

Think Tank Typologies:
Which Typology Best Fits with the Mission and Core Values of
NCAI Policy Research Center?

A Report Prepared for the NCAI Policy Research Center

November 2005

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Executive Summary

This report was prepared for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center. The purpose of the report is to provide recommendations as to models and characteristics that would be most useful to consider in establishing and implementing the Policy Research Center. As background information for this analysis, the authors conducted a literature review on U.S. think tanks and an overview of existing think tank models nationwide to be included in a separate report. The background report analyzed many diverse think tanks; particular attention was paid to:

- The establishment of each center/brief history;
- Funding level and sources;
- Governance structure;
- Administrative structure, including staffing;
- Types of products; and
- Use of materials.

Initially, thirty-five think tanks were investigated (out of approximately 1,500 in the U.S.) based on diversity, names commonly mentioned in the literature, and those most often cited in mainstream media/news. From that group, sixteen were chosen for further exploration, and more detailed information was gathered for the think tanks in this group.

Once the background information was collected and evaluated, this separate report was created comparing the mission and core values of the Policy Research Center to the mainstream models, and suggestions were made about which model would be the best fit for the Policy Research Center to consider adapting for its use.

After discussing what is meant by the term “think tank” in the literature, three typologies of think tanks are evaluated – academic, contract, and advocacy. In evaluating the different types of think tanks, the report focuses on what is meant by “independence” and how different types of think tanks understand independence. The authors conclude that independence is liberally interpreted and depends largely on the mission and core values of a particular organization. In addition, the concept of independence is insufficient for determining whether an organization is a think tank. The key factor used to distinguish between think tanks and lobbying groups in this report is whether the organization has as its primary concern providing research findings from social science experts to policymakers.

Based on the mission and core values of the Policy Research Center, the authors recommend a contract typology as the best model for the Policy Research Center. This does not mean that other types of think tanks are not valuable for the Advisory Council to consider. What it does suggest is that the contract typology has the most in common with what the Advisory Council has in mind for the Policy Research Center. This report also raises questions about whether the use of the term think tank produces more confusion than clarity when talking about assembling a committee of experts to discuss important

policy issues facing Indian Country. To help reduce this uncertainty, the authors recommend adopting a term that can be easily understood within Indian Country.

The Need for a National Think Tank in Indian Country

In recent decades, contemporary American Indian and Alaska Native tribes have become increasingly sophisticated self-determining governments. At the same time, new pressures and challenges have amplified the need for innovative approaches to education of policymakers and the public at large, and to the development of proactive strategies for tribes to move forward. Devolution is shifting the nature of tribes' relationships with federal and state governments. Supreme Court decisions demonstrating a void in understanding of tribal governments have brought federal Indian law to an uncertain crossroads. Federal appropriations, which are central to fulfillment of the U.S. trust responsibility to tribes, have been on a consistent downward trend, threatening the progress of tribes in building healthy communities. In this complex political landscape, tribal leaders have requested sound, defensible data. Recognizing this need, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Education Fund began to explore the possibility of launching a national policy research center.

In the Winter of 2003, NCAI secured seed funding for a national policy research center that would focus solely on issues facing tribal communities. Developed under an advisory council of tribal leaders, Native scholars, tribal organization heads, regional Indian policy center directors, private sector researchers, and state policymakers, this tribally-driven consortium of existing research bodies and primary researchers will be equipped to gather and assess data on conditions and trends in Indian Country, and will serve to support and inform the policy development efforts of tribal leaders, tribal organizations, Congress, and the Administration with objective data and analysis. In so doing, the NCAI Policy Research Center can help to provide the tools necessary to inform public policy debates with meaningful information and assist in shifting the discourse in Native policy from a problem-focused approach to truly proactive, future-thinking strategy development.

The Think Tank Concept

The term “think tank” was first used by the military during World War II (Abelson, 2002; Rich, 2004; Smith, 1991). The term was used to refer to a type of secure environment where military planners could have discussions about strategy (Abelson, 2002). Currently, in mainstream society, think tanks are now associated with a type of nonacademic institute where the brightest minds are gathered together to address societies most pressing social, economic, and political problems (Abelson, 2002).

Scholars have not been able to agree on how to define the term think tank (Abelson, 2002; McGann & Weaver, 2000; Smith, 1991; Diane Stone & Denham, 2004). McGann and Weaver (2000) define a think tank as, “... a policy research organization that has significant autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties” (p. 5). Rich (2004) defines think tanks as, “independent, non-interest-based, nonprofit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process” (p. 11). These are but a few ways that scholars have defined the term think tank (see also, Abelson, 1996, 2002; Smith, 1991; Donald Stone, 1996; Diane Stone & Denham, 2004).¹

Dictionaries also vary in how they define a think tank. For example, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines a think tank as, “an institute, corporation, or group organized for interdisciplinary research (as in technological and social problems)” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2005, para. 1). Whereas, Encarta World English Dictionary defines a think tank as, “consultative committee: a committee of experts that undertakes research or gives advice, especially to a government” (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2005, para. 1).²

While scholars have not been able to come up with a consensus definition for the term think tank, there are similarities or basic themes in most definitions. When talking about think tanks in America, scholars commonly refer to them as a type of independent, nonprofit organization designed to affect the policy process through the creation and dissemination of scholarly research.³

Typology of the American Think Tank

Think tanks come in all sizes with staff ranging from one or two staff members to several hundred. Abelson (2002) notes, however, that “... a typical American think tank more closely resembles the Acadia Institute of Bar Harbor, Maine, which has a full-time

¹ See Appendix A for additional ways the term think tank has been defined.

² While there clearly are two different meanings associated with the term think tank, for purposes of clarity, it is recommended that the Policy Research Center select a term that conveys a similar meaning to think tank but can be more readily understood by Indian people when referring to a think tank forum.

³ This usage of the term think tank is more consistent with how the NCAI Policy Research Center itself has been defined than how the Policy Research Center has discussed sponsoring think tank forums. In fact, the term “policy research center” is often used synonymously with think tank in the literature (see for e.g., Abelson, 1996, 2002; Smith, 1991; Diane Stone & Denham, 2004).

staff of ten and a budget between \$250,000 and \$500,000, than the world-renowned Brookings Institute” (p. 17).⁴ As a consequence, size is not necessarily a defining characteristic of a think tank. In addition, think tanks vary in terms of, “specialization, research output and ideological orientation, and greatly in terms of their institutional independence” (Abelson, 2002, p. 8). The one characteristic that distinguishes think tanks from other organizations and policy-making communities is their emphasis on research and analysis (Abelson, 2002). However, as Abelson (2002) points out, “as think tanks place greater emphasis on marketing their ideas and as interest groups invest more resources in building a stronger research capacity, the characteristics distinguishing the two will become increasingly blurred” (p. 11). Maintaining separate functions and separate identities is one of the challenges that NCAI and the Policy Research Center face.⁵

Since scholars have not been able to come to a consensus on how to define what a think tank is, they have tried to create typologies to account for the many different kinds of think tanks that currently exist (see for e.g., Abelson, 2002; McGann & Weaver, 2000; Donald Stone, 1996), while also acknowledging that some think tanks cannot be neatly packaged into any one of the categories (Abelson, 2002). Abelson (2002) has identified five types of think tanks: (1) Universities without Students, (2) Government Contractors, (3) Advocacy Think Tanks, (4) Legacy-Based Think Tanks, and (5) Policy Clubs. Weaver and McGann and Weaver (2000) have argued that there are four types of think tanks: (1) Academic (university without students), (2) Contract Researchers, (3) Advocacy Tanks, (4) and Party Think Tanks. For the purposes of this report, the authors will use the first three typologies from both McGann and Weaver (2000) and Abelson (2002). The rationale for this decision is that the authors believe that what McGann and Weaver (2000) have referred to as party think tanks⁶ adequately capture what Abelson (2002) refers to as legacy-based think tank and policy clubs. Also, it is recognized that party think tanks are least like what the Advisory Council for the Policy Research Center has described as their desire for the Center to become. We have chosen to address the three categories that there is consensus for in the literature and that most resemble what the Advisory Council has outlined on as their desire for Policy Research Center.

University without Students/Academic Think Tanks

This type of think tank usually hires academics (usually PhDs) that have a proven track record in research and publications in scholarly journals. Unlike at actual universities, the researchers are not required to teach. Abelson states that, “they function like universities in the sense that their principal mission is to promote a greater understanding of important social, economic, and political issues confronting society”

⁴ This might be a good goal for the end of the first year for staffing and a minimum budget.

⁵ As will be discussed in more detail later in the report, maintaining separate functions is not necessarily the same as having no direct relationship with NCAI.

⁶ A party think tank is “organized around the issues and platform of a political party and are often staffed by current or former party officials, politicians, and party members” (McGann & Weaver, 2000)

(Abelson, 2002, p. 18). The Brookings Institution and the Hoover Institution are examples of two of the largest academic think tanks in America (Abelson, 2002).⁷

Academic think tanks emphasize medium and long-term research projects that produce book length studies (Abelson, 2002). They are more likely to, “focus on issues that policy makers may want to consider in years to come” (Abelson, 2002, p. 23). Academic think tanks are portrayed as independent organizations that adhere to a rigorous standard for conducting objective research. They are typically funded by a number of different foundations, corporations, and individuals (McGann & Weaver, 2000). The agendas of academic think tanks are usually set internally and researchers play an important role in setting the agenda (McGann & Weaver, 2000, p. 7). Their institutional structure is in line with their emphasis on objectivity in research. However, this emphasis on the objectivity of research and the level of rigor demanded in their research is at odds sometimes with their desire to impact policy (McGann & Weaver, 2000), one of the key functions that scholars have attributed to think tanks.

As the Brookings Institution is an example of a multi-issue, national, academic think tank, it is helpful to examine some of its qualities that might be most informative to the development of the Policy Research Center. The Brookings Institution was established in 1916 by Robert Brookings, a wealthy St. Louis merchant. It was originally identified as a conservative think tank, but in more recent times it has been considered to be left leaning. While it has been suggested that Brookings is left leaning, they do not identify themselves as championing a particular ideology; in fact they staunchly deny it, “The remedies our scholars propose are rooted in open-minded inquiry, not in dogma or doctrine” (The Brookings Institute, 2005). Furthermore, Brookings does not respond to the day-to-day policy issues as their primary function. Their philosophy is to be proactive and to provide policy makers with information that will help them see into the future.

While Brookings allows its researchers to play a large role in setting the research agenda, their board of trustees has the right to veto research projects that they think do not fit the goals of Brookings (Dye, 2002). Thus, the board of trustees and researchers both shape the research agenda.

Brookings strives to maintain its public perception as an independent organization, which is able to set its own research agenda. Through their endowment, they are able to remain a more independent organization. Their funding model might serve as one for the Policy Research Center, as it would allow the Center to address both long term and controversial issues in Indian Country. Organizations that are heavily dependent upon grants are more likely to be perceived as being run by the agencies that provide those grants, particularly, if they receive a large sum of money from any one particular agency or donor. It is hard to avoid such perceptions in today’s more limited funding climate.

⁷ For additional information on the mission statement and core values of the Brookings Institute see Appendix C. Of particular interest is their emphasis on conducting nonpartisan research.

Brookings Institution has applied a cross disciplinary approach to studying public policy issues (Smith, 1991). The founders of the Brookings Institution saw the Institute as a way of overcoming the educational specialization taking place in universities (Smith, 1991). When talking about the cross disciplinary nature of Brookings, its website states:

We've maintained a commitment both to the discipline of the social sciences and to the value of the interdisciplinary approach, especially when dealing with the complex and cross-cutting issues of a world that is drawing closer together and in which the lines are blurring between the domestic and the foreign, the local and the global. (The Brookings Institute, 2005)

The idea of bringing together a cross disciplinary team to address the issues facing Indian Country has been a reoccurring theme in Policy Research Center Advisory Council meetings. Brookings might provide a good model for how to bring such teams together to work on an issue. Here we have only mentioned a few of the characteristics of the Brookings Institution that might be helpful to consider as the Policy Research Center moves forward.

Contract Think Tanks

RAND and the Urban Institute are examples of contract think tanks.⁸ Like academic think tanks, contract think tanks hire staff with strong academic backgrounds. They also emphasize doing research that is rigorous and strive to maintain the perception that the research is objective and credible (McGann & Weaver, 2000).

Contract think tanks can be distinguished from the academic think tank primarily by their funding sources, their principle client, how they set their agenda, and the type of outputs they produce (Abelson, 2002; McGann & Weaver, 2000). Contract think tanks are usually funded by government agencies, and the funders typically play a large role in setting the agenda that the think tanks pursues (McGann & Weaver, 2000). The outputs of contract think tanks often take the form of a report that is submitted to the funding agency rather than publicly circulated books and articles, but these are usually still made publicly available in a downloadable form on their websites (McGann & Weaver, 2000). Since contract think tanks have their agendas primarily set by their funders, who are often policy makers, their research typically has policy relevance (McGann & Weaver, 2000). While this is an advantage, it also can present problems when the funder tries to influence the results of a study or stop a study that is contrary to the funders position from being published (McGann & Weaver, 2000). In such a case, the objectivity of the research is called into question.

RAND is a primary example of a contract think tank. It came into existence in 1947 to advise the U.S. Air Force on intercontinental warfare (Slee Smith, 1971). At the time, military leadership felt that the military was overburdened with immediate issues and that they could not devote sufficient time to analyzing the massive amounts of data

⁸ For more information on RAND's mission statement and expression of core values see appendix D. Of particular interest is their focus on conducting disinterested research.

they received on a daily basis. In addition, they sought to have a group of experts assembled, that would not be likely to be influenced by partisan interests, to advise them. While RAND funding stream is largely limited to government agencies, they still pride themselves in doing objective research:

Almost at once, RAND developed a unique style, blending scrupulous nonpartisanship with rigorous, fact-based analysis to tackle society's most pressing problems. (RAND Corporation, 2005, para. 1)

In 1948, RAND became an independent, nonprofit corporation. However, most of its contracts are government contracts (Kaplan, 1983). This model is in contrast to academic think tanks that use multiple funders in order to maintain a strict sense of independence in setting their research agendas. RAND is largely dependent on one source for its funding and thus not truly independent financially. As a result, there are constraints on its research agenda. However, to the military, they are seen as an independent organization.

Both the Brookings Institution and RAND emphasize cross disciplinary research. RAND's commitment to a cross disciplinary approach can be seen in the following statement posted on their website, "Over time, RAND assembled a unique corps of researchers, notable not only for individual skills but also for interdisciplinary cooperation" (RAND, 2005). In the beginning, RAND assembled what they called operational research teams made up of scholars from a number of different academic disciplines (Kaplan, 1983). This is a similar model to what the NCAI Policy Research Center has explored. At RAND, these operational research teams were given access to large amounts of government information and provided with a secure environment. They were asked to come up with solutions and predictions about future war scenarios.

Advocacy Think Tanks

The Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Fraser Institute are examples of advocacy think tanks (Abelson, 2002).⁹ Advocacy think tanks focus their research on providing policymakers with information on current issues that they need to know now (Abelson, 2002). These types of think tanks often try to market their ideas to particular audiences rather than maintain a more objective approach like the previous two types of think tanks (Abelson, 2002). They focus on producing short-term research that they can quickly distribute to policymakers and the media as one-to-two-page briefing notes in hopes of influencing the current policy debates as opposed to future scenarios. As McGann and Weaver (2000) characterized:

"Advocacy think tanks, while maintaining formal independence, are linked to particular ideological groupings or interests. They tend to view their role in the policy making process as winning the war of ideas rather than as a disinterested

⁹ To find out more information about the Heritage Foundation see Appendix E. Of particular interest is that they declare their ideological position as conservative, however, they maintain research as their primary goal.

search for the best policies, and they are more often than not staffed by nonacademics who are less interested in basic research.” (p. 7)

These attributes of advocacy think tanks give them the appearance of being more committed to promoting their own ideological views than do academic and contract think tanks.

As a result, studies conducted by advocacy think tanks are sometimes portrayed as being less “objective and balanced” than studies produced by academic and contract think tanks (Abelson, 2002, p. 21). However, this does not mean that these types of think tanks cannot have an impact on the policy process: the dramatic impact these think tanks can have on the policy process is well illustrated by the Heritage Foundation’s work over the last twenty years in particular.¹⁰ The question becomes, is an advocacy think tank’s influence that of a research institute or that of a lobbying organization?

In the advocacy think tank mold, Heritage characterizes their research focus in the following manner:

Our expert staff—with years of experience in business, government and on Capitol Hill—don’t just produce research. We generate solutions consistent with our beliefs and market them to the Congress, the Executive Branch, the news media and others. (The Heritage Foundation, 2005, para. 4)

In stark contrast to both Brookings and RAND, Heritage generates research solutions that are consistent with their beliefs. In addition, the idea of being a marketer of research, an idea that has transformed how think tanks conduct business, comes through in the quote above.

Unlike many other policy institutes, the Heritage Foundation has raised a considerable amount of their funders from their membership (individual contributors) over 45 percent (McGann & Weaver, 2000) the remaining funding comes from corporations and foundations. This has enabled them to maintain the perception of being an independent organization and not to become to heavily dependent on any one contributor in the eyes of its constituency. As Rich (2004) notes, “In order to achieve credibility, think tanks seek to maximize their independence” (p. 12). What the Heritage Foundation has made clear, is that independence can be defined differently than how it is defined by academic think tanks, who try to maintain strict objectivity and nonpartisan ties. This can be seen in the mission statement of Heritage Foundation:

¹⁰ McGann and Weaver (2005) provide one example of how the Heritage Foundation has affected policy. “In March 1982, for example, Heritage published a landmark study proposing an end to the Cold War doctrine of mutually assured destruction as a means of discouraging nuclear war. We [Heritage] proposed instead a new strategy of defending Americans against missile attack. A year later, almost to the day, President Reagan announced his Strategic Defense Initiative, which bore a striking resemblance to the Heritage plan” (p. 69).

Founded in 1973, the Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute - a think tank - whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. (The Heritage Foundation, 2005, para. 1)

In contrast to Brookings and RAND, Heritage openly acknowledges their political leanings. The constituency of the Heritage Foundation sees the think tank as responding first and foremost to conservatives and only secondarily to the rest of the world so independence for them is more narrowly defined as within group independence.

The NCAI Policy Research Center could follow the lead of the Heritage Foundation and achieve the perception of independence by relying on membership fees for financial support. The Center would have membership, primarily tribal leaders and national Indian organizations, as its primary customers. While membership fees are not contradictory to the Policy Center's goal of independence, it is unlikely that membership fees alone would be sufficient resources to run the Policy Center.

Unlike Brookings Institution and RAND, the Heritage Foundation emphasizes wining the battle of the "war of ideas" (McGann & Weaver, 2000, p. 73) over pure research. This is reflected in their staffing. They try to recruit young individuals who have not yet earned a reputation in research. These individuals will usually have earned a masters degree or Ph.D. but are not heavily published or cited. Staff must adhere to no other particular ideological system, but they must be dedicated to "building and promoting a free society" (McGann & Weaver, 2000, p. 77). The Heritage Foundation encourages staff to debate issues. Contrary to Academic think tanks, the Heritage Foundation rarely employs adjunct analysts, preferring full time staff.

The Heritage Foundation is known for its use of the media to promote its ideas and attempt to influence policy and public opinion. It has been referred to as a "marketing machine" (McGann & Weaver, 2000, p. 77). Heritage was one of the first think tanks to market their products to targeted audiences. The NCAI Policy Research Center might note this particular characteristic of the Heritage Foundation. By targeting its products toward its main constituents and devising a marketing strategy that targets Indian Country, the Policy Center is more likely to have impact on the issues it is looking to gain support for. As a part of its marketing strategy, the Heritage Foundation has invested heavily into its internet sites. It went as far as to create an interactive website, Town Hall (www.townhall.com), to disseminate information to their constituents and provide a forum for conservatives to keep up to date on breaking news that might have an impact on policies important to the conservative movement. Further, they have created websites "devoted to specific policy issues such as taxation, regulation, labor, and foreign policy" (McGann & Weaver, 2000, p 80).¹¹ The Town Hall site might provide an interesting

¹¹ Some examples are: Labor at <http://www.laborheritage.org/>; Foreign Policy at <http://www.foreignpolicy.org/>; Tax Calculator at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Features/TAXcalculator/>.

example for the staff of the NCAI Policy Research Center as they move forward with the creation of the website for the Policy Center.

One last area that might be of particular interest and warrant further investigation is the Heritage Foundation's development of a center for data analysis. Conservatives felt that such federal agencies as the Congressional Budget Office and the White House Office of Management and Budget favored the left and that they monopolized the data analysis relevant to developing policy on taxes and spending legislation. To combat this, Heritage purchased software that would allow them to predict the effect of policy changes on specific sectors of the U.S economy used by federal agencies (McGann & Weaver, 2000). This idea, that a think tank can perform the function of a data analysis center might be important to the Policy Research Center as they grapple with developing technologies that will allow them to serve as repository for data.

As previously mentioned, the Heritage Foundation is an example of an advocacy think tank focusing on multiple issues. The NCAI Policy Research Center aspires to be a multi-issue think tank though rooted in Indian Country. When speculating about the future of think tanks in America McGann and Weaver (2000) note that:

From my vantage point, it appears that the trend for think tanks in the United States is one of multiplication, localization, and specialization. Think tanks have proliferated enormously in the last twenty-five years. But except for the founding of the Heritage Foundation in 1973, the Cato Institute in 1978, and the Progressive Policy Institute in 1989, no significant new national think tank has been established that covers the entire range of policy issues, at least not with private funds and based on a nongovernmental traditional model (McGann & Weaver, 2000, p. 83)

By examining the Heritage Foundation, the NCAI Policy Research Center can focus on several characteristics of the former which could influence its formation. The Heritage Foundation was incorporated in 1973, and over the last twenty years, has been able to have a significant influence on policy. It is an exemplar of what has become known as a "conservative think tank" and a model of the modern think tank. Indeed, the mission of the Heritage Foundation is to bring conservative ideas into the mainstream.

A Closer Look at Independence

There are certain themes related to independence that are common across the literature on think tanks. Here they will be termed, "domains of independence"; they include funding, agenda setting and financial (see **Table 1**).

In order to be considered a think tank and not a lobby group, a think tank must justify its independence in these three domains, but how they go about doing this varies considerably between types of think tanks. The three types of think tanks explored in this report – academic, contract, and advocacy think tanks – each understand independence differently within these domains as table one illustrates.

Table 1: Different ways of thinking about independence.

	Academic Think Tanks	Contract Think Tanks	Advocacy Think Tanks
Funding	Diversified funding (Endowments, grants, organizations, private individuals etc.)	Primarily government contracts.	Constituents play large role.
Agenda Setting	Researchers play large role.	Government needs	Driven by ideology
Ideology	Attempt to be neutral source of ideas.	Attempt to be neutral source of ideas.	Liberal/Conservative

* None of the think tanks are 100% neutral, have no constraints on agenda setting, or use one type of funding. The table illustrates how they differ in what they consider to be independence.

Academic think tanks can be thought of as striving for a pure independence, contract think tanks are the middle ground, and advocacy think tanks are right on the cusp of being more of a lobby group than a think tank (in relation to independence as defined in this report). Academic think tanks believe that financial independence is achieved by diversification of funding sources using foundations, corporations, and individuals to obtain the bulk of their financing. They believe that this approach gives them freedom in setting their research agendas, a prime concern for a pure research institute. Agenda setting within the academic think tank is driven by research questions at the lowest level (researchers play large role); knowledge building is the prime determinate in what research is chosen. Lastly, academic think tanks have no designated ideology. They attempt to be ideologically neutral and perceive their research as being for the benefit of humankind as a whole, or at a minimum all Americans.

The contract think tanks have a slightly different view, and were developed after the dominant academic think tanks. They are financed typically by large government contracts and have very little diversification of funding. Consequently, their agendas are often set more directly, if not exclusively, by their funders, who tend to be the consumers of their research. The important aspect of independence for contract think tanks is that they are seen by the government funders as separate from government entities and as being ideologically neutral. For government, Contract think tanks fulfill the role of outside individuals who are able to have conversations about what is otherwise classified information and provide unbiased evaluations back to the government agency for internal consumption. Often times, however, this information is not classified and can be made available to the public. While these think tanks have a clearly defined consumer – government – they must maintain a nonpartisan identity to be seen as independent. It is because some began to see these think tanks as left leaning that the next evolution of think tanks takes place, the advocacy think tank.

Lastly, advocacy think tanks are distinct from the other two types of think tanks because they have a clearly defined ideological stance – liberal or conservative. In addition to a clear ideological stance, their agendas are set by their constituents (members who typically pay some type of membership fee) for the purpose of winning the “war of ideas.” They most closely resemble lobbying groups but maintain enough of a focus on

research to be thought of as a think tank for the purposes of this report.¹² A large portion of advocacy think tank funding often times comes from their constituents. While they do not maintain ideological independence they must not be seen as favoring certain groups within their constituency. For example, if they are a conservative advocacy think tank, they cannot be seen as favoring moderates over fundamentalists. Advocacy think tanks have the least amount of independence in their funding, agenda setting, and ideology.

It should be noted that advocacy think tanks, particularly conservative advocacy think tanks, currently outnumber more traditional think tanks two to one and outspend liberal think tanks by a margin of three to one ("The political activity of think tanks: The case for mandatory contributor disclosure," 2002). Furthermore, the trend is toward think tanks that have a specified ideological purpose; that is, many newer think tanks declare their political affiliation ("The political activity of think tanks: The case for mandatory contributor disclosure," 2002). Some of these new think tanks that are more aptly classified as Party think tanks fall outside what is classified as a think tank for the purposes of this report.

Since independence is defined broadly within the scholarly literature, for the practical purposes of defining what a think tank is the concept of, independence provides very little help in distinguishing types of think tanks. Based on independence alone, it is very difficult to determine at what point a think tank becomes a lobbying group. The point at which a think tank becomes a lobbying group in this report is when research no longer is the primary purpose of the organization (see **Table 2**). Party think tanks are mentioned to show the clear demarcation between what is considered a think tank and lobby group for the purposes of this paper. While it might be hard to differentiate between Advocacy think tanks and Party think tanks in how they view independence, there is a significant difference in how they view research. Whereas advocacy think tanks see their main purpose as providing social science expertise to policymakers, party think tanks see their main purpose as justifying their party position. Party think tanks often have a position and then collect existing research to support their position.

Selecting a Think Tank Model

Of the three typologies discussed in detail in this report, the contract think tank (government funded) appears to be the model that fits the best with the mandates set by the Advisory Committee for the NCAI Policy Research Center. However, each typology has some important characteristics with implications for the Policy Research Center.

¹² The characteristic that distinguishes think tanks from lobby groups is not their independence per se, because independence is defined in so many different ways. A more accurate characteristic for differentiating a think tank from a lobbying group is whether their primary focus is on conducting research. Organizations that have as their primary mission conducting research can most aptly be classified as a think tank.

Table 2:

	Funding	Agenda Setting	Ideological	Research
Academic Think Tanks	Diversified funding (endowments, grants, organizations, private individuals etc.)	Researchers play large role	Attempt to be neutral source of ideas.	Driven by Ideas; Long Term; Future Oriented; Purpose to supply social science expertise to policymakers; *Strict adherence to disinterested research; Findings distributed in a manner that is to serve all of humanity; Hirer well published PhD's in adjutant positions.
Contract Think Tanks	Primarily government contracts	Government needs	Attempt to be neutral source of ideas.	Driven by Government Contractor Needs, Long Term, Future Oriented; Purpose to supply social science expertise to policymakers; **Disinterested research; Findings distributed primarily to Contracts; Hirer well published PhD's.
Advocacy Think Tanks	Constituents play large role.	Driven by ideology	Liberal or conservative	Driven by Ideology; Short term focus; Purpose to supply social science expertise to policymakers; ***Ideologically driven research; Findings distributed for Constituents; Hirer Masters level graduates and PhD's who have not published a lot in permanent positions.
Party Think Tanks	Constituents play large role.	Driven by party needs	Democrat or Republican	Driven by party allegiance; Issue focus; Not concerned with supplying social science expertise to policymakers; Main purpose is to prove that what they believe is right; Often times staffed by former government officials and interest groups.

Source: McGann and Weaver (2000); Abelson (2002); and (Diane Stone & Denham, 2004).

*Academic think tanks are portrayed in this report as rigidly adhering to the scientific method because their ideas about independence are believed to be driven by their desire to do rigorous scientific research.

**Contract think tanks are not portrayed in this table as rigidly adhering to the scientific method because of their tie to government funders. The lack of diversification of funding sources and their focus on serving one customer brings into question their ability to produce disinterested research.

***Advocacy think tanks do not claim to do disinterested research; instead, they declare their ideological leaning.

Analysis of Models

The stated mission of the NCAI Policy Research Center is, “to provide tribal leaders with the best available knowledge to make strategically proactive policy decisions in a framework of Native wisdom that positively impact the future of Native peoples” (Advisory Council, 2005b). The mission statement provides some guidance on what think tank model would best fit the expectations of the Policy Research Center Advisory Council. The mission statement of the Policy Research Center can be broken down into four distinct mandates and their corresponding think tank characteristics:

- To provide tribal leaders with the best available knowledge, i.e. rigorous, objective scholarly research
- In the framework of Native wisdom, i.e., nature of independence
- That positively impact, i.e., must have policy relevance
- The future of Native peoples, i.e., emphasis on medium and long-term research

In addition to looking at the mission of the Policy Research Center, we examined the core values of the Policy Research Center to assess what think tank typology would be the best model for the Policy Research Center.¹³

The first mandate “to provide tribal leaders with the best available knowledge” corresponds with the think tank characteristic of conducting rigorous, objective scholarly research in pursuit of the best available knowledge (Advisory Council, 2005b). This is very different function than that of NCAI, whose main purpose is to ensure that elected leaders pursue policies compatible with the interests of Indian Country. The main purpose of the Policy Research Center is to provide tribal leaders and NCAI with the best available knowledge so that they can make strategically proactive policy decisions.

If the Policy Research Center is effective, then the advocacy model would not be the best fit for the Policy Research Center based on the first mandate. What distinguishes the advocacy think tank from the academic and contract think tank is its emphasis on “winning the war of ideas” a function that seems more appropriate for NCAI than the Policy Research Center. Because advocacy think tanks are mainly concerned with winning political battles, finding the best available knowledge is not always a primary concern. In contrast, academic think tanks and contract think tanks, staffed primarily by Ph.D.s, have as their primary concern using rigorous social science methods and striving to have their research perceived as objective and credible. This would appear to be more in line with obtaining the best available knowledge.

The second mandate, “in the framework of Native Wisdom” corresponds with the think tank characteristic of independence. Independence is a very important concept in the American understanding of think tanks. In contrast to the view that independence is an important concept for understanding think tanks, Stone and Denham (2004) argue that “the notion that a think tank requires independence or autonomy from the state and private interests in order to be ‘free-thinking’ is a peculiarly Anglo-American predilection that does not travel well into other cultures” (p. 2). What we have argued in this paper is that while independence is very important to understanding what types of organizations constitute a think tank, there are different ways of viewing independence even in the American understanding of term. This was illustrated in the Heritage¹⁴ example, an advocacy think tank with an identified constituency, conservatives.

The NCAI Policy Research Center, like the Heritage Foundation, has within its mission a mandate to serve a particular constituency, Indian Country. However, as we noted before, advocacy think tanks are not a good model because their primary goal of “winning the war of ideas” is at odds with the first mandate given to the Policy Research Center by its Advisory Council. In addition, while the Heritage Foundation is a partisan organization, this is in strict contrast to the Policy Research Center’s core value that states that, “Indian issues are nonpartisan issues.” This leaves us to answer the question,

¹³ See Appendix C for a list of the core values of the NCAI Policy Research Center.

¹⁴ See page 10.

of the two types of think tanks that remain as viable options, which is most in line with the second mandate?

On the one hand, academic think tanks put the most emphasis on maintaining strict adherence to the American concept of independence, in part, because they are most like universities. They are typically funded by multiple funders and their agendas are set internally with the researchers playing a large role. It is this last point of agenda setting that is most at odds with the mandate of the Policy Research Center. In addition to the mission statement, one of the core values of the Policy Research Center is that, “tribal communities should drive the research agenda and all aspects of the policy research work conducted by the Policy Research Center” (Advisory Council, 2005a). Another Policy Research Center core value that is in direct contrast to what academic think tanks typically view as independence is the belief that, “... tribes own their data.” This value implies that data cannot be published without the consent of the tribe and is at odds with the way traditional think tanks have thought about data and their responsibility to publish all results as a way of maintaining their independence in the eyes of the scientific community.

Contract think tanks on the other hand appear to be most in line with both the first and second mandate. While adhering to strict methods of scientific research, they do not have the limited definition of independence that academic think tanks do. When talking about the similarities between contract think tanks and academic think tanks McGann and Weaver (2000) state:

The first two types, academic and contract research think tanks, have strong similarities: both tend to recruit staff with strong academic credentials such as Ph.D.s from prestigious universities, and both tend to put a strong emphasis on the use of rigorous social science methods and strive to have their research perceived as objective and credible by a broad audience. (p. 7)

As stated earlier, this is in line with the objectives of the Policy Research Center’s desire to provide Indian Country with the best available knowledge.

When speaking of the differences between the two types of think tanks, academic and contract, McGann and Weaver (2000) state, “They differ largely in their funding sources, agenda setting, and outputs” (p. 7). That is, they differ most in how they have set up their institutional structures so that they are in line with their definition of independence. Contract researchers are usually funded in large part by government agencies; these funding agencies play a significant role in setting the research agenda. This is similar to NCAI and tribal governments’ relationships to the Policy Research Center in a number of ways. First, the research agenda of the Policy Research Center is to be primarily set by tribal governments. Second, a portion of the funds for the Policy Research Center are likely to come from tribes, membership, and federal government projects that are tribally related.¹⁵ Third, the Policy Research Center will be producing

¹⁵ Early indications are that the Policy Research Center will probably be at least initially predominately funded by private services.

and presenting research to NCAI and tribal governments. Since the contract typology best meets the first two mandates stated in the mission statement of the Policy Research Center, the question left to answer is, “Does the contract think tank fit with the last two mandates given to the Policy Research Center?”

The third mandate is that the research conducted by the Policy Research Center “positively impact” Indian Country, which has been interpreted in this report as corresponding with the think tank characteristic of policy relevance. The interpretation of the mandate to “positively impact” Indian Country as corresponding with the think tank characteristic of policy relevancy is supported by the core value of the Policy Research Center that states that, “We believe that knowledge should be in service to wisdom and not for knowledge’s sake.” The Policy Research Center is not in the business of doing research for the sake of research; it must undertake research that has an impact on Indian Country. The kind of impact that think tanks aspire to have is on the policymaking landscape (Abelson, 2002). Therefore, when we talk about or evaluate whether the Policy Research Center has had a positive impact on Indian Country, this is in relation to informing policy.

When talking about the differences in the ability of academic and contract think tanks to conduct policy relevant research, McGann and Weaver (2000) state, “Contract researchers clearly have an advantage over academic think tanks in terms of policy relevance, since the policy makers often have outlined in fairly specific terms what types of questions they want answered” (p. 8). This is also the case with the Policy Research Center. The Policy Research Center’s research agenda is developed by Indian Country, and in particular, through the forum of NCAI. From this, we can conclude that the contract typology is in line with the third mandate in the mission statement and the core values of the Policy Research Center.

The last mandate stated in the mission of the Policy Research Center is found in the statement, “the future of Native peoples.” This statement corresponds with think tank typologies that emphasize medium and long-term research. Medium and long-term research are associated with the generation of new ideas that guide the future direction of policy development as opposed to short-term research that often times is thought to repackages existing research to help policymakers answer current questions (see for example, Abelson, 2002). As stated earlier in this report, both academic and contract think tanks are geared toward medium and long-term research agendas. As a result, the last mandate is not in conflict with a contract think tank typology. In addition, a contract typology would seem to best position the Policy Research Center to move Native policy from a problem-focused approach to truly proactive, future-thinking strategy development.

Conclusion

Based on the mission and core values of the Policy Research Center, a contract typology seems to be the best model for the Policy Research Center to adapt to structure the new organization. However, this does not suggest that each of the three typologies

discussed in this report do not have some qualities that the Policy Research Center can learn from.

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Appendix A: Definitions of Think Tank

McGann and Weaver (2000) define a think tank as, "... a policy research organization that has a significant autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties" (p. 5).

Rich (2004) defines a think tank as, "independent, non-interest-based, nonprofit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process" (p. 11).

Rich and Weaver (2000) define think tanks as, "independent nonprofit public policy research institutes" (p. 82).

In *The Political Activity of Think Tanks*, a think tank is defined as, "nonprofit organizations that analyze public policy issues independently from the government, political parties, or interest groups ("The political activity of think tanks: The case for mandatory contributor disclosure," 2002, p. 1502).

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines a think tank as, "an institute, corporation, or group organized for interdisciplinary research (as in technological and social problems)" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2005).

Encarta World English Dictionary defines a think tank as, "consultative committee: a committee of experts that undertakes research or gives advice, especially to a government" (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2005).

Appendix B: NCAI Policy Research Center Mission Statement and Core Values

Mission Statement:

The mission of the NCAI Policy Research Center is to provide tribal leaders with the best available knowledge to make strategically proactive policy decisions in a framework of Native wisdom that positively impact the future of Native peoples.

Core Values:

- Nationally focused;
- Results-oriented (e.g. impacting the quality of life of Indian People);
- Timely, relevant and proactive, anticipating and addressing policy issues on the horizon;
- Forward-thinking to advance tribal discussion about policy options and future scenarios;
- Tightly aligned with Indian Country (e.g. information should flow from Indian Country to guide and inform the work of the Center, and information produced within the Center should flow back to Indian Country for use in local decision-making and national policy development);
- From a Native perspective (e.g. tribally-driven);
- Credible (e.g. valid, reliable, using sound scientific standards);
- Building the capacity of tribal communities and Native scholars to determine local research agendas, collect and analyze data, and develop research expertise; and
- Reliant on partnerships and collaboration (e.g. rather than developing and relying solely on our own expertise, the Center collaborates in various ways with diverse partners to create networks of experts, leverage scarce resources, strengthen the feedback loop of new information to Indian Country, and add value to existing work).

Appendix C: Snapshot of Brookings Institute Mission and Core Values

Our founder—the entrepreneur and philanthropist Robert S. Brookings (1850-1932)—believed in an intellectual corollary to the social compact: the governed and the government share responsibility for conducting the kind of rigorous, innovative, clearly presented analysis on which sound public policy depends.

For more than eighty years, the Brookings Institution has provided a collegial, nonpartisan setting in which scholars of diverse perspectives and expertise have sought—sometimes individually, sometimes collaboratively—to probe the most pressing problems of their time and to identify realistic, constructive solutions.

Brookings has dedicated itself to improving the equity of the American democratic process, the performance of the economy, the health of society, the effectiveness of diplomacy and defense, the quality of public discourse, and the workings of institutions—public and private, domestic and international.

We've maintained a commitment both to the discipline of the social sciences and to the value of the interdisciplinary approach, especially when dealing with the complex and cross-cutting issues of a world that is drawing closer together and in which the lines are blurring between the domestic and the foreign, the local and the global.

The remedies our scholars propose are rooted in open-minded inquiry, not in dogma or doctrine. Our product consists of books, reports, articles, scholarly conferences, and press briefings. This website is an orderly and welcoming repository of our output. It contains more than 25,000 separate items—in print, audio, video clips and photos. The latest, most-user friendly navigation tools help you sift through dynamically cross-referenced documents, purchase our books online, register for executive education courses, and apply our research models to your own data and ideas.

Source quoted from: <http://www.brook.edu/index/presidentwelcome.htm>

Appendix D: RAND Mission Statement and Core Values

Mission Statement:

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

Snapshot of an expression of Core Values:

Almost at once, RAND developed a unique style, blending scrupulous nonpartisanship with rigorous, fact-based analysis to tackle society's most pressing problems. Over time, RAND assembled a unique corps of researchers, notable not only for individual skills but also for interdisciplinary cooperation. By the 1960s, RAND was bringing its trademark mode of empirical, nonpartisan, independent analysis to the study of many urgent domestic social and economic problems.

For nearly 60 years, decision makers in the public and private sectors have turned to the RAND Corporation for objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the nation and the world. These challenges include such critical social and economic issues as education, poverty, crime, and the environment, as well as a range of national security issues.

Today, RAND researchers and analysts continue to be on the cutting edge of their fields, working with decision makers in both the public and private sectors to find solutions to today's difficult, sensitive, and important problems. Through its dedication to high-quality and objective research and analysis and with sophisticated analytical tools developed over many years, RAND is engaged with its clients to create knowledge, insight, information, options, and solutions that will be both effective and enduring.

Source quoted from: <http://www.rand.org/about/history/#independ>

Appendix E: Heritage Foundation Mission Statement and Core Values

Mission:

Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute - a think tank - whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

Snapshot of an expression of Core Values:

The Heritage Foundation is a unique institution—a public policy research organization, or “think tank.” We draw solutions to contemporary problems from the ideas, principles and traditions that make America great.

We are not afraid to begin our sentences with the words “We believe,” because we do believe: in individual liberty, free enterprise, limited government, a strong national defense, and traditional American values.

We want an America that is safe and secure; where choices (in education, health care and retirement) abound; where taxes are fair, flat, and comprehensible; where everybody has the opportunity to go as far as their talents will take them; where government concentrates on its core functions, recognizes its limits and shows favor to none. And the policies we propose would accomplish these things.

Our expert staff—with years of experience in business, government and on Capitol Hill—don’t just produce research. We generate solutions consistent with our beliefs and market them to the Congress, the Executive Branch, the news media and others. These solutions build on our country’s economic, political and social heritage to produce a safer, stronger, freer, more prosperous America. And a safer, more prosperous, freer world.

As conservatives, we believe the values and ideas that motivated our Founding Fathers are worth conserving. And as policy entrepreneurs, we believe the most effective solutions are consistent with those ideas and values.

We believe that ideas have consequences, but that those ideas must be promoted aggressively. So, we constantly try innovative ways to market our ideas. We are proud of our broad base of support among the American people and we accept no government funds.

Our vision is to build an America where freedom, opportunity, prosperity and civil society flourish.

Source quoted from: <http://www.heritage.org/about/>