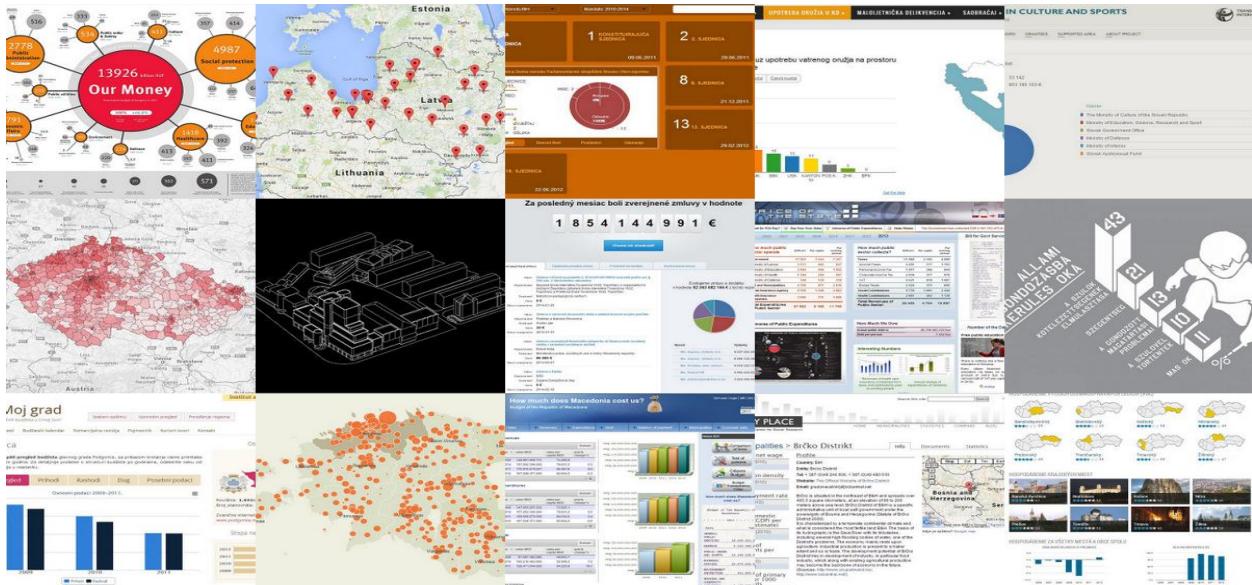


# Technological Innovation and Data Visualization in Public Policy Research

Portfolio Review of the **Think Tank Fund**

April 22, 2014



## Executive Summary

In this portfolio<sup>1</sup> TTF has worked to transform the ways how think tanks address their public by improving their competencies to communicate successfully and reach out to new and existing audiences. With a relatively small financial engagement of \$852,932 over four years, we pushed many of the think tanks out of their comfort zone. Drawing them outside of the small elite circles, this work helped think tanks challenge the reduced space for policy debates in the face of increasing populism. We have employed three sets of tools: grant support for demonstration projects, capacity-building events, and hands-on support and coaching for think tanks.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, we contributed to increasing the skills, popularity, and outreach of over 50 think tanks in their respective countries. Our most notable success was the leverage we achieved as a unique supporter of innovative communications approaches. We have learned that although useful, technological tools are not always the best way to achieve effective advocacy. It is not the tools that matter, but suiting the means of conveying the message to each particular purpose. Having taken stock of our performance, we hone our approach by adding new grantmaking instruments such as resident fellowships, support for replication and micro-grants. As a result, this line of work has evolved from a niche area into supporting think tanks to advance the political and socio-economic agenda for open society in developing countries.

<sup>1</sup> This portfolio emerged from Strategic Priority #3, "Innovation, Evaluation and Capacity-Building of Think Tanks" from the Think Tank Fund Strategy for 2010-2013. This strategic focus continues in the new strategy for 2014-2017, where this portfolio contributes to TTF's fealty to the field "1C. Innovation, Networking and Skills-Building of Think Tanks."

<sup>2</sup> The portfolio consists of 17 demonstration grants, two grants supporting skill providers, four events, and three consultancy contracts.

## I. Context and Field Developments

For more than two decades, think tanks in developing countries<sup>3</sup> have provided policy-makers with relevant information and recommendations. Throughout this period, the accessibility and attractiveness of their products has lagged behind the substance. Aware of these challenges, since its inception TTF has sought to address communications and policy uptake. Perhaps, the most concerted effort was a [training seminar](#) for think tank directors in London in May 2010. This meeting reinforced our earlier findings that TTF should invest in developing think tanks' communications strategies.

The advancement of social media and the omnipresence of personal digital devices have changed how people receive and consume information. Many think tanks have struggled to broaden their appeal and expand their audiences beyond a small elite circle, despite having under-utilized reserves of data. If they are to succeed, they must understand how people use information and how to diversify narrowly specialized products using the different formats and communications channels audiences demand.

In the flat digital world, single-issue bloggers receive attention comparable to established journals and policy institutions, and differences between many products have become blurred. Think tanks compete on the same market of ideas with blogs, magazines, and electronic media in general. This reality shapes demand for analytical formats – fewer people want to read a long text unless it is tailored to their needs. Even issue-experts have started relying on visual presentations of reports to navigate and prioritize among competing products.

Furthermore, in this environment, the influence and utility of policy research are affected not only by the strength of evidence presented, but also by availability. Think tanks' ability to reach wider populations and inspire a “call for action” is as important as the quality of policy research. Far from being only a technical question, this is a must for increasing think tanks' legitimacy in society.

These trends have been more pronounced in developed countries due to higher Internet use and greater political pluralism. Think tanks in Washington, London and Brussels have had to catch up quickly or be left behind. By contrast, until recently most think tanks in developing countries were only starting to take note of these trends despite seeing their impact abroad. Only a few were actively rethinking how to present research and reach audiences. TTF saw a unique opportunity to respond to these challenges by creating a special line of work on technological innovation and data visualization for think tanks in developing countries.

## II. Assumptions, Tools, and Strategic Stages of the Portfolio

From the beginning, our primary goal was to help think tanks improve communications and presentation skills to deepen their interactions with existing audiences, reach out to new target groups and, whenever possible, increase their policy impact. To achieve this, our strategy employed a combination of three tools:

1. Grant support for demonstration projects
2. Capacity-building events
3. Hands-on support and coaching for participating think tanks

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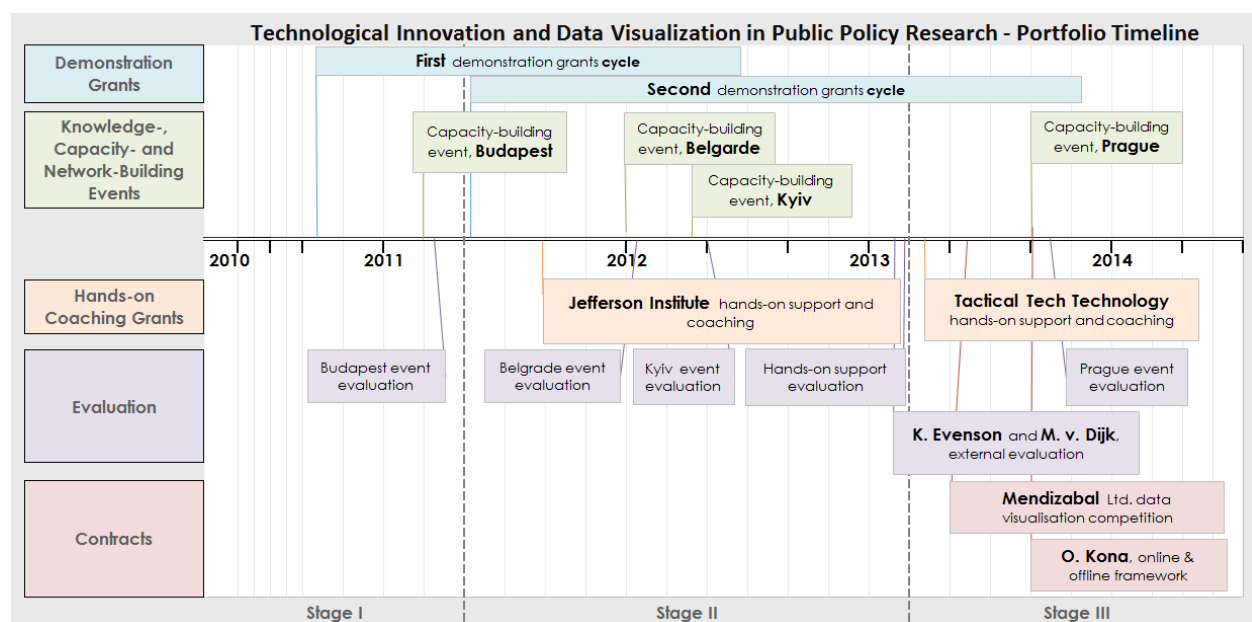
<sup>3</sup> Most of our work to date relates to Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

We launched two rounds of open calls for proposals for demonstration projects by think tanks in late 2010 and in summer 2011. These calls resulted in [17 grants](#), all completed by November 2013.

To learn about demand and developments in the field, and to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and partnerships, we organized [four](#) knowledge-, capacity- and network-building events: two regional workshops (Budapest in 2011, Prague in 2013),<sup>4</sup> one sub-regional event (Belgrade in 2012), and one national workshop (Kyiv in 2012). This level of fine-tuning the demand to reflect think tanks' need mitigated the [limitations and risks](#) associated with donor-organized capacity-building. All events offered one-on-one consultations to break the silos between technical providers and think tanks and involved a diverse pool of experts – e.g., [Sunlight Foundation](#) (US), [Open Knowledge Foundation](#) and [My Society](#) (UK), [Google Ideas](#) (UK), [Tactical Technology Collective](#) (Germany/UK) and the [Jefferson Institute](#) (Serbia/US).

We funded hands-on support through [two grants](#) for independent expertise-providers (Jefferson Institute and Tactical Technology Collective), a [learning study](#) by two external evaluators<sup>5</sup> to compile the lessons from the grant portfolio, and a data visualization [competition for think tanks](#) organized by Enrique Mendizabal,<sup>6</sup> a globally recognized blogger on think tanks. Finally, we selected Oto Kóna<sup>7</sup> to create a framework for gathering online and offline visualizations to showcase the skills of our grantees and influence other donors on what can be done with data visualization.

As the timeline below illustrates, we have employed these three sets of tools in parallel and our work has evolved through **three broad stages** with intensive interaction and spillover between the tools. Periodic evaluation by staff has provided feedback to sharpen the use of our tools.



<sup>4</sup> Both were co-financed by the Information Program.

<sup>5</sup> [https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=80007007](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=80007007)

<sup>6</sup> [https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=90002919](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=90002919)

<sup>7</sup> [https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=90003241](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=90003241)

## 1. Stage One

By 2010, think tanks had fallen significantly behind many advocacy organizations, experimenting with new communications approaches. At the time, OSF's Information Program had already supported many (mainly advocacy) groups on this issue and was familiar with a field of expertise providers. TTF knew the think tanks' needs, but had little prior engagement in this area. Realizing that both programs would stand to benefit from each other's distinct advantages, we partnered to match policy researchers with providers of innovative communications technologies.

Our **initial assumption** was that think tanks could use accessible and low-cost or free-of-charge online instruments<sup>8</sup> to increase public access to the analysis and data they kept on their hard drives. We started our engagement with an open call for proposals that would help think tanks<sup>9</sup> (1) bring new or hard-to-reach data sources to light; (2) propose new uses of data for advocacy and target non-traditional stakeholders, and (3) enhance the overall usefulness of data sources. Initially, we insisted think tanks use the data they *already* had "on file" to inspire a fresh look at existing policy problems. Using government data and collecting new data through crowdsourcing was seen as secondary. At the time, we also saw visual presentation as an add-on to our call.

The **first call** generated a lot of interest. We received 40 applications and awarded five grants. Due to the low technical quality of the proposals, we realized that the high demand for improving the know-how of think tanks in this area would surpass the modest funds we had reserved. Additionally, the grants were insufficient to address the interest in exchanging experiences between think tanks that had already experimented with this type of work and those that were tempted to try. To tackle this challenge, in March 2011 we organized a capacity-building event in Budapest. We selected 35 participants from a competitive pool of 83 organizations. All participants paid a 100 EUR token fee, which did not diminish the interest.<sup>10</sup> The event became a reference point for policy researchers in the region.

## 2. Stage Two

After a thorough internal evaluation of the initial experiences and the Budapest event, we **sharpened our grant support**. Our call for proposals identified the following priorities: (1) accessible information, (2) analysis and presentation and (3) evidence-based policy and impact. Instead of data availability, we refocused on data quality, and explicitly emphasized data presentation and relevance to increase interactivity, usability towards policy advocacy, and benefits for citizens. We explicitly discouraged "visualization for the sake of visualization."

For the 2011 call, we received 73 concept notes. Of those, 12 organizations had applied for the previous grant competition in 2010, and the staff of 25 organizations applied to

## TOPICS

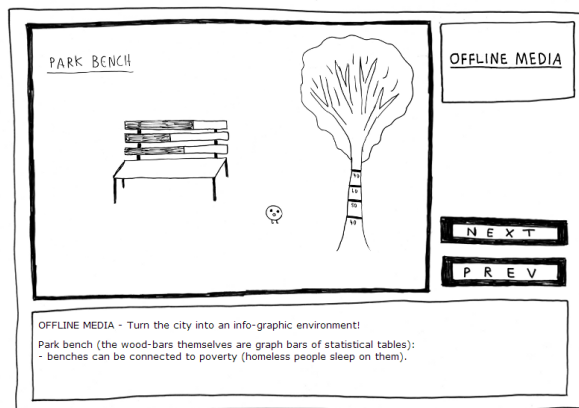
Monitoring Taxes  
 Tracking Ties within Govt  
 Monitoring country competitiveness  
 Public Budget Monitoring  
 Crime Tracking

Monitoring Public Expenditure  
 COI Transparency  
 Urban Planning  
 Making Budget Readable

<sup>8</sup> Some examples include: [www.easel.ly](http://www.easel.ly), <https://drawingbynumbers.org>, [www.piktochart.com](http://www.piktochart.com), <http://infogr.am>, [www.tableausoftware.com](http://www.tableausoftware.com), <http://www.google.com/publicdata/directory>, [www.mysociety.org](http://www.mysociety.org), [www.manveyes.com/software/analytics/manveyes](http://www.manveyes.com/software/analytics/manveyes)

<sup>9</sup> See the original document on Box.

<sup>10</sup> This is a very rare practice among donors in the region.



Example of a mockup received from KLA in 2011

participate in the capacity-building event in Budapest. In the end, we solicited 19 full proposals and supported 12 organizations. The submissions confirmed that many organizations either had their own valuable data or could tap into governmental information sources not easily accessible to the general public. Regrettably, the think tanks did not know how to use these sources to achieve wider consumption and advocacy, and did not understand the “technical language” necessary to work with those who had the skills and willingness to further data use. We realized that think tanks needed

tailored follow-up and individual coaching beyond what we provided as part of our capacity-building events.

**Three issues in capacity-building** required our attention: (1) some organizations had access to or knowledge of valuable information sources, but lacked the technical ability to make the information accessible; (2) others had a vision of how information could be used and communicated and the technical skills to implement these ideas, but did not have access to necessary data; and (3) the last cohort had to modernize how their policy products were presented and communicated. Given the magnitude of the demand, we began to consider supporting an independent expertise hub that would provide direct assistance to think tanks without TTF acting as an intermediary.

**Jefferson Institute** (JI) was ideally positioned to assume this function as it had knowledge on technology and policy, international reach through offices in Washington, DC and Belgrade, and professional recognition for its excellent work with <http://patchworknation.org/>. TTF received overwhelmingly positive participant feedback about Aaron Presnall, JI’s president, at our event in Budapest. Based on these reasons, we underwrote an online community “Data to the People” built upon JI’s “education hotspot.” The institute provided **advice and hands-on coaching** to 14 grantees.

In 2012 we organized two additional events: a sub-regional workshop for the Western Balkans in Belgrade and a single-country one in Ukraine. The **Belgrade** event gathered 100 participants from think tanks and advocacy organizations and was co-organized with our colleagues at the Human Rights Initiative and four other donors.<sup>11</sup> The event in **Kyiv** was an excellent example of our ability to leverage resources and inspire other donors to join. Because only two out of 13 Ukrainian applicants for our Budapest event in 2011 were selected to attend, UNITER/Pact (a USAID contractor) suggested TTF design a similar but nationally tailored capacity-building workshop in Ukraine and Pact would cover two-thirds of the cost. As a result, TTF contributed mainly with our know-how and staff time.

We expected that the Jefferson Institute would use the events in Kyiv and Belgrade to

<sup>11</sup> The Fund for an Open Society Serbia, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the European Fund for the Balkans, and the National Endowment for Democracy.

showcase its expertise to think tanks and encourage them to use its online platform as a follow-up. Ideally, JI would have grown into an independent technical adviser for “building the field,” which would allow TTF to maintain distance from the projects. Unfortunately, this expectation did not fully materialize. While JI provided value to the grantees (as confirmed by an ex-post evaluation through phone interviews with the grantees), it fell short of creating a genuine community of practice. Because the organization lacked governance and quality assurance mechanisms, the outcome was inconsistent quality of advice, which prompted us to discontinue cooperation.

### 3. Stage Three

In the first two stages we saw our role mainly as a hands-off donor and convener capitalizing on our knowledge of demand for improvement in this area, and supporting a knowledge hub as an independent provider of expertise. Having learned from our unsuccessful cooperation with JI, we revised our approach. While we still supported the field by identifying and collaborating with experts on new technology who would be interested in engaging with think tanks, we decided to **separate the policy and technology components of that assistance**, retaining control of the former, and delegating the latter for external implementation.

With this in mind, we engaged Tactical Technology Collective (TTC) to focus on issues of design and technology for data use and presentation. With this cooperation still ongoing, we see a benefit to supporting a genuinely independent provider that is willing to cater to think tanks. With our assistance, in the upcoming months TTC will design a manual for think tanks on increased use of visual communications in their work. We tested this approach of separating the policy from technical component at our fourth **capacity-building event** in Prague at the end of 2013. Our interactions during this process with providers of independent expertise and participants from think tanks confirmed our understanding of the field and therefore our modes of engagement.



Nearing the completion of most grants in 2013, we started collecting information about the projects and capacity-building events. Marieke van Dijk and Kristie D. Evenson<sup>12</sup> compiled the **lessons from 16 grants** into a [learning study](#) and provided invaluable feedback on our performance as a donor<sup>13</sup>. In June 2013, Enrique Mendizabal,<sup>14</sup> the world’s preeminent blogger on think tanks, approached the Fund with a request to support a **global [competition for think tanks on data visualization](#)**. We saw this as a low-risk, low-cost (\$24,500) opportunity to understand the demand and state of the field in regions where we have not worked before. The activity collected 29 high-quality visualizations from 18 countries and resulted in a series of blog posts analyzing the best aspects of these products and a hundred-page [compilation](#) eBook. Between July 2013 and January 2014 more than 30,000

<sup>12</sup> [https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=80007007](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=80007007)

<sup>13</sup> This feedback is integrated in the next section of this document.

<sup>14</sup> [https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=90002919](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=90002919)

unique visitors saw the competition website.<sup>15</sup> The final award ceremony in London was widely attended and followed online.

In winter 2013, we selected **Oto Kóňa**<sup>16</sup> to create an online and offline platform for a portfolio of visualizations that would showcase the skills of our grantees and prod other donors to support this type of work. The platform would not only provide an additional value to our grantees by presenting their work, but would also help cement the Fund's reputation as a go-to donor on technological and communications innovation in policy research.<sup>17</sup> The platform is currently being integrated into the main OSF website in cooperation with our colleagues from the Communications Department.

### III. TTF Performance and Lessons Learned

Though data visualizations can create a “wow” effect for their creators as well as the general public, we have learned a number of lessons about the field, our performance and how to improve this work in future.

#### 1. Advocacy and Impact: Right message, in right form for the right audience

##### *Audience and Message*

It is much more important to **attract the relevant and “right” audience(s)**. While exciting, technological tools are not always the only way to achieve advocacy and communications goals. As [Kurt Lewin Foundation](#) (KLA) in Hungary showed, visualizing information about social exclusion and poverty through street art ([see video](#)) reached those who should be concerned about the issue without Internet access.

The example demonstrated that it is not the tools that matter, but finding **means of conveying the message** that are right for a particular purpose. At times, we have seen organizations developing tools only to look for ways to use them. Instead the process must start with identifying objectives and only then proceed to selecting the contextually relevant tools and methods to achieve them.

##### *Different Contexts*

The development and effectiveness of visualization tools have varied by country, with more authoritarian contexts posing challenges to data-gathering and subsequent advocacy.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, in many countries projects considered a public good elsewhere proved valuable. Popolari's [Parliamentary Searchlight](#) in Bosnia and Herzegovina filled a critical gap by providing information on adopted legislation, which the parliament does not usually publish. Another example is an innovative tool on urban planning ([Skopje Raste](#)) from Macedonia's Reactor, which prompted government hostility. On the other hand, the projects from Providus in Latvia and ProPolice in the Czech Republic showed unprecedented benefits from [cooperation](#) between think tanks and authorities. These partnerships combine the agility of non-governmental organizations with the stability of public authority, which assures their sustainability.

<sup>15</sup> As compared with 7,281 page views of the TTF webpage on the OSF website in the same period.

<sup>16</sup> [https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=90003241](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=90003241)

<sup>17</sup> While the cost of the contract did not require competitive procurement, we chose this more labor-intensive process because it also enabled us to experience the challenges of procuring an external technological solution and to understand how our grantees negotiate technological solutions.

<sup>18</sup> See the Learning Study, [p. 49](#).

### *Advocacy and Impact*

Proper advocacy remained a challenge for many projects. In some cases, think tanks got “carried away” by technology and lost sight of their original advocacy goals. In others, the organizations either did not have a specific advocacy agenda or claimed their product targeted everyone. In addition, in many cases the assessment of audiences’ abilities to digest data appears to have been overly optimistic. Successful cases involved close **collaboration between policy researchers and advocacy organizations**. Examples from Estonia (between Praxis, a think tank, and Geomedia, a service provider for municipalities) and Slovakia (between Fair Play Alliance, a watchdog, and Transparency International Slovakia, a think tank) illustrate how cooperation can last beyond our funding. In Slovakia the cooperation between think tanks and mainstream media also brought an opportunity to host five visualization projects, three supported by TTF, on the website of a major daily.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the advocacy potential for the projects was greater than the impact they achieved, and the opportunities created by the new tools remain under-utilized.<sup>20</sup> The Fund and its grantees have recognized that the **approach to advocacy** needs to be more intentional and critical from the beginning, which would entail clear targets, better specification of goals, more precise operationalization of indicators, and realistic assessments for achieving change. Identifying, understanding, and working with the right audiences and the right knowledge products tailored for these audiences is tremendously important. To reinforce this point, we will have to strengthen this requirement in our support to the field. An example to illustrate this is approach of Reactor Macedonia that has introduced the technologically innovative products as regular outputs for each of their research projects.

## 2. Integration of New Technologies, Reflecting on New Trends

Many think tanks have mastered the skill of using the available technology, but the **integration of these projects** into organizational processes, communications and advocacy goals, and fundraising strategies still lags behind. Think tanks have to invest staff time and attract human resources to undertake these projects. Otherwise, those that lack internal talent and technological capacity are at risk of paying a lot of money for sub-optimal software or services.

In this portfolio TTF has invested in improving think tanks’ communication of research outputs. This has increased production and research quality. However, improvements on the **research input side** are still scarce. While some think tanks have started using new sources of data,<sup>21</sup> few have explored new methodologies, such as gamification approaches<sup>22</sup> or social and behavioral simulations to analyze and test policies.<sup>23</sup> Crowdsourcing to complement research is largely under-used and examples are few and far between.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <http://cenastatu.sme.sk/>; <http://obce.sme.sk/>; <http://tender.sme.sk/>

<sup>20</sup> Think tanks sometimes use traditional surveys to query targeted audiences about the extent of their reach. Those think tanks that have piloted new technologies for this purpose are mostly limited to the analytical data provided by their websites (Google analytics) and social media (Facebook and Twitter metrics).

<sup>21</sup> Such as Facebook and Twitter; see for example such as [Political Capital](#)’s research on political radicalism online.

<sup>22</sup> Gamification is the use of game thinking and game mechanics to engage users in solving problems.

<sup>23</sup> Economic think tank INEKO has [experimented](#) with advanced calculators and simulation.

<sup>24</sup> **Fair Play Alliance** and **Transparency International Slovakia** have undertaken several innovative and exciting [crowdsourcing approaches](#). Through crowdsourcing they have collected new



### 3. Spillover Effect

#### Community of Practice

Given the large discrepancies among different think tanks and rapid developments in available technology, there is a **continued need for a community of knowledge exchange**, which we initially envisaged through the unsuccessful partnership with JI. The external evaluation confirms this assessment: *“Findings suggest some follow-up support with organizations could be useful, but such support is less financial than technical and peer-focused.”* Therefore, we would like to provide more tailored support and skills-building in specific technical areas, similar to what Transparency and Accountability Initiative has tried with their [Bridging Transparency and Technology Initiative](#), and along the lines of what a research [study](#) by Hivos has suggested (both for advocacy organizations). This would require more staff time and know-how than financial commitment, but could offer high returns.

We found that supporting the **dissemination of existing projects** with a demonstrated value in their communities, like INESS’ Price of the State, provided tremendous return on investment. In this case we underwrote only the cost of designing a “manual” and cleaning up the code, which helped spread the idea of representing a public budget to the Czech Republic, Poland, Iceland, Georgia, and Belarus. INESS’ initiative provided inspiration for static visual posters in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Iceland, and Belarus. An extremely popular [bill of government services](#), which represents a per-capita recalculation of services in the form of a cash-register slip, was recreated in Bulgaria, Poland, Iceland, Lithuania, Georgia, and Belarus as well as in many regions and villages in Slovakia. While we did not pay directly for any of these, the power of example and INESS’ hard work made them possible through our initial grant.

Spreading of such data visualization products can be the basis for greater thematic dispersion effort, and provide a relatively straightforward way for OSF to target issues throughout the region. In addition to budget monitoring, products on urban planning and court monitoring have the greatest potential for dispersion and replication.

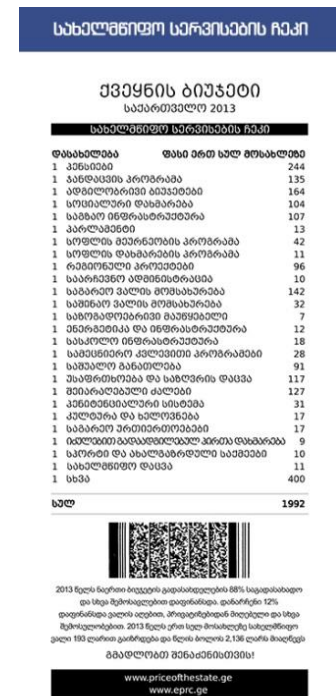
The anecdotal evidence points to a positive influence even on organizations we have not funded, because our support to the field has created a **critical mass of think tanks** that is prodding others to follow the trend. An illustrative example comes from AMO<sup>25</sup> in the Czech Republic, which within a complex research project supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation integrated a more professional [visualization](#) into their everyday workflow and communications strategy, following our approach<sup>26</sup>.

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expert input and contributed to increasing transparency in relation to public grants (in culture and sports) and in public procurement, tapping into the hitherto-unused expertise of business people interested in procurements.

<sup>25</sup> AMO participated only in one of the events we organized, and applied for the 2011 call for proposals, but has not received a grant. The organization was supported through the Open Society New Response grants scheme.

<sup>26</sup> TTF rejected their application in light of our limited funds for pilot projects.



### *Influence over Peer Donors*

We have learned that the use of new technology in policy research and data visualization has not been systematically explored by any other donor that supports policy research and think tanks in developing countries.<sup>27</sup> The staff time invested in tailored assistance to grantees, combined with our specific technical knowledge and reputation, provides the Fund with powerful leverage to continue supporting the field by influencing other donors. While this kind of engagement does not require funding, it demands significant additional staff time, effort, and coordination.

#### 4. Overall Reflections on TTF Donor Craft

As a donor, we reflected upon the deficiencies in grantees' planning cycles and tried to weather the challenges of collaborative grant making with IP.

Almost all grantees underestimated the **duration of their projects** and many fell behind schedule. Out of the 17 grants, 10 had to be extended by average six months. The shortest extension was two months (Budapest Institute) and longest 11 months (in case of OSOPS Prague). Nonetheless in both of these cases more time was spent well, OSOPS won global On Think Tanks data visualization competition and made the [website](#) fully available in English. Budapest Institute increased the data [coverage](#) and created additional visualizations also enabling the use at schools to increase students' awareness of public finances.

We have started this work as collaboration between TTF and IP. We have evaluated the proposals and applications together, but then divided up the monitoring and administrative processing of grants between the two programs. With different work-styles and different approaches to monitoring and oversight, we had effectively created **two-tiered approach to our grantees**. Corroborating these findings, the feedback we received from our grantees and the external evaluators made a stronger case for bringing about shared grant making standards across OSF.

The three stages of the portfolio evolution illustrate that we have alternated between hands-off **support to the field** and direct engagement, which resembles **our own initiative**. In the course of implementing this line of work, TTF has become perceived as more than just a funder. Our grantees regularly contact TTF staff with requests for technical advice and consultation. Though this makes us a unique donor, we do not think of ourselves as direct providers of expertise.

We face a dilemma as to whether TTF should stand back and maintain our role as a funder only, or whether we should get proactively involved in helping think tanks when we see them falling short or when our regional perspective enables us to see unmet needs. We sense that this will remain a **balancing act between maintaining our expertise and reputation without imposing ourselves as experts**, which would unduly strain our time and human resources.

In the current programmatic period, we have decided to go back to our original approach of supporting this line of work as fealty to the field. While our activities in the past three years relied heavily on the combination of project grant-making and capacity-building through events and hands-on coaching, we need to reflect on lessons learned

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<sup>27</sup> There are a few examples of donors requiring organizations to visually beautify or spice up their products, but they rarely look at organizations' capacity to do so and it does not constitute a systematic approach.

and rethink our approach. In the process of doing so, we should consider using **new tools** including:

- Resident fellowships for designers or technology experts to “embed” with think tanks
- Support the champions of this work to spread the word and enable others to replicate proven projects
- Micro-grants to those who want to replicate tried-and-true approaches to meet their role models in one-on-one sessions.

With this rich range of instruments TTF will complement its demonstration projects by a full-fledged grant support to the field of think tanks engaged in policy-relevant research.

#### **IV. Questions and Follow-up**

This review is an opportunity to fine-tune our approach for implementing this initiative in 2014-17. Underwriting demonstration projects remains our key instrument of support. These projects would produce visualizations that target media, advocacy NGOs, community groups, and policy- and decision-makers. The Fund will support or directly develop manuals, checklists, and advising notes that provide technical assistance for such projects. We also plan to continue with networking and knowledge- and practice-sharing meetings between think tanks, technical experts, and other relevant stakeholders in local communities. Our activities will cover Central and Eastern Europe and expand to Latin America (most probably through ILLAIP, a network of think tanks supported by Think Tank Initiative). There is demand for a special event in Indonesia by Knowledge Sector Initiative (AusAid), which would enable think tanks outside our area of operation to pursue this work independently.

- **Context and balance in the field building between grants and operations:** Communications technology impacts the depth of policy products and public discussions through new methods and tools for input (data collection and processing) and output (communications, presentation). How should TTF incorporate these developments? Should we actively form and shape the field, or should we maintain distance, emphasize learning and gathering knowledge, and react to developments? How do we balance grant-making and pursuing our own initiatives through operational work?
- **Innovation vs. implementation:** How should we allocate resources and programmatic focus – should we support innovation or tried-and-true approaches that increase the capacity of more actors?
- **Matchmaking, networking, and community of practice:** We have combined different approaches to supporting think tanks’ knowledge- and capacity-building. To what extent should the Think Tank Fund engage in creating a community of practitioners and actively match technical experts and providers with think tanks?
- **Sustainability and affordability:** Given the competition with businesses for experts and technology, think tanks face a serious challenge in the high human and financial resource intensity required for techniques and products involving data and visualization. Should TTF seek ways to lower the entry costs for think tanks?

## Annexes

List of individual elements of TTF 1C (Innovation, Networking, and Skills-Building of Think Tanks) portfolio:

- 17 Demonstration Grants:** <https://na14.salesforce.com/00O0000003SeHQ>  
**Simple Links to Websites:** <http://bridgeurl.com/ttf-data-visualization-portfolio-2010-2013>  
**2 Grants Supporting Skill Providers:** <https://na14.salesforce.com/00O0000003SeVD>  
**4 Events\*:** <https://na14.salesforce.com/00O0000003SeVI>  
 \*(please note that these events were co-organized, and TTF's financial contribution has been used to leverage larger spending contributed by Information Program as well as other external donors).  
**3 Consultancy Contracts:** (one needs to be explicitly logged in to Contract Online for links to work)  
[https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=80007007](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=80007007)  
[https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=90002919](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=90002919)  
[https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log\\_id=90003241](https://businesscenter.osi.hu/contractonlinebp/Contracts.aspx?action=logdetail&tab=all&log_id=90003241)

### Public Communications:

- <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/knowing-your-city-s-finances-can-bring-real-change>  
<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/putting-transparency-practice-slovakia-what-we-can-learn>  
<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/price-state>  
<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/events/balkan-peer-exchange-enhancing-analysis-and-research-based-advocacy-era-open-data>  
<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/events/use-information-and-data-enhanced-communication-and-advocacy>  
<http://goranspolicy.com/information-data-visualization-tanks/>  
<http://goranspolicy.com/collection-links-resources-data-advocacy/>  
<http://goranspolicy.com/god-trust-bring-data/>  
<http://goranspolicy.com/balkan-peer-exchange-enhancing-analysis-researchbased-advocacy-era-open-data/>

### OSCE's sOcialSCapE report:

<http://www.oscepa.org/publications/all-documents/news-a-media/socialscape/1231-socialscape-july-2013/file> (p. 42)

**Background documents pertaining to portfolio are shared on the Box (strategies, calls for proposals, calls for participation, events agendas, evaluations, terms of reference, deliverables):**

<https://osf.box.com/s/cekrec301mx2u3b92tzf>

Box Sync\Think Tank Fund\\_Board and Portfolio Reviews\2014-1\background documents\  
 Consolidated list app\_partic\_prop\_grant.xlsx

### Staff time breakdown (for TTF)<sup>28</sup>

| Staff member             | Share of work-time on this portfolio | Tasks                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Andrej Nosko             | 30% (to be reduced to 5%)            | Grants monitoring and oversight, strategic design of calls, events (overseeing 9 grants directly, remaining 8 indirectly) |
| Goran Buldioski          | 7% (to be increased)                 | Strategic oversight and feedback on all events, event in Serbia                                                           |
| Vlad Galushko            | 5%                                   | Event in Ukraine                                                                                                          |
| Masha Djordjevic         | 5%                                   | Event in Serbia                                                                                                           |
| Dora Hardy <sup>29</sup> | 25%                                  | Administrative and Programmatic Support, events organization                                                              |

<sup>28</sup> Preparation of this portfolio review, including PRD with annexes, took approximately 141 staff hours (AN: 90, GB: 25, DH: 15, VG: 8, MD: 3).

<sup>29</sup> Zsafia Revay before 12/2013.

**Overview of evaluation of individual pilot grants (from TTF perspective):  
Innovative projects pushing boundaries in approach or innovation:**

|                    |    |                                                           |                                                                                                       |
|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| OSOPS              | CZ | Police Accountability through Smart Display of Crime Data | <a href="http://www.czechcrime.org">http://www.czechcrime.org</a>                                     |
| Reactor*           | MK | Public Spaces in Skopje                                   | <a href="http://skopjeraste.mk">http://skopjeraste.mk</a>                                             |
| FPA                | SK | (a)GREED                                                  | <a href="http://www.otvorenezmluvy.sk">http://www.otvorenezmluvy.sk</a>                               |
| KLA                | HU | 100 Poorest Database                                      | <a href="http://humanrobot.biz/100_Poorest_Data_base">http://humanrobot.biz/100 Poorest Data base</a> |
| INESS              | SK | The Price of the State - a Toolkit for Foreign Partners   | <a href="http://www.priceofthestate.org">http://www.priceofthestate.org</a>                           |
| PRAXIS             | EE | Visualizing Local Government Indicators                   | <a href="http://kodupilt.ee">http://kodupilt.ee</a>                                                   |
| Budapest Institute | HU | The Visualization of Hungarian Budget Data                | <a href="http://www.amipenzunk.hu/">http://www.amipenzunk.hu/</a>                                     |

**Satisfactory projects fulfilling the objectives:**

|                               |     |                                                          |                                                                               |
|-------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *TIS                          | SK  | State Culture and Sports Grants                          | <a href="http://granty.transparency.sk">http://granty.transparency.sk</a>     |
| INEKO                         | SK  | Monitoring the Financial Health of Slovak Municipalities | <a href="http://obce.ineko.sk">http://obce.ineko.sk</a>                       |
| *Analitika*                   | BiH | My Place (Moje Mjesto): Local Governance Data Reform     | <a href="http://www.mojemjesto.ba/en">http://www.mojemjesto.ba/en</a>         |
| PoPuLaRi*                     | BiH | The Parliamentary Searchlight                            | <a href="http://searchlight.populari.org">http://searchlight.populari.org</a> |
| Center for Economic Analyses* | MK  | Budget of Macedonia                                      | <a href="http://www.mkbudget.org">http://www.mkbudget.org</a>                 |
| Institute Alternative*        | ME  | Municipal Budget Monitoring/Montenegro                   | <a href="http://mojgrad.me">http://mojgrad.me</a>                             |

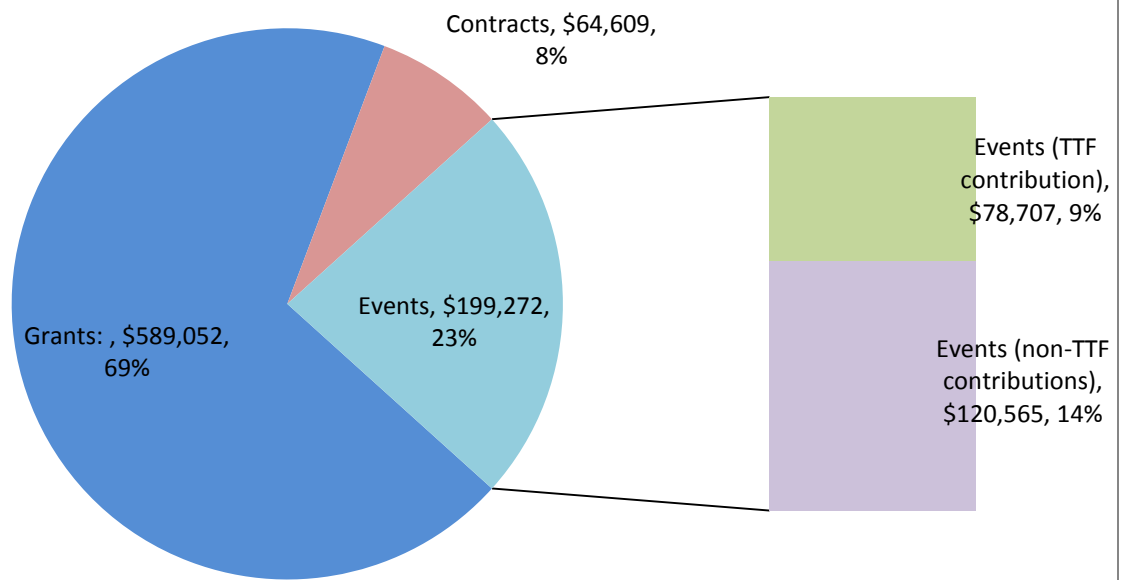
**“Disappointments”:**

|                              |     |                                                                 |                                                                                         |
|------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Center for Security Studies* | BiH | Armed Violence and Injury Monitoring System/Crime Observatories | <a href="http://statistika.css.ba">http://statistika.css.ba</a>                         |
| *Providus                    | LV  | Pursuing the Right to Fair Trial: Mapping the Court Overload    | <a href="http://www.tiesas.lv/tiesas/saraksts">http://www.tiesas.lv/tiesas/saraksts</a> |
| *OMC*                        | GE  | Open Taps/Georgia                                               | <a href="#">Only Project summary</a>                                                    |
| *ARKE                        | HU  | Visualizing European Structural Funds in Hungary                | <a href="#">Government website</a>                                                      |

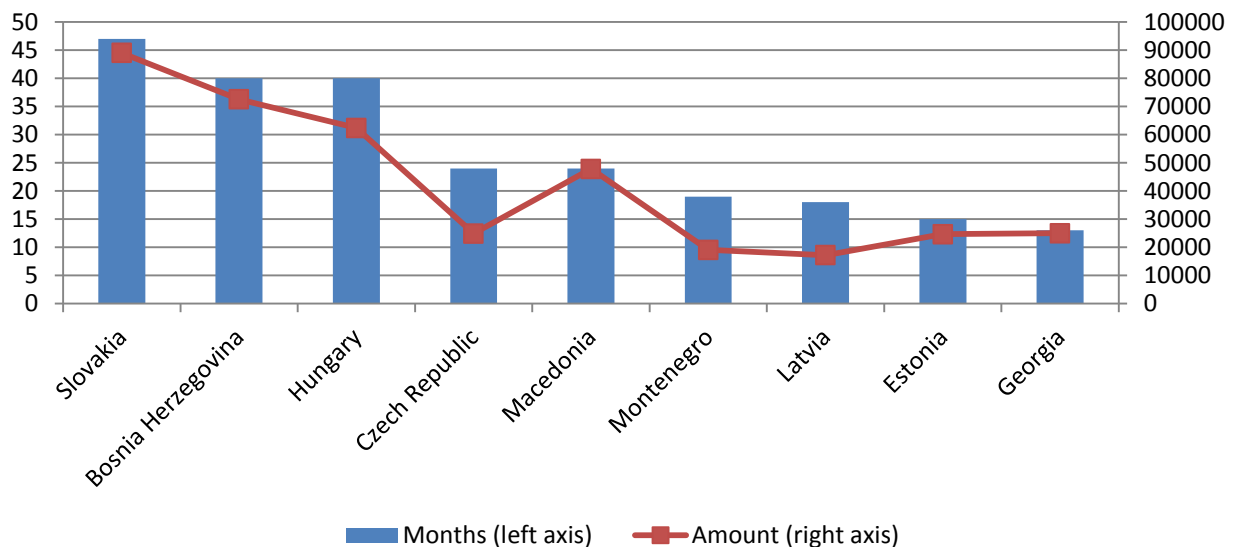
\*Project supported in first (2010) batch.

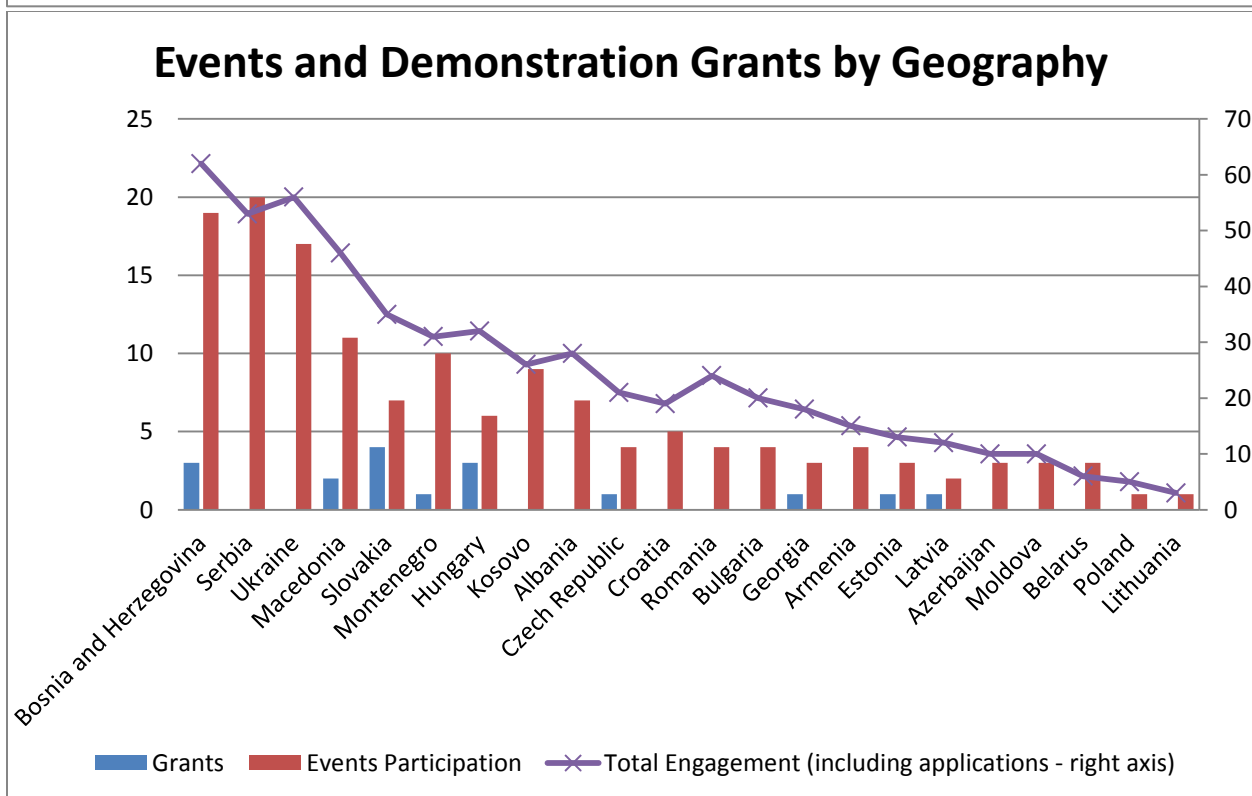
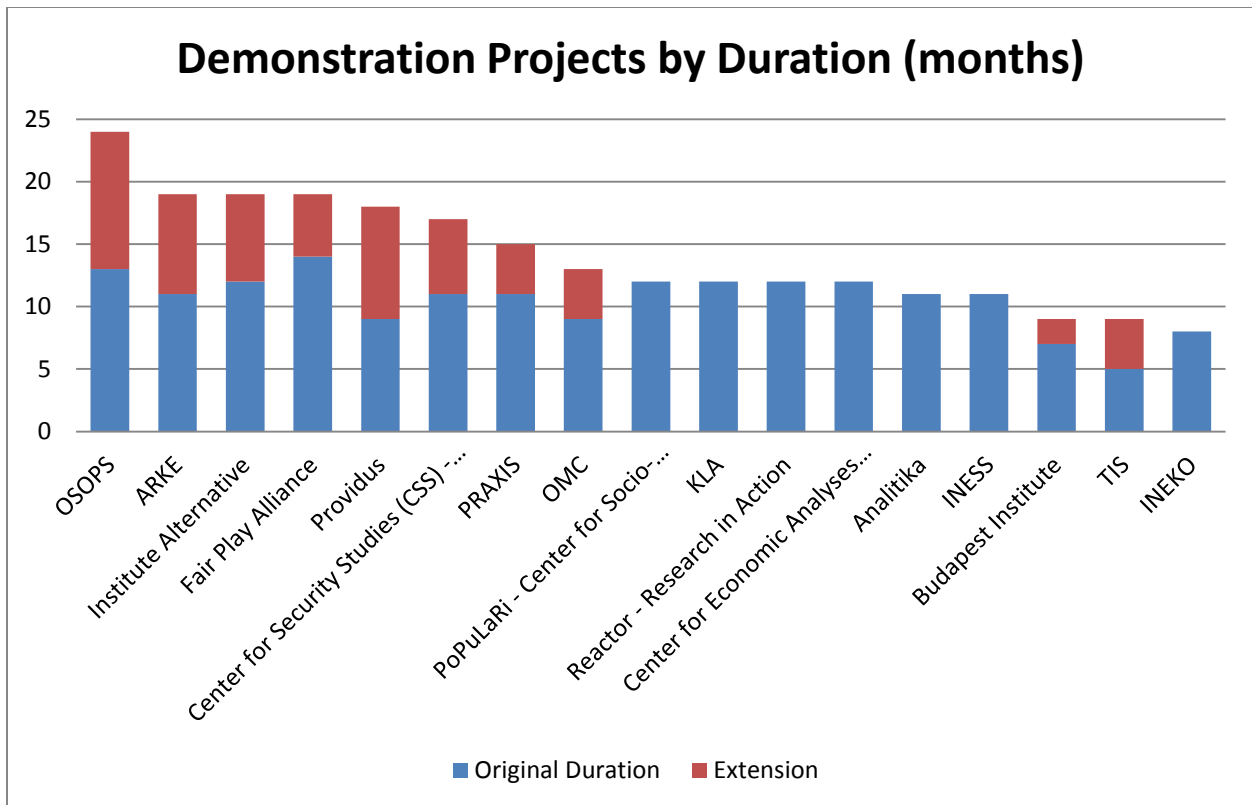
\*Projects overseen primarily by Information Program

### Portfolio: Total Cumulative Size since 2010: \$852,932



### Cummulative Support Through Demonstration Grants





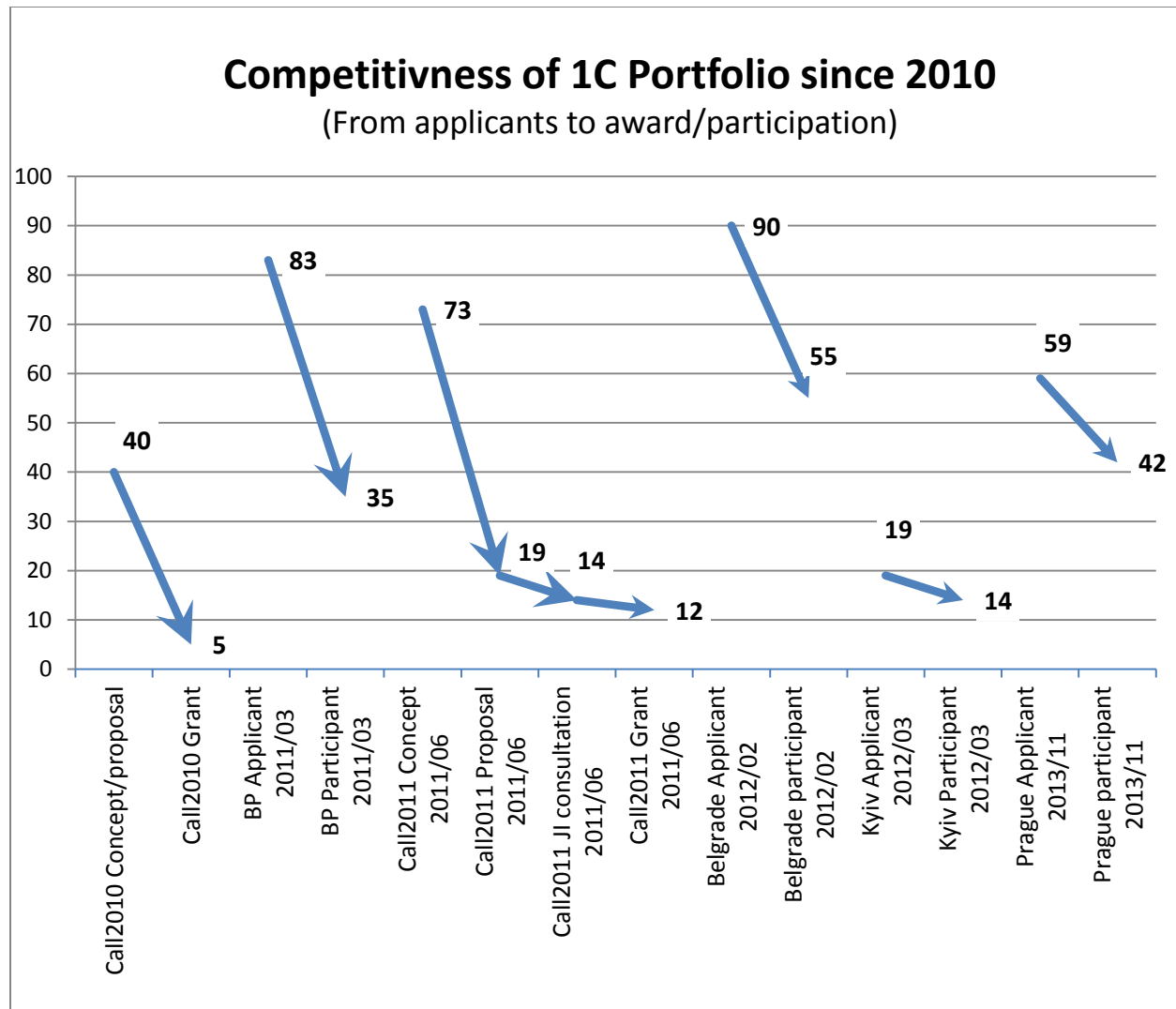


Figure 1: 2011 Overview of Grantees' Clustering by Topics, Skills, Needs and Proposed Outputs