing social and political environment. I think the specific skills you need vary enormously between think tanks depending on the situation. The skills you need if you are running a think tank with a hundred people or ten or two are very different. You have to consider the environment that you are working in.

In addition, at Atlas, we have found that the most successful intellectual entrepreneurs have a strong understanding of and a deep commitment to the ideas of liberty; connectedness to different constituencies with his or her local civic society; charisma and salesmanship to get others to buy into the vision; integrity and trustworthiness; discipline and competence to build an organization; and a consistent drive to achieve high quality results.

When devising your programs and objectives, answer the question: What do I really want to do? Once you have your answer, find a way to make it happen. If you work from the opposite direction ('I don't have enough money, therefore I can't do that'), you will accomplish very little. Necessity is the mother of invention; use necessity to your advantage. Find creative ways to accomplish your goals, not creative excuses why something can't be done.

(Kurt Weber, State Policy Network, USA)



Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo's (Chile), an Atlas Templeton Freedom Award winner and example of institute excellence, celebrated its 15th year of advancing freedom in Latin America June 2005 with a workshop that attracted speakers from Asia and across the globe.

Strive for Excellence

As you start to develop your think tank, be sure to consider each decision that you make very carefully, striving always for the highest quality and the highest caliber in everything you do. Every report, program, conference, or staff person is a direct reflection of the institute. Poor efforts and products lead to a poor image that will be hard to reverse. Apply standards of excellence, right down to the receptionist who answers your phone. Remember, for many people, this will be the very first contact ever made with your institute. As John Blundell, Atlas's former president, always says "It's better to do 8 things at an A+ level than to do 10 things at a B-level."

The most important thing has been to be systematic and independent in our proposals. Our studies and researchers constantly appear in the media giving technical opinions and interviews as often as possible. We distribute our documents, proposals and studies to experts, academics, legislators, and policy makers, and we invite them to discuss specific subjects. We have been successful in projecting a solid image of stability, influence, and high-level performance.

(Cristian Larroulet, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)

It is also important to strive for excellence in promoting market oriented ideas, not hidden agendas.

Think tanks should avoid the serious danger of becoming cheaper versions of [public relations] firms. Publishing op-eds is essential [for getting] the message through. At IBL, we did a lot of it right from the beginning. But a think tank is more than a task force of journalists: it should be providing the public with publications and studies that can have a long term impact in the debate, it should be engaging emerging academics and politicians, [and] it should be providing new impetus to the ideas of liberty. Donors like op-eds: sometimes, they are the only things they have the time to read. But neither an endless flow of op-eds nor a well updated website is enough. Think

tanks should be bringing together a new intellectual class, to propel a mentality shift all over academia, politics, and the business world. Engaging new scholars, helping students, publishing high quality papers and books are the only true hope for making the case for the free society even more cogent.

(Alberto Mingardi, Istituto Bruno Leoni, Italy)

Achieving excellence also takes time and determination.

Never, never quit: I knew from the start that I had to spend 80 percent of my time raising money. For the first year, I spent three to four days on the road every week, staying with friends while I was away from home. Persevering just when things looked grim was the right decision. Don't you dare quit.

(Chris Derry, Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, USA)

.....SETTING UP AN INSTITUTE.....

To win the long-term policy battles that will shape history, public policy discourse must be energized through credible research by independent think tanks that are dedicated to free markets and individual liberty. As you get started on the process of developing a think tank, it is important that you think big and make it a point to remember the importance of the work that you are doing.

There must be enthusiasm on the part of the originator of the idea and a firm belief in the value of his product.

(James Shikwati, Inter Region Economic Network, Kenya)

Do not go after formal requirements such as office, office paraphernalia, etc; keep your eye on your work since your work will make your presence felt whereas if you go after the formalities these will consume most of your resources.

(Khalil Ahmad, Alternate Solutions Institute, Pakistan)

Here are some basic words of advice: do it right the first time!

Do things right the first time; employ knowledgeable professionals who know what they are doing. We made a lot of mistakes in setting up our constitution, relying on friends for lawyers and accountants, who charged nothing.

(Greg Lindsay, Centre for Independent Studies, Australia)



With the help of a grant from Atlas, in May of 2005, the Association for Liberal Thinking (Turkey) organized a training seminar for Iraqi think tank leaders to provide them with useful advice and strategies for spreading classical liberal ideas in difficult environments.

Analyze the Market

A key first step when getting started is to analyze the market in which you will be working. For-profit businesses are very aware of their “competitors.” All too frequently, people approach Atlas with an idea for a think tank, but they have not looked to see what organizations currently exist in their area. If there are other organizations with a mission similar to yours, you need to have clear ideas about how your organization will differentiate itself and provide new value. Who will be interested in funding your organization? Why will your organization be more appealing to these donors than other charities? What is your competitive niche?

A for-profit company would never roll out a new product without confirming there is a market for it. You need to conduct the same due diligence for your think tank!

In determining the niche, decide how the think tank is going to get involved in the debate. Is it at a higher philosophical level or an applied policy level? If the latter, will it get involved in particular policy issues or publish and work at a more general level. For example, will the institute publish on pensions policy or on particular government proposals for pensions, or both?

(Philip Booth, Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)

If your institute is considering a major change in its mission or operations, there is a point at which it makes more sense to create a new institute. I think that think tanks (like corporations or government agencies) that have either fulfilled their mission or are unable to be successful, should be shut down. If there is a market niche to be filled, then a new entrant to the market will enter, be it a think tank or a corporation. Too often, organizations remain in business long after they should because they feel that they have a right to remain operational. Think tanks must operate like for-profit businesses and remain active and vibrant only if the market responds to their product or service.

(Sally Pipes, Pacific Research Institute, USA)



Monthly 'International Thursday' meetings at Atlas provide individuals and groups local to the Washington, DC area as well as international visitors a forum to exchange ideas, network and give updates on their latest projects.

Become a Student of Management Topics

Many people who try to start think tanks are academics who don't take seriously the business of running a think tank. Your efforts can only grow and expand their impact if you are serious about building a lasting organization. Get serious also about studying management. If possible, look for executive directors from the business sector. Look for ways that for-profit management techniques can be integrated into your non-profit organization.

We need to pay attention to the principles of good management. Along with your institute, you can suffer untold personnel problems without knowing why. Read books on the subject; it's a constant learning process.

(John Goodman, National Center for Policy Analysis, USA)

If you have had little managerial or negotiating experience, read a book on how to negotiate. This will prove beneficial in the short- and long-run, whether you are contracting for studies, managing others, renting a room for a speaker, or just about anything you do during a day at the office.

(Kurt Weber, State Policy Network, USA)

Our think tank, in many respects, is "run like a business" ... We look at and discuss our numbers every quarter: revenues from donations, revenues from events, the estimated commercial value of our media coverage, the number of single visitors to our Web-site, the number of participants to our events, and so on.

(Michel-Kelly Gagnon, Institut Économique de Montréal, Canada)

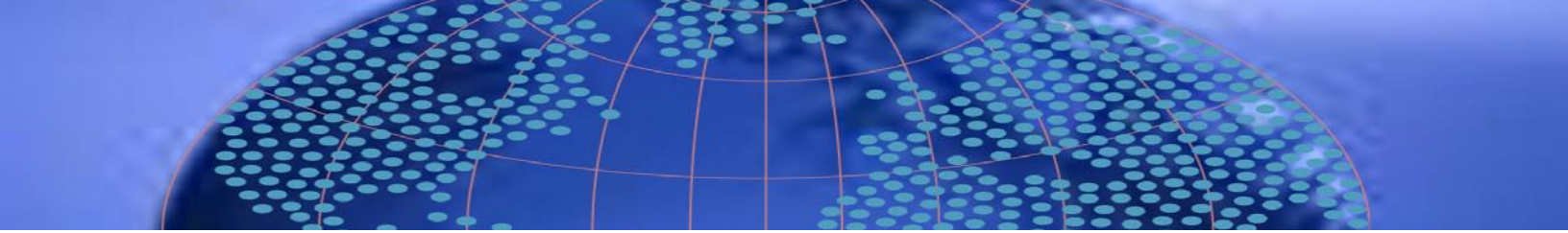
Select a Name

In choosing a name for the institute, there are several things to think about. Is there a readily apparent "nickname" or abbreviated name that flows easily? ("Atlas" from "Atlas Economic Research Foundation" works, but "Michigan" doesn't from the "Michigan Public Policy Institute") Is this nickname unique or do others also use it? Is it one you would like to be known as? Remember, press credits are difficult if an institute's name is too long. Does the acronym work, or does it spell anything odd?

We started with another name, and then changed it to the Adam Smith Institute, something more recognizable. We try to cultivate an image of standing very high, because the higher you stand, the further your voice carries.
(Eamonn Butler, Adam Smith Institute, United Kingdom)

Names such as "Freedom Institute" are not very descriptive. Then again, some institutes deliberately pick names that convey little information in the hopes that it will enable them to participate in a wider variety of opportunities. Think about the level of information you would like to convey in your name. Your decision may rest on the culture within which you work - if the name you choose is likely to generate hostilities because of misplaced assumptions associated with certain words, you might want to go with something less descriptive.

In all that you do, make it difficult for the opposition to tear you down. If you put the word 'freedom' in your name, for example, you will be making it easier for your opposition to stigmatize you as 'ideological' or more specifically, "right-wing." While there's nothing wrong with being ideological (indeed, it's usually a sign of consistent thinking), the opposition unfortunately has been largely successful at convincing the broader public that there's something wrong, narrow-minded or biased about people who have strong, clear conclusions that follow from solid premises. The work you put out will quickly convince the already-converted that you are indeed pro-freedom, so you don't need "Freedom" in the name to attract them. Generalize the name a little more and you can potentially attract the attention of others who are not yet completely on your side and engage them in a conversation about the ideas. Think of the CEOs of companies you want to attract



to your board — because they don't want to lose customers, they steer clear of things that seem to be tagged as strongly of one perspective or the other.

(Lawrence W. Reed, Mackinac Center for Public Policy, USA)

I think Yogi Berra put it best when he said, 'if you don't know where you are going you'll end up someplace else.'

(Michael Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)

Define Your Mission and Stick to It!

Successful think tanks are very clear about the reason they exist. Take time to develop a succinct, concise, easily repeatable mission statement. Once you come up with your guiding mission statement, consider displaying it on every desk in your office. With each decision that comes up, ask yourself, "How will this opportunity help advance the institute's mission?" If you have trouble answering that, it might be a good time to say "no", regardless of how easy the money seems or how great a favor it might be to some one.

Get an identity for your institute, map out a program and stick to it. There will always be temptations to veer away from it, such as funded offers to undertake research you are not prepared to do. My advice is to turn them down. If you spread yourself too thin, you won't get anything done.

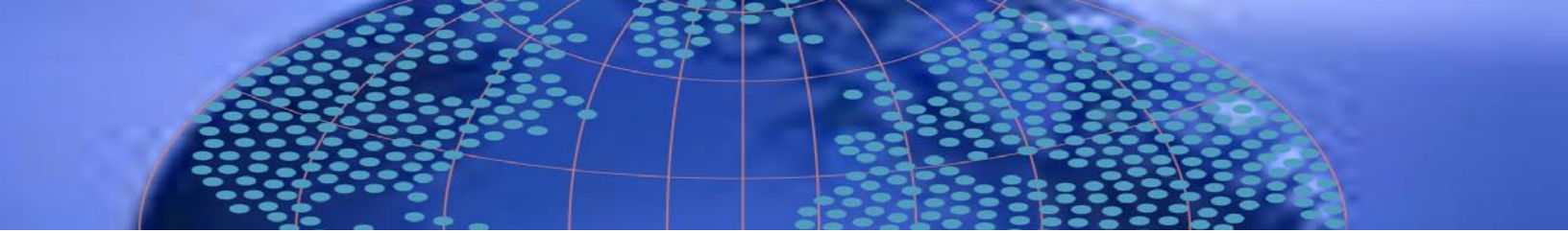
(John Goodman, National Center for Policy Analysis, USA)

Jake Haulk believes that Allegheny Institute's strength comes from staying true to the mission and values of the organization: "We have been and remain committed to excellence and accuracy in our research and education efforts. Anything less would undermine us totally in the hostile environment in which we operate."

At the same time, there's no need to stick to the same mission forever. As the institute develops, it may face new opportunities to achieve different objectives. Work with your board to determine whether or not to redefine your mission. The important point is to have a guiding mission that accurately reflects your work. You can change your work, but first change your mission.



Azerbaijani students discuss free market ideas during a seminar on the basics of market economics organized by the New Economic School of Georgia.



.....APPLY FOR TAX-EXEMPT STATUS.....

As soon as you are firmly committed to creating your free-market, public policy think tank, it would be wise to apply for your tax-exempt status. In the US, this typically means filing for the 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service. (Under IRS rules, non-profit corporations which are formed for charitable, scientific, religious or educational purposes are called 501(c)(3) corporations.)

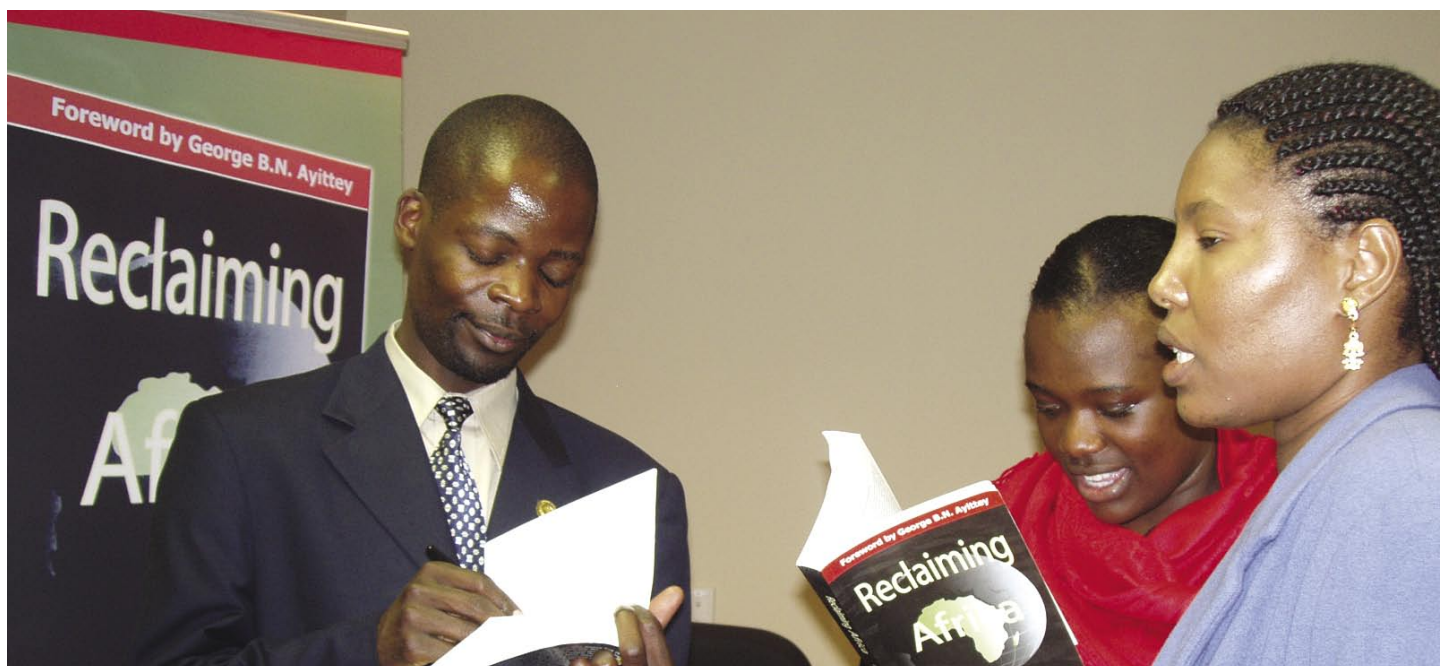
The IRS filing process can be lengthy. Institutes have generally reported 3 to 12 month response times from the agency. For this reason, Atlas recommends that you get your application in early. The sooner you get your IRS ruling, the easier it is to begin fundraising. Intellectual entrepreneurs in the United States need to check state statutes for information about incorporation and corporate operations. (Atlas has compiled notes about the process of incorporation and applying for 501(c)(3) status in the U.S. in a document titled, “Incorporating Your Think Tank and Filing for Tax-Exempt Status” which can be found in Atlas’ online ‘Toolkit’ at www.atlasusa.org.)

It is important that your organization has its objectives and its by-laws clearly established from the beginning — a legal structure to prevent its being co-opted for different purposes than you had in mind when you started. It should be incorporated as a nonprofit, charitable organization, and that contributions to it are deductible from the donors’ income before tax.

(Pat Boyle, The Fraser Institute, Canada)

Depending on the political environment, that is, if one is in a country that permits a vibrant civil society, one may directly register his institute as a non-profit organization. Since some countries in Africa are opposed to civil society activity, it will be strategic to register the institute as a business entity, but make the non-profit status and activities of the institute clear to supporters.

(James Shikwati, Inter Region Economic Network, Kenya)



James Shikwati of the Inter Region Economic Network (Kenya) hosts a book signing for his book, *Reclaiming Africa*, at the Atlas offices in April 2005. The event attracted members from the Kenya Embassy and the local chapter of the Kenya Community Abroad.



OPERATIONS

Seek out Opportunities to Learn from Others

One of the best ways to learn from others is to attend events and workshops that will present opportunities for networking. Atlas workshops, such as the annual Liberty Forum in April and our monthly International Thursday meetings are designed specifically for this purpose. Keep abreast of other think tank network events by checking the ‘Calendar’ section of the Atlas website, www.atlasusa.org. When you have the opportunity to meet others in the network, be relentless in asking questions about their successes and failures.

One temptation to be wary of: many meetings involve discussions of policy topics and classical liberal ideas — the things we all love to talk about — but remember that your biggest challenge will be in building a thriving organization. At these networking events, try to “talk shop” about management topics and projects you can develop — not just academic and policy ideas.

Focus on Ideas

In the ideas world, we are trying to affect long-term change. Friedrich von Hayek wrote about the important role of journalists, teachers, and other “second-hand dealers in ideas” in his essay, *The Intellectuals and Socialism*. With this term, Hayek refers to people who are in position to disseminate ideas to large audiences; as they are not “experts” themselves, they tend to pass along ideas that they perceive to be part of the conventional wisdom.

To succeed, free-market think tanks must provide convincing arguments to these “second-hand dealers in ideas.” Only this can help change the long-term climate of understanding.

By focusing on the ideas – rather than politics – we can broaden our sphere of influence.

Some programs are designed to target large numbers of people, the grassroots. Atlas institutes tend to focus on the ‘grasstops’ — the leaders or gatekeepers of ideas. By definition, that is a much smaller constituency.

(John Blundell, Atlas and Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)

One thing that we like to stress at Timbro is the importance of creating platforms for intellectuals and other qualified opinion makers. Most of the material we produce is written by people not directly employed by Timbro (Johan Norberg’s book, *In Defense of Global Capitalism*, is an exception). We try to create a wide network of people who feel that they are part of what in Sweden has come to be called Timbrohögern, the ‘Timbro right.’ Another priority is to engage young people, especially politically active students. The importance of that cannot be overestimated.

(Mattias Bengtsson, former president of Timbro, Sweden)

Think tanks are often tempted by two sins of the opposite kind: they may decide to water the wine of their ideology, to gain respectability in front of the media, or to enter the tunnel of sectarianism, keeping everybody that does not completely agree with their gospel out of their gates. Both these lines of conduct may prove to be seriously damaging. Joining the consensus won’t do any good to a market-oriented think tank: we are not relevant when we join the choir, we are relevant when we change the minds of people. . . . Debating with people that do not agree with you and engaging opinion leaders who live far from your ideological shores, is not selling out. It is just the only possible way to fight the war of ideas.

(Alberto Mingardi, Istituto Bruno Leoni, Italy)



Political Affiliations

Because the work of an institute involves national and local policy issues, there is inevitable confusion as to whether the institute is ‘political,’ or whether its free market preferences automatically associate it with ‘conservative’ administrations. It is imperative to avoid reinforcing misperceptions by affiliations with political persons, i.e., on the board or among the authors. Our free market think tank objective – to find and publish better solutions to problems in hopes of assisting policy decisions – is a totally nonpartisan approach. Many issues have not been adequately studied (i.e., money systems, educational systems, retirement systems, etc.), so no literature or body of opinion, whether left or right, supports any course of action whatsoever.

We are political in that we do political economy all day, everyday. But that is not the same as ‘party political.’
(John Blundell, Atlas and Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)

We don’t lobby, we publish studies which address policy issues facing American lawmakers. We distribute copies to every member of Congress, to committee and Congressional staff members with an interest in the subject, the White House and Executive branch officials, and to the national news media. Though Heritage does not take a formal institutional position on any of these issues, we encourage our analysts to express their views in the clearest possible terms, and to structure their arguments in persuasive, logical ways. We don’t expect anyone to agree with their findings. We never ask anyone to vote one way or another on a particular proposal. The Heritage Foundation is totally involved in the policy making process. We do not sit on a lofty perch on the sidelines and think grand thoughts; instead we are directly involved in the battle of ideas that goes on day after day in the political trenches of the nation’s capital. We provide a bridge between the worlds of scholarship and politics, one a world of ideas, the other a world of action, one an esoteric world, the other a very pragmatic one.
(Ed Feulner, “The Heritage Way,” The Heritage Foundation, USA)

Maintain favorable relations with legislators of all stripes. Most likely you will be closely aligned with a given political party due to your economic philosophy. However, to drift too close means the other party/parties will shun you in the future and your clout will wane with the changing of the political guard. Furthermore, the press will dress you in partisan clothes, which will cause the general public to believe you are a partisan, not an educational, group. Thus, it is important to make a great effort to reach out to those who are hostile to market-based ideas. Make constant effort to include members of the opposition party/parties in your forums, debates, and seminars. Your organization is educational, not political; it seeks long-term solutions, not short-term political gains. To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, enjoy peaceful relations with all, entangling alliances with none.

(Kurt Weber, State Policy Network, USA)

It may be tempting, particularly if you have good political access, to go directly to the prime “shakers and movers,” or the people of influence in the government. But, our work in the world of ideas requires patience. We are trying to affect the long-term climate of opinion, and hence, education of the public is of vital importance. Don’t make the mistake of bypassing the electorate. Instead, take opportunities to educate them directly about the issues at stake.

The changing of policy is like a relay race, where the baton is the policy change. It requires many runners to win. Policy think tanks are runners at the beginning of the race who pass the baton on to others who in turn pass it on to the main runners who are the electorate whose views have to be changed if we are to win. Our job is to make the baton as attractive as possible. Not too heavy or awkward so that it will be dropped or so light that runners will forget they have it. Politicians recognize when electors seize the baton and are quick to join the team in the last lap when victory is assured. Think tanks should avoid running the last lap since the political losers in that lap are potential teammates in the next race.

(Michael Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)

Marx and Keynes had an all-pervading influence that we need to counteract. Their ideas have brought government intervention, which has failed to solve problems, causing more government intervention . . . causing economic decline.

(Antony Fisher, Atlas’s founder)



Hiring, Firing, and Maintaining Staff

Lawrence W. Reed, president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy prepared some useful pointers about interviewing techniques for this starter kit. The Mackinac Center has developed a rigorous process for evaluating job applicants. Generally, applicants that are being seriously considered for positions at Mackinac are brought to the institute where they are interviewed by no fewer than a half dozen staff members. All those who participated in the interview must concur that the person is the best candidate for the job in order to move forward with the hiring.

In interviewing potential employees, it's important to not only ask the usual and thoroughly expected questions (such as, "Why do you think you're a good fit for this job?"), but also to ask the questions that may come as a surprise. Meaningful questions a candidate may not have planned for can often give you a glimpse of the person's real character and capabilities, as well as insights into how they may handle impromptu situations. Get the person to think introspectively. If you find a person who just cannot be introspective (self-analytical and self-critical), then you have probably found someone so full of himself that he or she is not teachable. Such questions include:

- Have you ever played competitive sports? Why or why not? (It's a big plus in my book if a person can respond affirmatively. Participation in competitive sports is a good indicator of a person's ability to work well as a team member with others.)
- What was the biggest challenge you faced in your last position and how did you handle it?
- How do you handle conflicts between fellow employees, or between yourself and another employee?
- What would you have done differently in your last job and why?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as an employee, particularly as you see them in relation to the position you are now seeking? What are you doing to ameliorate or eliminate your weaknesses?
- How would a fellow worker who knows you describe you and how you work with others?
- How do you manage your time? How do you set goals?
- What have you done in previous jobs to become more effective?
- What do you think will be the most challenging aspect of this position and how do you plan to rise to the occasion and meet it?
- What questions do you have for me?

This last one is more important than you might first imagine. Serious prospective employees should have thought through the position or researched your organization well enough to have prompted some thoughtful if not sophisticated questions themselves. If they come to their interview with nothing to ask, that suggests they may not have done much homework and may not be very thorough, serious, or detail-oriented. Be sure to give them time to ask whatever is on their mind and be prepared

at least in your own mind to evaluate just how thoughtful (or thoughtless) those questions are.

Additionally, Mackinac executive vice president Joe Lehman describes an informal term that the Mackinac team uses to discuss the potential hire – the "excite factor." Although he is careful to explain the subjective nature of this aspect of the evaluation process, it raises additional questions and thoughts for the interviewer to consider.

"Excite" status is very subjective and it's based on gut feel. "Exciting candidates" raise comments such as: "This candidate is going to teach us a thing or two." "Wow, it will be very cool to have this person representing the Mackinac Center." "He's very impressive." "Other people on the staff will have no trouble looking up to, and liking, this guy."

If we don't get "exciting" candidates, we keep looking, rather than settle, even if it means keeping a position open for a long time. We began applying the "excitement test" for specific reasons that may not be applicable to other groups. But for us, the cost of making less-than-ideal hires just finally grew too high, generating the need for additional ways to evaluate staff additions.

In retrospect, in almost every instance in which we've had a specific, significant problem with an employee, it has not been a surprise. We've been able to say that we identified the problem as a potential problem way back in the interview. We finally just decided to start trusting our gut, quit believing that certain problems would go away, and quit believing that the Mackinac Center was so great it could overcome certain problems in employees.

Regarding the firing employees, here's a parting comment that Brian Tracy, one of America's leading authorities on the development of human potential and personal effectiveness, once shared. He asked the question "When is the best time to fire someone?" The answer he suggested: "The first time you think about it." Though it sounds terribly cold and impetuous, he explained how most methods of trying to work things out eventually lead to a firing anyway. By cutting losses immediately, everyone is spared the hurt and costs of a long drawn out process. Again, as Joe Lehman warned above, these ideas may not work for everyone, but they are certainly worth considering based on the experience of these management experts.

The Importance of Good People for Success and Longevity

While your think tank may still be very young, it is important to prepare for its long term. Management books like Jim Collins's *Good to Great* emphasize how important it is to "get the right people on the bus." The comments of think tank leaders underscore this message that the success of a think tank depends on its human capital.

If you are short of human resources (shortage of liberal individuals prepared to work or participate in such work), focus on the search for individuals sympathetic to any of your basic values. Involve them in intellectual work such as translating, summarizing, etc, liberal texts/writings into your local languages, writing on the issues crucial to your environment.

(Khalil Ahmad, Alternate Solutions Institute, Pakistan)

Think tanks depend on people to produce ideas; therefore, knowing how to develop human capital is the most important skill. A think tank has to be a place where new professionals learn and achieve expertise in different subjects. They must be imaginative and willing to learn new

subjects through new lines of approach. At LyD, we develop young professionals who have the ability to transmit new ideas, to appear in the media, and to conduct research that is technically sound, conveyed with intellectual clarity, and based on principles of freedom. Further, their opinions must be independent: they should not know who the donors are and should not be influenced by them.

(Cristian Larroulet, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)

I would say that the success [of our institute] is mainly in the people, who believe in the ideas of classical liberalism, and are not afraid of fighting for them in all areas. This fight is not very easy—unlike Western countries, these ideas were not known at all in the post-Communist countries, and even the fall of Socialism did not mean that the market economy with its institutions rose from its ashes like the legendary Phoenix. In addition to this, I think that a huge part of our success was also achieved thanks to our orientation to practical, real life. We do research, but mainly with the goal to prepare real reform proposals, which we then introduce to the decision makers and try to lobby for them and push them through the political process.

(Martin Chren, Nadácia F.A. Hayeka, Slovakia)



Individuals interested in promoting liberty and developing human capital in the Muslim world explore ideas during an Atlas and Foundation for Economic Education (USA) sponsored conference in Tarrytown, NY, in June of 2005.



•• PRODUCTS, PUBLICATIONS, AND PROGRAMS ••

Think tanks are institutions where human capital is decisive: we have to think, since we exist in order to think. But we also have to produce. And if we believe in a free market, we have to prove its superiority with facts, by being very efficient and offering very specific and valuable products. That is why we have standardized our products. *(Denise Couyoumdjian, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)*

The development of a think tank's programs depends on the combination of human and financial/material capacity. It is necessary to make programs simple, but attractive, and as much as possible interactive. Traditional seminars, publications, and policy recommendations are not enough anymore: the selling of ideas needs new forms, use of modern techniques of communication, modern languages, and an understanding that people today are not ready to read 500 pages treatises and follow policy recommendations. *(Paata Sheshelidze, New Economic School, Georgia)*

People like to listen and then debate ideas. They are interested in living better and they need intellectual guidelines in order to do so. They need to know WHAT THEY WILL GAIN from all that. In the end, a think tank's product must make people think differently in order to achieve their own goals. So each product must be packaged in a way that is most convenient for target audience. TV, internet, and radio are important sources, but other forms of idea development are important. Each category of people needs to hold products in a form that fits more their capacity and interests – ideas are the most flexible products – they can be converted in unlimited forms. This is the bread of think tanks. *(Paata Sheshelidze, New Economic School, Georgia)*

Use Scarce Resources Wisely and Borrow Shamelessly

There is a host of low-cost, easily reproducible products that can help get your institute off the ground. Most institutes in the Atlas network will freely offer reprint and publication rights of their articles. If you see an article that addresses a topic that you would like to get involved in, check with the institute. Ask if you can pub-

lish their piece, perhaps with a new cover that would better reach out to your audience. Of course, clear credits to the home institute will be required, but that reinforces the message that you are part of a broader, cohesive network.

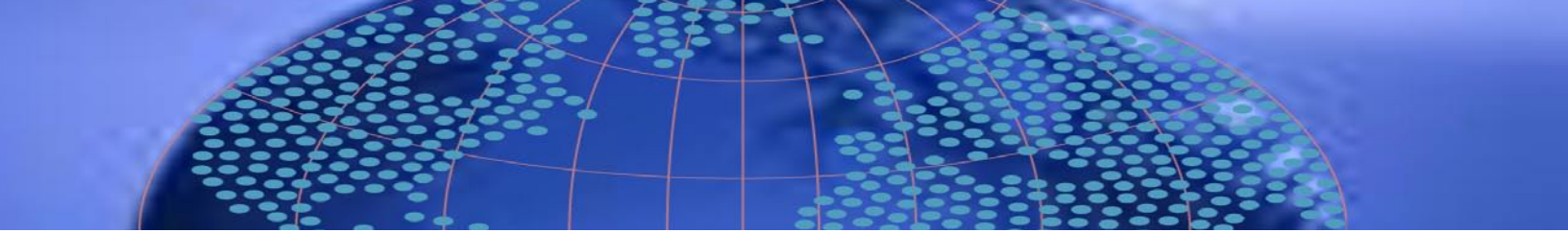
For international institutes, don't hesitate to ask the US institutes for translation rights to their books. Most institutes are very happy to see their works expanded to new audiences through new language translations.

The most significant, high impact, activities of GRIH that might be duplicated by other think tanks are the affiliation and collaboration with an online independent newspaper, heavy promotion of the Taxpayer Protection Pledge, and a monthly local meeting of activists, patterned after the coalition-building "Wednesday meeting" of Americans for Tax Reform (Washington, D.C.). *(Dick Rowland, Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, USA)*

When we started up, we 'borrowed' the IEA book, *Verdict on Rent Control*. About half of our best selling book, *Rent Control: Popular Paradox*, was purchased from the IEA for \$500. The other half we added for local interest. I recommend it as a tactic for smaller, newer institutes. They are welcome to any of Fraser Institute's back publications without charge, and I am sure the IEA would be willing to allow that as well. One crucial point, however, is that there must be a section of the book that relates the broader international experience to local circumstances or else the locals will miss the point! *(Michael Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)*

One of the cheapest and quickest ways of getting a book out is to grab some worthy academic on his way through your country and build a seminar around him; get all your supporters in for a dinner, then publish the findings. *(Greg Lindsay, Centre for Independent Studies, Australia)*

Clone, don't reinvent: Realizing that 46 other state-based think tanks existed, we decided that communicating policy ideas that were working in other states would add immediate value to Kentuckians. Meeting my colleagues at the Atlas Liberty Forum and Heritage Resource Bank intro-



duced me to the right people right from the start. We also cloned the *Daily Policy Digest* published by the National Center for Policy Analysis (Texas). We call ours the “Bluegrass Digest” and it is now a staple on the monthly tables of our more than 1,600 e-mail readers.

(Chris Derry, Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, USA)

Contracting Out

In the early stages, many institutes hope they can find the perfect policy analyst who can address every topic. Those people don’t usually exist. Instead, consider contracting out research opportunities to the true experts in the policy area. This will not only leverage your flexibility, but it will also give you an opportunity to reach out to some potential new partners. Many institutes start out as one-person operations, relying entirely on contracting out for services. It’s not only very cost effective, but maximizes prospects for the future structure of the organization.

At the IEA we search for academics who know the relevant literature inside out. We say to them, “The scholarly journals are probably read by ten people at most. Write an overview for us in English and we will make you famous! Our first print run is 3000 and of that, 2000 go straight out on publication day!

(John Blundell, Atlas and Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)

Contracting out can be very effective and all of us use it to one degree or another. For studies, contracting out allows an institute to leverage in-house resources so as to create an inverted pyramid of impact. One year we produced seven books with three staff because of contracting out. We always peer review and pay from \$200 to \$500 depending on the length and the degree of urgency as well as the caliber of the reviewer. The better names have higher opportunity cost.

(Mike Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)

What we should be trying to do is to nurture home talent, particularly in countries where the case for the free society has not been made. One way to judge the success of an institute is to ask how many new authors it has found in the last year that were not known, big names.

(Digby Anderson, Social Affairs Unit, United Kingdom)

Communicating Your Ideas - Develop Media Lists

The comments below are excerpts from the article, “How Can Think Tanks Win Friends And Influence People In The Media?” by Brian Lee Crowley of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (Canada). The full text is available on the Atlas website: www.atlasusa.org under the Toolkit Section.

Having sound ideas and doing the research to back them up are certainly a key aspect of your work, but it is only one half of your job. The other half is putting a lot of energy into strategic thinking about communications, and putting that strategy into effect.

The place to start is not with ideas, but with personal relationships. Journalists are moved much more by personal contact than by the best ideas in the world. One way that they economize on scarce time is by having a staple of people, experts in their field, in whom they can have confidence, knowing that if they are told something by these people, they can put a great deal of weight on it without running the risk of looking stupid or foolish.

Put your expertise to good use. Scour the newspapers and television for people who habitually report on issues that you are interested in. Begin to feed them information, on a piecemeal basis, through calls and letters. Be selective. Carefully cull information that they can immediately recognize as allowing them to write better stories on these themes - more hard-hitting, insightful, and controversial. Be very certain of your facts (remember, this is a confidence-building exercise) and document them with care. And (this is very important) don’t be concerned at this stage about getting credit. Let the journalist look good thanks to your efforts. You will have accomplished two things. First, you will have established yourself in the journalist’s mind as a credible source, and he or she will have a sense of being indebted to you. Then, and only then, can you really expect media people to take an interest in the things that you think are important.

Through our programs and publications, we “platform” people. Once they are on media lists as experts, they pop up for years, even decades, on radio and television — all because of one institute publication. It is very attractive and we do not pay much at all because the “research” is a sunk cost!

(John Blundell, Atlas and Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)



FUNDRAISING

If You Don't Ask, You Don't Get

Believe it or not, the number one reason people give money is because they were asked.

When you approach potential donors, remember that you are giving them a great opportunity. If you have done your homework and identified a potential donor who has a reason to be interested in your ideas, you are not asking them for a favor. Rather, you are offering them a way to act on their interests — but your institute will do all the work! Approaching fundraising this way enables you to project confidence and speak with pride and passion about your institute's work.

It is important to link fundraising with marketing and the programs. Donors want to see what has actually been published in their own area of interest. On the other hand, if possible (and it is not always possible) it is helpful to keep donors away from sponsoring particular pieces of work, in case editorial independence is lost.

(Philip Booth, Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)

With regards to products:

People give because they expect something back. They buy a specific study, review, magazine, but they also give because they care for a better future for themselves and their families; they support because they know that by doing so someone – i.e. LyD – is worrying about laws and political and administrative measures that will affect their lives – their business, their children's education, their political environment – in the near future.

(Denise Couyoumdjian, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)

Effective Stewardship

The manner in which you steward today's donors will greatly affect your donors of tomorrow. Pay attention to the seemingly small details. Recognize, for example, that the thank you letter is one of the most important tools for cultivation. As a general rule of thumb, send

thank you letters within 24 hours of receiving the donation. Be sure that there are no errors, the salutation is correct, and a handwritten note is included.

Seek Broad-Based Support

Many intellectual entrepreneurs ask us for our top 10 list of grant making foundations. "Who are the foundations that everyone gets their money from?"

The answer? There is no magic list. Sure, there are a handful of foundations that support many institutes in our free-market network, but it is unwise to rely on these few donors to sustain you. In fact, the most successful institutes are those who have discovered and nurtured their own new donors.

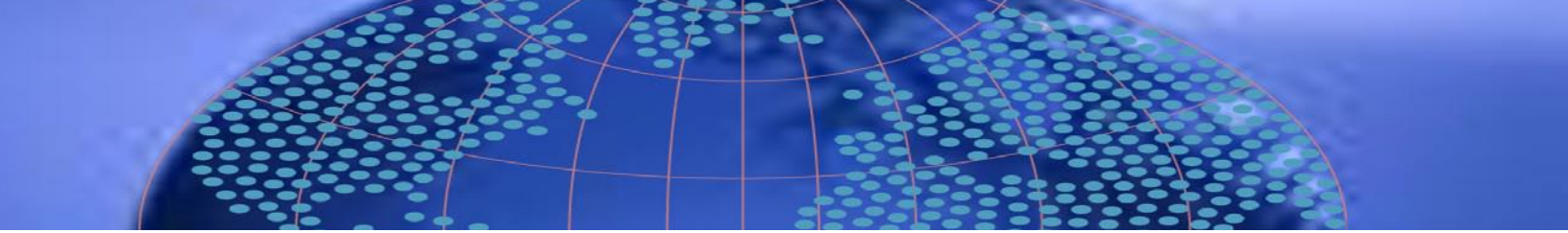
Furthermore, avoid having one large donor. If you have the good fortune of securing one big grant, consider it the beginning of a good track record and nothing more. Don't become complacent and feel as if fundraising is under control. Markets can change, donor portfolios can change, and donors can simply change their minds. Several institutes have experienced devastating blows when informed that their "big donor" will no longer be contributing. Avoid the situation by diversifying - it can only bring benefits to your overall strength and growth.

To approach possible new donors we look for information through friends; in lists of enterprises and entrepreneurs; in newspaper information; we search in civil society institutions and business associations. To get to individuals we use mailing lists from which we select the most probable customers.

(Denise Couyoumdjian, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)

We believe in the safety of numbers...having large numbers of people contributing, on the whole, modest sums of money to make up our budget so that none of them are dominant or can try and influence what we are doing.

(Lord Harris, Founder, Institute of Economic Affairs, United Kingdom)



Because a great deal of time must be devoted to fundraising, one tends to want to go to a few sources for large amounts rather than go through the more time consuming process of soliciting many sources for smaller amounts. However, if you upset one of your few sources, and sooner or later you will, your institute may not survive the withdrawal of funds. I know of no instance where a supporter, who held an overbearing position, didn't use it, even though not really meaning to. The ability of the institute to maintain its program the way it wants depends upon the diversity of support, otherwise you become someone's pawn.

(Antony Fisher, Founder, Atlas Economic Research Foundation, USA)

Fundraising is difficult everywhere, but especially in countries (such as most of European countries, not to mention the developing world) where there is no culture of think tanks, nor an adequate tax exemption system. Sometimes one could be tempted to rely on "foreign aid", even [if it is] private. [This aid] is, of course, most welcomed, and we should all be grateful to the great generosity of those American individuals and firms that want to help the cause of liberty in other parts of the world too. Atlas's help, as the godfather of us all, is very precious too. But I always remember that Alex Chafuen told me once that developing a basis of local donors is, in the long run, the only way to firmly establish a think tank in a given national environment. This is not because people living in your own country may be more willing to donate to somebody who speaks their own language and knows their own political situation: it is so because a think tank should be understood as a legitimate part of society, not as an external actor.

(Alberto Mingardi, Istituto Bruno Leoni, Italy)

Writing articles to the media with the institution's byline can be a double edged way of fundraising and gaining publicity.

(James Shikwati, Inter Region Economic Network, Kenya)

It is always easier to maintain and upgrade current donors than to get new ones. We are also constantly looking for information on enterprises, to find out whether they are in difficulties, if there are fusions, if they are sold, how not to lose them. Periodically, you need to give additional or better services as the market changes and the information you used to give can be freely attained or becomes avail-

able in another way, etc. It is important to create a partnership with donors. If they gave to you once, you have to try to keep him or her as a donor, and your actions must be focused on how to keep them. The donor wants to know that his money is well spent. He appreciates the fact that we are worrying about problems 3 or 6 months ahead, and we are constantly analyzing the current situation and forecasting the problems. The key concept is that donors will finance and continue financing if they see results.

(Denise Couyoumdjian, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)

Grant Reporting Requirements

The Atlas Economic Research Foundation sits on both sides of the fundraising equation: it raises money from donors, but it also makes small seed grants to institutes during their start up years. In its role as a grant maker, Atlas finds it remarkable to see the number of institutes that fail to comply with grant making reporting requirements. You can be sure that this information is duly noted in our files!

Be sure that you clearly understand the grant reporting requirements and that you submit these requirements on time, without prompting from the grant maker.

As think tanks promoting a market economy, you will uphold the principle of transparency as one of the pillars of sound economics. The same principle must apply in your relationship between your organization and those who choose to financially support your work. Financial reporting has at least three stages. First, be clear in proposals about how you will spend the money, focusing not just on salaries and office equipment, but also on measurable activities and outcomes. Secondly, provide clear, concise, outcome-based reports to donors who have supported a specific project throughout the life of the project. In other words, as you find success, share the stories with those who helped make them possible. Finally, when the project is complete, provide a thorough report which lists not only activities but also how and why these activities helped you achieve the stated mission of your organization. Business people are inundated with requests for financial support. Those who are responsible in their reporting, in addition to demonstrating integrity, will develop long-term relationships with donors which will be beneficial to both of you.

(Jerry Zandstra, formerly of Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, USA)



Beware of Vested Interests

Atlas does not seek or accept government funding. Beyond an ethical belief that we should only benefit from voluntary contributions, there is great danger when a nonprofit relies on a big donor, especially one with vested interests in political outcomes.

One of your greatest strengths is the fact that you are an independent institute, free of vested interests. This allows your authors and program participants to share perspectives and opinions that are unbiased. Similarly, never accept funding from contributors that ask you to produce research with a specific outcome. Do your best to protect this strength – and the credibility that comes with it.

Most left-wing organizations and journalists see government funding as a sign of ‘independence,’ because in their minds, it is corporations that corrupt opinion. Yet, that doesn’t seem to stop them from taking money from corporations either directly or indirectly (often through foundations funded from corporate stocks). It is going to be an uphill struggle to counter these misguided notions — and receiving money from government only adds to the burden.

(Roger Bate, American Enterprise Institute, USA)

Having warned you of the philosophical dangers of accepting government money, there is no denying that it is extremely difficult to raise money for free market causes in many countries. The US is blessed with a generous philanthropic culture that is rivaled by none. Many of our international colleagues believe that very little funding is available to them outside of government grants. In the end, only you can determine whether you should accept government funding or not.

Antony Fisher believed that government money corrupts, which is why Atlas and many others in the network refuse to accept money from government.

The Fraser Institute came by its prohibition against taking government money because it was once suckered into taking government funding. A government department asked us to do a study, we said no. The government department asked how much would it cost to do the study if you were willing to do it? We told them. They then asked

a government funded think tank how much they would charge...the answer was three times as large as the Fraser Institute estimate. The government department now came to the Institute and said, “won’t you save the taxpayers 2.2 million dollars by doing this project? We did it and it was a great success but it distracted us from what we really should have been doing. That was twenty years ago and we have never done another one and never shall. Beware of governments offering gifts!

(Michael Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)

Civitas shares a floor with 18 “voluntary sector” organizations. Our institute, along with only one other institute, does not accept government funding. We are regarded as very eccentric. One of the organizations, which depended entirely on government funding, went bankrupt last year because the terms under which their grants were awarded kept changing and there were long delays in the grant dispersals. Meanwhile they had hired offices and staff and eventually their bank foreclosed on them. One day the staff was told to go home - unpaid - and for weeks we could hear their phones ringing as young people on employment schemes (their line of work) were ringing in to find out why their mentors weren’t in touch. It was tragic, and a lesson - in case I needed one - that you don’t take state money if you want to preserve your integrity.

(Robert Whelan, Civitas- The Institute for the Study of Civil Society, United Kingdom)

On the other hand, some institutes in the Atlas network are engaged in government work to differing extents: some perform contract work for privatization, others offer deregulation advice or serve on advisory boards.

We have no public financing from the Government and we do not work for private consultancies. We only do some consultancies in other countries if it clearly fits into our objective of studying public policies and helping to add internationally compared experience.

(Denise Couyoumdjian, Libertad y Desarrollo, Chile)

In the end, what matters most is the work you do rather than who funds it. Consequently, (a) avoid doing things that directly undermine your credibility and (b) avoid becoming merely a subcontractor for the government, constraining what you say in order to keep the government happy.



..... BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Directors and Trustees and the “Give, Get, or Get Off” Rule

If your think tank is to last over the long-term, you will want to organize it with a Board of Directors or Trustees, which is legally responsible for oversight of the organization and hiring/firing its chief executive officer.

Take great care in creating your Board of Directors. In the early stages, it is tempting to invite anyone who expresses interest in your work to join the board. But remember, it is much harder to “dis-invite” than it is to invite. Someone who does not work out can do a lot of damage that will be tough to undo.

When you invite people to join the board, be clear on expectations, including the expected financial contribution. Consider writing a job description which includes expectations about fund raising, meetings, etc. Some institutes offer a clear term limit. This protects both sides. The prospective board member will know how long his minimum commitment will be. The institute will have an easy way out (by not renewing the term) for a board member who has not worked out.

On the other hand, some colleagues regard this strategy as “a leadership cop-out.” From this perspective, you decide what’s best for the institute and take the necessary actions to achieve it, even if it results in hurt feelings. If the board member is truly committed to enhancing your institute’s effectiveness, they should be supportive of your well-intentioned efforts.

The wrong board can kill you; the right board can help you with potential authors, employees, the media, fundraising, etc. It makes all the difference in the world to your fundraising to have your potential donor recognize the names of some of your board as friends of his. It does half the selling job. If you have to delay starting your organization to get the right board, do so. I would try to get the board members to agree on some minimum contribution, say \$10,000, either giving it personally or raising it for you. It would be a great way to start an institute, as

other donors ask how much support your board gives. If you say ‘little,’ they wonder why they should give. However, board members are skeptical at first. Then after you get some news coverage, they want to have a lunch for you and invite all these CEO friends. Their interest builds as you begin to do things.

(John Goodman, National Center for Policy Analysis, USA)

There is a down side to having pressure on your Board to produce the money. That is they may reciprocate by putting the pressure on you to have a role in what the Institute does or in setting its mission. That is a mistake. The Board should not be involved in setting the policy agenda. The Board should be involved in setting the mission at the outset and then leave the policy content of the work alone. If they are doing a lot of work to raise the money they may forget this separation of powers.

(Michael Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)

A widely accepted rule about boards is that they must “Give, Get, or Get off.” Board members who do not lead to financial or in-kind support are simply not carrying their weight. Look for other ways for these folks to help out, but get them off the board!

Don’t invite people who have never contributed to you in the hopes that being on your board might finally get them to. Make board membership something that you bestow on people who have already demonstrated their support and otherwise proven themselves to your cause.

(Lawrence W. Reed, Mackinac Center for Public Policy, USA)

Optimal Size of Board

In talking to institutes worldwide, there is general agreement that a workable board should be limited to no more than 15-20 members. If you are in the fortunate position to have more potential board members than there is room, there are several options to consider.

Advisory Board, “Emeritus Boards” and other Board Options

Advisory Boards are great ways to include folks who do not fit the “give, get, or get off” rule, but who you feel have important knowledge and input to contribute. Such boards are not governing bodies, but enable opportunities to keep people active and involved. Here, you can use well-known names of people who you may only call on from time to time. The commitment on both sides is much more informal, allowing both parties to benefit from a looser arrangement.

The academic advisory board is recruited from established academics, who are accepted authorities in their various subjects, and are sympathetic with the objectives of the institute. The institute seeks academic credibility and the advisory board members’ names, appearing on the letterhead and in the publications, act as a certification to that effect. Every effort is made to insure rigorous analysis, and these names, associated with and indirectly responsible for the work, are a form of guarantee. These advisors may assist in reviewing manuscripts, for which they are paid, as well as advising on suitable researchers and authors for forthcoming books, and also on universities or libraries needing them.

Lawrence W. Reed at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy also suggests creating regional boards, which group board members geographically. These people can be particularly helpful if you anticipate tackling issues that will have regional relevance.

At the Fraser Institute, the Board of Trustees takes care of the business side of the organization. The Executive Advisory Committee manages the monthly running of the Institute, while the Executive Director runs the day-to-day affairs. The Editorial Board controls what is published. The Board of Trustees usually does not see a publication until its printed; it has no input over what gets published; that is the responsibility of the Editorial Advisory Board and the Executive Officers. The Board of Trustees does not have anything to do with the intellectual side of the organization. Thus, everyone in the boardroom knows where the lines are drawn. Businesspeople may know their business but that doesn’t mean they know the idea business.
(Mike Walker, The Fraser Institute, Canada)



Former Atlas fellow, Dr. Mico Mrkaic (Slovenia) discusses ways that individuals can get involved in his think tank efforts in Slovenia.

If your board members are not contributing to the organization, ask them to step down — or be creative in demoting them. One established institute ran into difficulties with aging board members — they were not actively contributing to the organization and were not stepping down. These board members were moved to a special emeritus board created especially for them. An executive committee of five more youthful members of the area’s business community was formed.

(Kurt Weber, State Policy Network, USA)

Business Council

A Business Council is a way of adding prestigious names for your fundraising without increasing the size of your board, and without requiring any financial or advisory responsibilities of people who are too busy to serve on your board. The use of their names does signify approval of your objectives, for which an institute is extremely grateful.

(Antony Fisher, Founder, Atlas Economic Research Foundation, USA)

..... THE BROADER FREE MARKET NETWORK

Finding New Audiences and Allies

Reach out to new audiences and involve new people whenever possible. You can never tell when an issue will resonate with someone. Too often, people do not embrace our ideas because they have never really had an opportunity to hear the issues, talk to someone about them, or read an eye-opening book. Many of our colleagues came to our ideas, for example, when someone took the time to give them books. F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* and Ludwig von Mises's *Human Action* seem to be the most frequently cited books that helped lead our colleagues to their free-market perspectives.

When you are just getting started, you can create new opportunities to reach out to potential allies. Seek out areas of agreement among players, rather than differences, without straying from your guiding principles. For many institutes, economic issues are relatively safe bets to promote free market ideas, whereas social issues can be much more divisive.

Check Out other Organizations that Serve the Think Tank Movement

There are several other organizations that play a “service” role for other think tanks. Some of Atlas's prominent partners include the Cato Institute, Economic Freedom Network, Fraser Institute, Heritage Foundation, International Policy Network, the Leadership Institute, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the Stockholm Network, and the State Policy Network. Once again, make liberal use of Atlas's online resources (calendar, classifieds, directory, toolkit) to learn more about these organizations, their events and the products they offer.

Under such circumstances where liberal individuals are scarce, your best friends are organizations. I won't exclude organizations existing outside your country like Atlas, the International Policy Network, etc; but, of course, what I have in mind is organizations working inside your country. *(Khalil Ahmad, Alternate Solutions Institute, Pakistan)*

Maintaining a wide network of organizations you can tap into will strengthen the image and effectiveness of your institute to your donors and target audience.



1st Annual Asian Resource Bank, September 2004 (Hong Kong)

Operating in “Difficult Climates” — Foster Partnerships

Many Atlas colleagues operate in “difficult climates” — environments in which corruption is high, rule of law is weak, and philanthropic culture is virtually nonexistent. Many of these “heroes” have survived by partnering and collaborating with other institutes, particularly in the early stages. Don’t hesitate to ask a well-established institute for help.

The larger your network, the stronger you are. The network must be extended and must not be limited to only your city or your country’s internal regions, even if the think tank is focused on very local topics. Sometimes solutions for local problems are re-exported and invented and it is only then that people see results in other places. Foreign recognition is an important part of your think tank’s reputation that will make your ideas more marketable and your leadership more attractive.

(Paata Sheshelidze, New Economic School, Georgia)

Remember, the Competitive Model Works for Think Tanks, Too!

Often, Atlas hears the comment “Oh, we already have a free market think tank in my state...or my city.” Well, that’s great! The more the merrier. If you’ve done your homework, and find that there is an important niche for what you have to offer, then turn your “competitors” into positive collaborators in your efforts. Established institutes can share their products with new institutes, which can in turn update, supplement or translate their research. This can create a climate in which institutes learn from one another’s mistakes and triumphs while also stimulating competition.

Use your competitors to your advantage: remind donors of how you are part of a bigger, collaborative movement of think tanks, each working to secure and protect free markets. You don’t have to undervalue your role, but let them see how you are part of a worldwide movement. This helps put the risk of investing in your new operation in a broader perspective. You may be new, but you’re building upon decades of experience earned and shared by others.



Kevin Gentry of the Koch Charitable Foundation (USA) leads an in-depth discussion on fundraising during an Atlas-hosted leadership seminar for think tank leaders in October of 2005.

Be sure your institute is included with any and all lists of organizations in your state, region or city. The Portland, Oregon, public library system maintains a computer database of some 6,000 nonprofit organizations and associations. The Local Information Connection (LINC) contains information on groups such as their meeting times, membership information and mission statement. Similarly, see if your organization’s brochure can be included with the local Welcome Wagon packet for newcomers or set out at the Chamber of Commerce office.

(Kurt Weber, State Policy Network, USA)

Let’s Get Started

Once you decide to transform your ideas into action – to start a free-market public policy institute in your country – be sure you get involved in the broader Atlas network. We are here to help. Don’t hesitate to ask for feedback or suggestions for any situation you find yourself facing. One of the most rewarding tasks each of our intellectual entrepreneurs faces is the pleasure of helping to expand our efforts. Together we are making an important difference to promote freedom around the world. Welcome aboard!

I’m very happy that you consider me a part of the family. It’s a family to be proud of. I want to share with the family all our experiences, our success and our problems, our good and bad times.

(Andrés Mejía-Vergnaud, Instituto Libertad y Progreso, Colombia)



“Atlas’s coverage of the world on behalf of liberty is truly remarkable. In seventy or more countries it is helping think tanks spread an understanding of free markets or engaged in creating think tanks that will do so. More power to it.”

—Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman,
September 2005