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On Think Tanks Conference 2025 & 2026

Concept note for partners

The On Think Tanks (OTT) Conference brings together thinktankers, funders and policy experts from around the world to exchange knowledge, establish and strengthen partnerships, and co-develop solutions to common sector challenges.

We are seeking partners to support the 2025 Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, co-hosted with the [South African Institute for International Affairs](#) and the [New South Institute](#) in June 2025, and the 2026 Conference in Rabat, Morocco, in partnership with the [Policy Center for the New South](#) *(date to be confirmed)*.

About the conference

Partnerships and participation

On Think Tanks is the leading global source of information, support and community for people working in, with and funding think tanks. Our conferences are designed to create opportunities for formal and informal interactions and for participants to co-create sessions on topics that are relevant and meaningful to them.

The Conference is organised in collaboration with partners. Long-standing funders include the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Mercator Stiftung. Strategic partnerships include Southern Voice, Soapbox, Sociopúblico, Universidad del Pacífico, University of Bath, and the German Council for Foreign Relations.

Each year the Conference is hosted by a local think tank in a different city. Previous conferences have been hosted by the University of Bath (2017 and 2018),

Foraus (2019), Chatham House (2023), and Fundació Bofill (2024). In 2020, 2021, and 2022, the Conference moved online due to the global pandemic.

OTT has also supported several local conferences creating space for more context-specific discussions at the country or regional level: Johannesburg (2018), Washington DC (2019), Mexico and South Asia (2021), Malaysia and Saudi Arabia (2022), Europe (2022 and 2023), Madrid, Lima, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Guadalajara, and Berlin (2023), and Nepal (2024).

In 2024, **OTT has partnered with over 20 think tanks** to launch the Global Think Tank State of the Sector Report and host local events to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing think tanks.

More than 900 people from 80 countries have joined OTT conferences in-person and online since 2017. The number of participants depends on the venue's capacity. The 2024 Conference was attended by 150 people from 46 countries.

What 2024 participants said

89% said they would recommend the 2025 Conference to colleagues.

96% said they created useful or very useful connections at the Conference.

94 % said they left with new ideas/knowledge/learning to help them in their work.

“Amid the current global trust deficit, I am grateful for people and spaces that generate hope. Huge thanks and congratulations to OTT for posing all the right questions for think tanks and their communities.” [Vidisha Mishra, Head of Program, Community Engagement, Global Solutions.](#)

“Amidst the stimulating discussions and dynamic exchanges [at OTT Conference], I witnessed a beautiful testament to empowerment and inclusion. Picture this: Three incredible mothers, hailing from Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina, graced the conference halls, each accompanied by their precious bundles of joy.” [Tricia Yeoh, CEO of IDEAS, Malaysia](#)

“OTT Conference was an excellent opportunity to (re)connect, learn and exchange ideas with thinktankers, funders and policy experts from around the world. For IIED Europe, it was also a great occasion to explore alliances and partnerships to help us maximise the impact of our work.” [Alexandre Fernandes, Director, IIED Europe](#)

[Explore more reactions from participants](#)

[Listen to 2024 participants talk about their conference experience.](#)

Participation has traditionally been by invitation only and free of charge.

Starting in 2024, we introduced a small fee of USD 100 for countries in the Global South and USD 200 for Global North countries to support the Conference's sustainability and

to help fund participation of think tanks from the Global South who face challenges accessing technical training and peer learning opportunities.

Conference attendees represent a diverse cross-section of thinktankers from different research/policy sectors and professions, as well as think tank scholars, funders and practitioners.

Relevance and impact

The community as the protagonist

At the OTT Conference, we grow together as a community. Each year we welcome back participants who have been members of the community for years, as well as bringing in new members. This way existing relationships are strengthened, and new ones formed.

We ensure that the Conference is designed for, and with, all actors in the evidence-informed policy ecosystem, creating a space where they feel safe, welcome and heard.

We ensure that the content is relevant for participants regardless of their policy areas or geography. For instance, the 2024 Conference featured 15 sessions co-created with over 50 participants.

Finally, we promote the use of the Conference space for participants to plan their own private meetings and take advantage of the time and travel.

The 2025 Conference will be held in the Global South for the first time. We will be co-hosted in Johannesburg, at the [South African Institute for International Affairs](#) (SAIIA) and the [New South Institute](#) (NSI). We are also building a robust coalition of local partners, including the Institute for Security Studies, the Institute for Global Dialogue, NEPAD's Policy Bridge Tank and Southern Hemisphere. More partners to come.

Hosting the Conference in South Africa the same year the country will host the **G20**, will bring unique and diverse perspectives to the dialogues, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. OTT will aim to coordinate with the T20 organising Committee and include context-specific sessions to reflect on the T20 and its agenda.

An inclusive approach

Youth participation: In 2024, we encouraged the participation of younger voices from student think tanks to co-lead sessions as part of our [Building for the Future initiative](#).

Care arrangements: We supported the attendance of think tank leaders and their young children by including a “baby room” in the venue.

Regional focus: We allocated time for regional meetings, allowing for a local-level focus in a global conference.

Open space for new ideas: We held an “unconference” session, inviting the community to propose topics they want to discuss.

Sharing knowledge

We take the following measures to share conference insights with the broader community:

We record and publish the keynote addresses and public event.

We assign a designated notetaker to all sessions and publish the main ideas and topics discussed.

We invite participants and speakers to share reflections and knowledge from the conference via our platform.

2024 keynote addresses:

- [Liliana Alvarado on the relationship between think tanks and their communities](#)
- [Tricia Yeoh on communities and bottom-up accountability](#)
- [Elizabeth Sidiropoulos on think tanks and youth](#)
- [Ismael Palacin on think tanks and trust](#)

[View the OTT Conference 2024 series](#)

Request for support

Our commitment for the next two years is to bring the OTT Conference to the Global South: 2025 in South Africa and 2026 in Morocco. We anticipate an even greater impact and engagement from these events and seek partners to help fund and deliver them.

Supporting the OTT Conference will help the evidence-informed policy community worldwide exchange, learn, and grow as a sector. We hope that this will be an opportunity for you to establish and strengthen relationships across the sector, too.

Support may include:

- A financial contribution to the overall event delivery
- Funding attendance of participants from the Global South
- An in-kind contribution to support event delivery
- Sponsoring sessions, fringe events or social activities

Research funders who support the OTT Conference are also invited to join the OTT Funders Circle, which brings together think tank donors from across the world. We will host a meeting of the members at the conference.



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