



# OTT Conference 2026: Think tanks & trust

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## Session Proposal Guidelines

Across public life, trust has eroded- consensus is rare, and evidence can be ignored or instrumentalised. This raises a core question for our community: are think tanks still trustworthy and relevant actors?

Together, we will explore how trust is built, lost, and rebuilt. We will ask: Is trust earned, negotiated, contested? How can think tanks move from being seen as distant elites to becoming credible actors in public debate? What strategies work when governments actively sow mistrust by labelling think tanks as elitist, foreign, or anti-national? What can be done when civil society perceives them as detached, technocratic, or dominated by elites? And is it a lack of trust behind the burdensome reporting requirements funders impose?

If trust is indeed the “ultimate currency,” then think tanks must learn not only how to earn it, but how to spend it wisely. The 2026 OTT Conference is an invitation to join this critical conversation: to shape a collective understanding of trust, and to ensure that think tanks remain trustworthy in a world where trust itself is under siege.

## Agenda

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The Conference will take place on 19-21 May 2026 at the Policy Center for the New South, Rabat, Morocco.

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

## How the programme will be built

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For 2026, OTT will propose the **overarching themes for each programme slot (4 in total)** and an **initial set of potential topics for the parallel sessions**. You can also suggest additional topics that are not included. Invitees may then choose how to participate:

- **Session leader** – submit a short pitch outlining the proposed focus of a session within the chosen slot/theme.
- **Facilitator** – help shape and run the discussion.

- **Speaker** – submit the perspective or experience you plan to bring to a chosen session.

Choosing only one role is fine; combining roles is also possible.

OTT will review all submissions and appoint session leaders. Leaders may receive travel support if required and available. OTT will then connect each leader with facilitators and speakers whose choices align so that the group can refine the session's focus, format, and methodology.

The programme is a **living document**. The structure and sessions may evolve depending on confirmed participants and the balance of topics, regions, and formats.

## Proposing a parallel session: key information

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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:

- **Your role(s):** lead / facilitate / speak.
- **Preferred session(s):** aligned to the proposal sessions.
- **If leading:** a brief pitch with focus and objectives
- **If speaking:** a short perspective clarifying your angle.

OTT reviews submissions on a rolling basis, appoints leaders, and then confirms facilitators and speakers per session. We may propose combining complementary proposals to enrich participation and avoid duplication. The final deadline for session proposals is **31 January 2026**.

## 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

- 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.
- Ensure that all session's participants are registered to the Conference before submitting the final blurb.
- Alerting us of any changes to the agreed session.
- Delivering the session along with the other speakers during the conference.

## Timeline for leads

Activity	Responsible	Deadline
Selection of leads	OTT	November 31, 2025
Groups conformation	OTT with the lead's suggestions	January 31, 2026
Session's initial blurb	Lead	February 28, 2026
Session's methodology, names and roles of participants (registered), and further description	Lead agrees with the group	March 31, 2026
Final Blurb and materials requested	Lead	April 15, 2026

**Questions and comments: contact Camila Ulloa at**  
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