

Maxwell School Center for CAREER DEVELOPMENT

YOUR GUIDE TO THINK TANKS

OVERVIEW

There are a large number of think tanks and research organizations with a focus on domestic and foreign policy issues. These organizations are often supported by contracts from the government, foundations, private businesses and endowments. Think tanks, in the most traditional sense, are seen as non-partisan organizations, which employ interdisciplinary approaches to finding long-term solutions to policy-related issues.

There are many variations in the perspectives and focus of these research organizations: some may be viewed more as advocacy groups that promote a particular agenda; others may resemble private sector consulting organizations or academic institutions. In addition to their research efforts, many research institutes produce major publications or organize professional conferences, lectures and policy forums. Think tank scholars testify before congressional committees, submit articles to major newspapers and may serve on government task forces.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The type of positions available varies considerably between organizations and is very much dependent upon one's level of education. In addition to research-related positions, which usually require an MA or Ph.D. and specialized expertise, many organizations utilize interns and individuals with BA and MA degrees for a range of administrative positions.

Advancement into senior positions usually requires education at the Ph.D. level and/or extensive specialized expertise, so it is common to see those in junior level positions leaving after 2-3 years to pursue higher education and professional opportunities in academia, government, private corporations and consulting firms.

TYPES OF JOBS

- Researcher
- Policy associate
- Communications
- Administrative assistant
- Legislative specialist

QUALIFICATIONS + SKILLS

- MA or Ph.D. for substantive research positions
- Strong oral/written communication skills
- Presentation and public speaking skills
- Foreign language fluency
- Analytical skills

PRO TIP: Most think tanks and research institutes do have formal internship programs and many look first to current and former interns to fill vacant permanent positions. Not only are interns in a position to hear about openings before they are advertised externally, but they also frequently have had prior occasion to demonstrate their specialized knowledge, skills and dedication.

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SAMPLE EMPLOYERS

- Brookings Institution
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Council on Foreign Relations
- Center for Strategic and International Studies
- East-West Center
- Hoover Institute, Stanford University
- National Bureau of Asian Research
- RAND
- Worldwatch Institute
- Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs
- The Heritage Foundation
- National Center of Policy Analysis
- Woodrow Wilson International Center
- Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
- The American Council for Capital Formation
- Committee for Economic Development
- Economic Policy Institute
- Peterson Institute for International Economics
- World Economic Forum
- Foundation for National Progress
- ...And More!

SAMPLE MAXWELL CLASSES

Be sure to choose courses relevant to areas you wish to build in-depth knowledge about:

- Business and Government in a Global Economy
- International Management and Leadership
- Child and Family Policy
- Digital Government
- Forecasting for Policy Analysis and Public Management
- Education Policy
- Ethics and Public Policy
- Implementation of Public Policy
- Financial Management in Nonprofit Organizations

RESOURCES

- PolicyJobs.net - World Think Tank Directory
- U.S. State Department - Jobs in Think Tanks
- Riley Guide
- National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) - World Directory of Think Tanks

RELATED CAREER GUIDES

- Foundations
- Nonprofit Management
- Consulting
- Government Relations/Lobbying