

# The Emergence of Partisan Think Tanks: A Case Study of the Manning Centre and Broadbent Institute

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## ABSTRACT

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While previously in Canada, think tanks defined themselves as non partisan, the Manning Centre for Building Democracy (founded in 2005) and the Broadbent Institute (2011) have both adopted a strong political orientation to guide the work of their organizations. Drawing on interviews with the founders and staff of each organization, this paper will discuss the factors leading to the partisan association of these organizations. Despite the political orientation of the think tanks, they have attempted to maintain their independence from political parties while simultaneously influencing their work. The current political environment at the federal level has in the case of the Broadbent Institute constrained the role of its policy work. Unlike other think tanks in Canada who concentrate on communications with the political élite, these organizations have adopted a bottom-up approach, seeking to empower and influence the general population into become politically active rather than concentrate their efforts on influencing the political elite.

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While the formal decision powers for policy choice lie within the executive and legislative branches of power, policy development itself often occurs outside of these formal political arenas. Think tanks serve as one of the groups strongly involved in public policy debates. Canadian society is continually faced with think tanks' work as major newspapers, radio stations and broadcast networks often interview officials or publish findings from their studies. Determining the influence of a particular think tank on a particular policy debate would be nearly impossible, given the large group of other potential actors, including bureaucracy, media, political parties and interest groups to name a few, all engaged in the long process of policy change. Nevertheless, think tanks still play a vital role among these actors due to their work between academic research and advocacy.

The Canadian think tank sector is rapidly evolving and recently, the Manning Centre (founded in 2005) and the Broadbent Institute (founded in 2011) have become well known for their work on the right and the left of the political spectrum respectively. Founded by former political party leaders, the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre for Building Democracy are unique among organizations operating within the think tank sector in their choice to forgo charitable status. This decision has allowed them to operate without limits on their partisanship. This paper will explore the situational factors that may have led these organizations to choose partisanship over charitable status as an effective vehicle to reach their goal of influence public policy. It will then discuss their relationship with federal political parties before presenting a new bottom-up model for think-tank engagement, defining how these organizations' approach differs from traditional think tanks. It will conclude with a look at the potential for the creation of a further partisan policy institutes reflecting the values of the Liberal Party.

## A Short Overview of Think Tanks in Canada

Scholars have generally found it difficult to establish a universal definition as to what constitutes a think tank. The socio-political context of the creation of the first think tanks strongly influences a society's understanding of what constitute a think tank.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, there were few think tanks prior to the 1960s. At that time, the Canadian government created and generously funded numerous institutions operating at arms-length and advising the government on key policy issues, including the Economic Council of Canada, the Science Council of Canada and the Law Reform Commission.<sup>2</sup> Canadians began to understand think tanks through this model of deliberate discussion on important political issues. Lindquist notes that Canadians are not prone to scrutinize think tanks as they suggest images of scientific debates on society's problems and fits in with Western values such as problem solving, evidence and reasoning.<sup>3</sup>

Canadian think tanks have also often been described as non-partisan, not-for-profit organizations seeking to affect political change, often through the academic merit of their ideas. Unlike the United States and Britain, think tanks have in the past generally relied on government funding.<sup>4</sup> Direct funding, contract research or even indirectly through charitable tax receipts issued to donors are all manners in which the state finances these forms of institutions. Think tanks in Canada are thought of as non-partisan as they have had to assume this status in order to benefit from a charitable status for income tax purposes. While traditionally, think tanks relied

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<sup>1</sup> Diane Stone. 'Garbage Cans, Recycling Bins or Think Tanks? Three Myths about Policy Institutes', *Public Administration*, 85 (2007): 260.

<sup>2</sup> Donald E. Abelson, and Evert A. Lindquist. "Think Tanks Across North America," *Think Tanks and Civil*

<sup>2</sup> Donald E. Abelson, and Evert A. Lindquist. "Think Tanks Across North America," *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalyst for Ideas and Action*, edited by R. Kent Weaver and James G. McGann, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers (2000): 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> Evert A. Lindquist, "Think tanks or clubs? Assessing the influence and roles of Canadian policy institutes" *Canadian Public Administration* 36, no.4 (Winter1993): 552.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. Savoie, Searching for accountability in a government without boundaries. *Canadian Public Administration* 47 (2004): 9.

more heavily on academic research, new forms of think tanks have concentrated on taking strong ideological or even partisan positions and on marketing pre-existing research.<sup>5</sup> Past assumptions flowing from the view of think tanks as independent scientific research institutes finding solutions for society's problems lead Canadians to accept information from think tanks at face value rather than debate the merits of the research produced.

The lack of clarity on what constitutes a think tank has made it difficult to differentiate between these forms of nongovernmental organizations and others, such as interest groups. Think tanks are increasingly using the marketing ability of interest groups; in turn, interest groups are now developing their own research programs to legitimize their role in the policy process.<sup>6</sup> Think tanks range from traditional academic research organizations to think-and-do tanks, which focus on delivering programming. With forms of think tanks not often discussed, multiple journalists have referred to both the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre as think tanks in the past. Instead of attempting to define a think tank in relation to other non-governmental organizations such as interest groups, this study will take the view of think tanks as being one group amongst a spectrum of non-state independent actors seeking to influence policy but without formal decision-making power. The broader definition will allow the case studies to be considered as part of the think tank environment for this paper.

Methodologically, the analysis is based on seven interviews conducted between March 2015 and June 2015 with key representatives from the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre. The interview subjects included both think tank founders as well as upper managers in research, administrative, and training (see Appendix A for list).

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<sup>5</sup> Diane Stone. *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*, London: Frank Cass, (1996): 23.

<sup>6</sup> Abelson and Lindquist, "Think Tanks Across North America," 38.

## Factors for Establishing Partisan Organizations

In Canada, even think tanks that are strongly identified as having a clear political affiliation in the public domain will deny it. In the November 11, 2014 episode of TVO current affairs show *The Agenda*, the Fraser Institute's Jason Clemens, refused to acknowledge his organization as right-wing or even acknowledge it elsewhere along the political spectrum. Corak notes, "there is nothing Paikin [the show's host] can say to get Clemens to drop, even just a bit, the veil of objectivity with which he has cloaked his organization."<sup>7</sup> However, both the Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute operate as partisan organizations. While on their websites, the Manning Centre identifies as conservative while the Broadbent Institute defines itself as non-partisan, through interviews, it became clear both organizations defined their organization strongly through its political orientation. The key representatives of the Broadbent Institute also saw their organization as partisan and identified it as social democratic. The Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute therefore stand out as anomalies in their decision to identify as partisan organizations. The political and financial advantages that may have incited the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre to identify as such include the role of differentiation in an increasingly saturated market of ideas, the reduction in funding to policy institutes, the changes to political party financing and the review by the Canada Revenue Agency of political activities conducted by charitable organizations.

## Reduction in Funding to Policy Institutes

Canada used to be known for its many government funded policy institutes. Nevertheless, since the early 90s, governments have lapsed the funding allocated to policy institutes, which has led to the privatization or demise of multiple think tanks that relied heavily on such funding.

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<sup>7</sup> Miles Corak. "How to Think About Think Tanks," *Policy Options*, Apr. 2007: 63.

They included many of the think tanks founded in the 1960s, such as the Economic Council of Canada, the Science Council of Canada, and the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, which the Mulroney government justified by the proliferation of non-profit think tanks.<sup>8</sup> This approach is currently ongoing, with multiple think tanks closing due to lack of funds, including the Canadian Policy Research Networks in 2009, the National Council of Welfare in 2012, and the North-South Institute in 2014.

The reduction of government spending on think tanks has changed the funding model for think tanks and led the way to seeking new ways of generating revenue. To compensate for the reduction in government funding to policy institutes, conservative think tanks became more reliant on private funding while centrists have instead concentrated on self-generate revenue.<sup>9</sup> The lack of government funding to think tanks, which had traditionally been a major source of funding in Canada, has incentivized think tanks to seek other funding sources.

## **Differentiation in a Saturated Market**

Despite the numerous closures of government institutions due to lack of funding, there is still an abundance of think tank in Canada specializing in different sectors. In 2007, Fetherling estimates that there were approximately one hundred think tanks in Canada, with numbers still growing.<sup>10</sup> In order to quickly become recognized among the panoply of other organizations, the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre had to find a defining characteristic that would separate them from other think tanks. In this sense, politicization becomes “a means to differentiate a new think-tank from the

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<sup>8</sup> Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008: 36

<sup>9</sup> John McLevey. “Think Tanks, Funding, and the Politics of Policy Knowledge in Canada.” *Canadian Review of Sociology / Revue canadienne de sociologie*. 51.1 (2014): 54

<sup>10</sup> George Fetherling, “Tanked: Canadian Think Tanks And The Daily Press.” Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, 8.



traditional institute and to attract support from a targeted constituency.”<sup>11</sup> Interviewees from both organizations agreed that being partisan allowed them to distinguish themselves from other think tanks. Interviewees were unapologetic about the political orientation of their organization. Preston Manning, founder and President of the Manning Centre, justified its approach by stating the Centre was operating and training people for a partisan political arena, whether federal, provincial or municipal.<sup>12</sup> By operating in a partisan manner, the Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute could directly address the political environment in which policy is approved and could in this way offer services not currently covered among think tanks.

## **Political Party Funding Reform**

Prior to 2004, corporations and unions could donate to political parties and candidates without limit. These organizations were a large source of funding for political parties. In 2000, approximately 51% of party fundraising came from corporations and labour unions.<sup>13</sup> However, the passage of Bill C-24 (CEA Amendments, 2003) limited contributions from these organizations to \$1000 before they were outright prohibited through the Federal Accountability Act passed in 2007. These bills also both placed restrictions on individual donations. Changes to political financing rules affected the matter in which both businesses and labour organizations operated, with some increase in grassroots activities among labour unions and some voter information strategies brought forward by business groups.<sup>14</sup> The legislation created an opportunity for organizations doing similar policy work to attempt to obtain funding previously spent on political financing by both individuals and interest groups.

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<sup>11</sup> Donald and Lindquist. "Think Tanks Across North America," 50.

<sup>12</sup> Preston Manning, Telephone interview by author, May 13, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> William Cross, *Political Parties: The Canadian Democratic Audit*. Vancouver: UBC Press (2004): 147.

<sup>14</sup> R. G. Boatright, "Interest group adaptations to campaign finance reform in Canada and the United States," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 42.1 (2009): 26-36.

Political financing limits did not automatically result in the diverting of resources to organizations such as the Manning Centre or the Broadbent Institute. Preston Manning stated that obtaining funding remains difficult, as people with a political interest are used to donating to political parties and less to “the infrastructure, the intellectual capital, the development, the training side, the networking side.”<sup>15</sup> Additionally, certain interest groups were more affected by political financing reforms. Bill C-24 effectively severed the formal ties between unions and the NDP.<sup>16</sup> Labour organizations sought alternatives to political party activity. Dr. Andrew Jackson, Senior Policy Fellow at the Broadbent Institute, said that since the change in the political financing rules, “a lot of the labour movement intervention in politics has been really more around trying to develop support for left, progressive alternatives” which aligned with the role of the Broadbent Institute.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Jackson also confirmed that much of the initial funding for the Broadbent Institute came from labour unions.

It is interesting to note that both organizations also obtain corporate funding, especially for large-scale events such as dinners or conferences. Notably, some corporate sponsors have funded both organizations’ major conferences. Twelve of thirty-six sponsors thanked in the online program for the Manning Networking Conference were also listed among the fifty-five identified for the Broadbent Institute’s Progress Summit. There was still a strong divide between traditionally right-wing corporations such as banks and the petroleum industry supporting the Manning Conference while labour unions supported the Progress Summit. Changes to political financing rules appear to have opened up an avenue for these organizations to finance their work through corporate and union donations.

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<sup>15</sup> Preston Manning.

<sup>16</sup> Boatright, “Interest group adaptations to campaign finance reform in Canada and the United States,” 29.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Jackson, Interview by author. Ottawa, April 13, 2015.

## Charitable Status provided by the Canada Revenue Agency

In Canada, think tanks apply to become recognized as educational charities by the Canada Revenue Agency due to their mandate to inform the public about policy issues. By obtaining charitable status, these organizations can issue donation receipts for income tax purposes. Tax credits for donations are a form of indirect public financial support for think tanks, as government then forgoes that revenue. The tax credits also provide an incentive for citizens to donate to organizations with charitable status such as think tanks.

In order to be identified as charitable, organizations must be non-partisan. This status places limits on the political actions of charitable organizations. They can dedicate a maximum of 10% of their annual budget to political activities (recently adjusted to up to 20% for organizations with less income). However, despite recent attempts from the CRA to clarify what constitutes political activity, “there is still considerable latitude for interpretation by government as to what is allowed under the ‘10 percent rule’ and discretion over who gets called for overstepping the limit.”<sup>18</sup> The loss of charitable status would affect the financial standing of an organization. Understandably, a longitudinal survey of the charitable organizations activity found that they self-restricted participation in public policy activity to avoid jeopardizing their status.<sup>19</sup> These restrictions become an obstacle in the inherent goal of a think tank to influence public policy and are particularly troublesome when organizations are uncertain of which activities are allowed and which are forbidden

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<sup>18</sup> Susan D. Phillips, “Policy Analysis and the Voluntary Sector: Evolving Policy Styles,” *Policy Analysis in Canada: The State of the Art*, edited by L. Dobuzinskis, M. Howlett, D. Laycock Toronto: University of Toronto Press (2007): 504.

<sup>19</sup> A. Paul Pross, and Kernaghan R. Webb. ‘Embedded Regulation: Advocacy and the Federal Regulation of Public Interest Groups,’ *Delicate Dances: Public Policy and the Nonprofit Sector*, edited by Kathy L. Brock, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003. 63-121.

The Conservative government has attempted to place clearer limits on what constitutes political activity. To do so, it allocated \$8 million in the 2012 Federal Budget for the Canada Revenue Agency to conduct a special audit of charitable organizations to ensure compliance with limits placed on their political activities. The most prominent example of think tanks that has come out and acknowledged that it is being audited is the Canadian Centre for Public Policy, a left-leaning think-tank often critical of government policy. Outraged at the apparent political targeting of this organization, over four hundred professors from Canadian universities released an open letter to the media criticizing the Canada Revenue Agency's audit of the political activities of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) over "conservative" think tanks such as the C.D. Howe Institute and the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, which have both confirmed publically that they are not being audited.<sup>20</sup> With the current ongoing audits of think tanks in Canada, the opportunity to finance a think tank through the indirect government funding provided in the forms of tax credits has been curtailed.

Both Ed Broadbent, founder and Chair of the Broadbent Institute, and Mr. Manning recognized Canada's charitable laws as out-of-date and in serious need of revision. Mr. Manning indicated that the political activity restriction placed on think tanks forces a cumbersome bifurcation of efforts, as think tanks must find an interest group willing to champion the idea or advocate on a very limited basis.<sup>21</sup> The Broadbent Institute, when it was first created, originally announced it would seek charitable status. At the time of Jack Layton's death, it directed gifts in his honour to the recently created Broadbent Institute, which was still awaiting charitable status, through the NDP's political funding. However, Mr. Broadbent said that after attempting to obtain

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<sup>20</sup> Dean Beeby, "Academics' open letter calls for moratorium on political tax audits", *CBC News*, September 14 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/m/touch/news/story/1.2765967>.

<sup>21</sup> Preston Manning.

charitable status, the qualifications to obtain it were seen as too constraining on the political role the organization wanted to play and therefore decided to forgo the status.<sup>22</sup>

Without charitable status, both organizations were free to define themselves as partisan and choose how much political advocacy work they would undertake. Both identified that some of the work they were conducting could only be one because they did not have charitable status. Graham Mitchell, Director of Training and Learning at the Broadbent Institute, indicated that contributors saw “a real value in having an organization not fettered by the rules related to charitable tax status.”<sup>23</sup> Choosing partisanship over charitable status, these organizations have been able to use partisanship to differentiate themselves in an increasingly full market of ideas. While originally funding was a potential concern, as the organizations could not entice potential donors with tax receipts, the lack of constraints placed on the organization allowed them to differentiate themselves from other organizations. The government’s reduction in funding to policy institutes, changes in political party financing rules, and the limits placed and now enforced on political activity in the case of charities would have created financial incentives to look at non-traditional forms of financing for think tanks. Politicization would have allowed them to differentiate themselves in an increasingly saturated market.

## **Relationship with Political Parties**

Canada’s parliamentary system strongly influences how think tanks interact with political parties. They have little chance of affecting individual MPs due to the strong party discipline found in Canada’s parliamentary system. Nevertheless, they are not necessarily powerless. While there are supposedly fewer points of access for policy institutes to participate in systems with

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<sup>22</sup> Ed Broadbent. Interview by author. Ottawa, June 4, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Graham Mitchell. Telephone interview by author, May 13, 2015.

strong political parties like that of Canada, parties can magnify the influence of a particular think tank if it relies heavily on its work.<sup>24</sup> Canada provides a unique case of study, as despite its parliamentary system, party supported institutes have not been created. Instead, Canadian think tanks “work as independent policy entrepreneurs, influencing the agenda of public policy from the outside.”<sup>25</sup> That is not to say that they have not been considered. One of the major recommendations to come out of the 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing was for federal political parties to create policy institutes in order to improve their policy depth. However, this call to action has yet to be implemented. The creation of the Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute appears at first to fill this gap.

Despite the partisan associations previously discussed, these organizations are both careful to create some distance from political parties. Explaining the Manning Centre’s tagline, the Home of the conservative movement, Dave Quist, VP of Administration, differentiated between small-c conservative and conservative-identified political parties at the provincial or federal levels. He identified that most who adhere to political parties such as the Conservative Party of Canada would then also identify themselves as part of the conservative movement, but that the opposite would not necessarily be true.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, interviewees from the Broadbent Institute were clear that such being a social democrat was not only a quality of the New Democratic Party, but could also be seen in other parties. Dr. Jackson summarized the feeling among the interviewees when, after identifying the Broadbent Institute as a social democrat

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<sup>24</sup> Stone. *Think Tanks and the Policy Process*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> G. Baier and H. Bakvis., “Think Tanks and Political Parties in Canada: Competitors or Collaborators?” *Think tanks and Public Policies in Latin America*, edited by A. Garcé and G. Uña Buenos Aires: Fundación CIPPEC, (2010): 41.

<sup>26</sup> Dave Quist. Telephone interview by author, March 9, 2015.

institute, he stated that the Institute was “partisan in [its] sense of ideas, non-partisan in the sense of [its] politics.”<sup>27</sup>

While at the federal level, the Manning Centre only has one political party, the Conservative Party of Canada, to which it has affinities, there is more fragmentation on the left of the political spectrum. Interviewees therefore tended to first identify the NDP as social democrats but then also take into account that some Liberals and Greens might also identify as such. Hoping to avoid being pigeonholed as an “NDP 2”, Mr. Broadbent reached out to members of other political parties to join the Institute. At the beginning, its board included Monique Bégin, a former Liberal Cabinet minister under Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Overall, ties to the NDP are still stronger than to other parties, partially due to the networks in which both Mr. Broadbent himself runs and for some staff, who have in the past worked with NDP MPs. Jonathan Sas, Director of Research for the Broadbent Institute, stated that to influence political parties, the organization needed to build up support for their ideas but that it also needed to keep critical distance from parties in order to retain its credibility.<sup>28</sup>

Though both organizations make clear to differentiate themselves from political parties, there are still many informal links between the organizations and the political parties of their namesake. For example, members of the Board of Directors from the Manning Centre serve on local CPC electoral district associations and multiple staff of both organizations have previously worked for the political party, both organizations have made visits to their founder’s former caucus and both organizations have highlighted the numerous caucus members who have attended their conferences in Ottawa. The think tanks are waging a difficult battle; they must

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Jackson.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Sas, Telephone interview by author, April 24, 2015.

develop their relationships with political parties yet avoid becoming confounded with them. To do so, they concentrate on developing ties with individuals but avoid relating too closely to the party itself.

## Current Political Environment

While these institutes share some affinities with the political parties of their founders, the current makeup of the Parliament may facilitate or frustrate these organizations' policy-making influence. During a government where the ruling party is not considered an ally of the organization, "the party affiliation of think tanks limits their objectivity, credibility, and independence (and) their access to policy makers and influence on policy makers is likely to be quite limited."<sup>29</sup> This would be especially true in a majority parliament in the Canada, when decision-making power is concentrated in the executive and its parliamentary majority and the Opposition's role in terms of policy creating is minimal. Given that the Broadbent Institute, created in 2011, has only operated under a majority Conservative government, it is fitting that Mr. Sas identified that another government, even a minority or a coalition, might provide an opportunity where the role of the organization might shift from opposing current policy to proposing new initiatives.<sup>30</sup> The Broadbent Institute and its counterpart on the right, the Manning Centre, are cautious in their ties to political parties and strive to retain their independence. The current political situation also has a considerable impact on the type of programming they will run.

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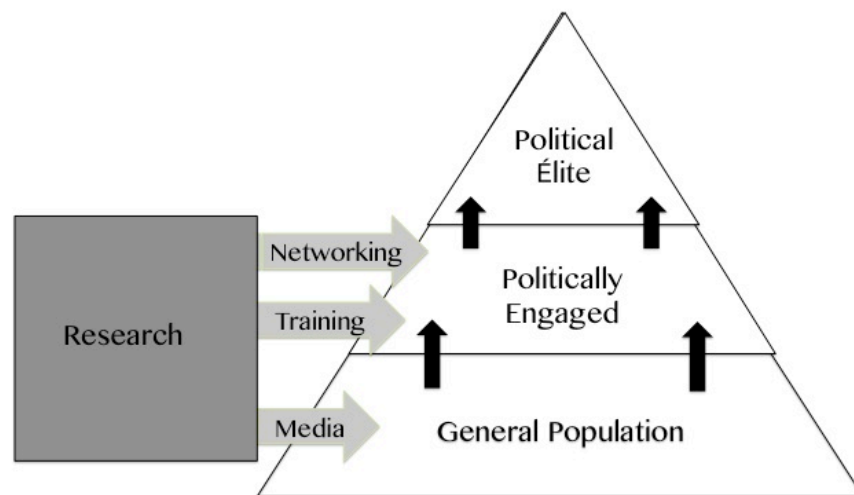
<sup>29</sup> James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver. "Think Tanks and Civil Societies in a Time of Change," *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalyst for Ideas and Action*, edited by R. Kent Weaver and James G. McGann, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers (2000): 8.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Sas.



## A New Bottom-Up Model for Think Tanks

The think tanks studied in this paper are atypical in their partisanship. They are also atypical in their approach to influencing public policy. Traditional think tanks, through the academic and technical character of their work, tend to “cater primarily to the economically and politically literate [élite].<sup>31</sup> The Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre have instead concentrated their efforts on communicating and developing the skills of the masses and attempting to influence public policy from the bottom up.



The above figure separates the Canadian population into three categories: the general population, the politically engaged and the political élite. The general population group is largely disengaged from politics and not currently involved in any form of political activism. The politically engaged are those with interest in politics and may be active in political life, though in smaller or less influential roles. Higley’s definition of political élite as “persons who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect

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<sup>31</sup> Stone, *Think Tanks and the Policy Process*, 116.

political outcomes regularly and substantially”<sup>32</sup> is used to define top tier. This definition is broadened to include those involved in political parties, government, corporations and unions but also those in civil society organizations. The groups of people identified in higher levels in the pyramid have access to these engagement opportunities. Nevertheless, due to the high demands placed on them by numerous actors, they do not have time to take advantage of these opportunities. Mr. Manning indicated that the Manning Centre has recognized this dilemma and therefore deliberately focused the work of the organizations on accessing people “upstream”.<sup>33</sup>

These organizations have developed three different avenues to interact with and ultimately influence the groups identified in the pyramid. These avenues are media, training and networking, all of which are influenced by research.

## Research

In order to inform their programming, both the Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute rely on research. A key difference between the organizations relates to who produces the information used. The Manning Centre operates the Manning Foundation, an affiliated think tank which conducts research and that has obtained charitable status, thereby providing a venue for donors to fund research and obtain a charitable receipt in the process. Despite this, the Manning Centre and the Manning Foundation conduct little of their own research. Instead of “trying to compete or replace the conservative-oriented think tanks, “ Mr. Manning stated that the Centre is “basically trying to take much of the work they do, interpret it and try to translate it into some action that results in the implementation of policies.”<sup>34</sup> By separating the research function of the organization and relying heavily on other sources, the Manning Centre is able to

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<sup>32</sup> John Higley, *Elite theory in political sociology*, Austin: University of Texas (2008): 3.

<sup>33</sup> Preston Manning.

<sup>34</sup> Preston Manning.

concentrate on developing its programming. Staff were quick to identify the organization as not a think tank, but a do tank. While do tanks have not been described in literature, Stone identified that think-and-do tanks that no longer uphold their research agenda risk losing their identity as think tanks.<sup>35</sup> As the Manning Centre operates in Canada, where the term think tank has come to mean scientific detachment and objectivity, it risks losing its legitimacy by concentrating on delivering programming. As Canadians have few other reference points to which to compare the Centre, even if the key informants disputed its role as a think tank, contextually it is still understood in those terms and some of its work may be dismissed because of this.

The Broadbent Institute has placed more emphasis on developing research capabilities within the institutions. All interviewees from the Broadbent Institute suggested that there was a lack of think tank activity on the left of the political spectrum as opposed to the right. Mr. Broadbent noted that the Broadbent Institute was originally founded with the “idea of being the left counterbalance to the Manning (Centre) and the Fraser Institute” (interview). By identifying both the activist and research vanguards of conservative think tanks, thereby recognizing the need to counter both the activist and research agendas of the vanguards of conservative and free-market think-tanks.

The preponderance of right wing think tanks both in the media and in appearances before Parliament as well as mentions in the House of Commons demonstrates some of this activity. In Donald Abelson’s tables identifying media citations between 1999 and 2008 and appearances before Parliament between 2000 and 2008, right-wing think tanks are much more prominently used. To qualify where an organization landed on the political spectrum, I used McLevey’s identification and then evaluated think tanks not identified in his study through their general

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<sup>35</sup> Stone, *Think Tanks and the Policy Process*, 22-23.

reputation within the policy community.<sup>36</sup> While 48% of media citations were from right-wing think tanks, only 16% were from left-wing. As for appearances before Parliament at committees, 31% were from right-wing think tanks while only 18% were from left-wing organizations.<sup>37</sup> The remainder of citations and appearances were by centrist think tanks. Of the top three organizations which were cited or which appeared the most before Parliament, two were right-wing while the last was centrist. Progressive organizations were simply less present in both media citations and in appearances before Parliament, giving the Broadbent Institute the opportunity to develop a strong research focus that would help its work become recognized. While the Manning Centre had chosen to concentrate its efforts on delivering programming and therefore relies on the multiple well-known other conservative think tanks, the Broadbent Institute has identified the need for more research on the left of the political spectrum. Research, whether external or internal, serves to inform the programming they run, including media, training and networking.

## Media

The Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre both use media to quickly catch the attention of a new public. Media developed must be easily accessible and avoids not only academic terminology but also academic forms of publication. Instead of producing books, articles or even briefs as has become more common among think tanks, the organizations use forms reminiscent of magazines. The Manning Centre has produced quizzes (ex: “What can YOU do for the movement?”) and a “Vote for Your Favourite Harper Government Accomplishment” tournament, where contestant participated though Facebook or Twitter. The Broadbent Institute has produced videos and developed a digital media political news source,

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<sup>36</sup> McLevey. “Think Tanks, Funding, and the Politics of Policy Knowledge in Canada,” 65.

<sup>37</sup> Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, 228-264.

Press Progress, which uses forms such as listicles (a form of article that uses a list as its structure, ex: “4 Ways Stephen Harper is Silencing the Public Service”).

The forms of media they use are more likely to be used by youth, who are much more likely to access “their news and information online and from alternative, rather than mainstream, media”.<sup>38</sup> They are also often identified as a key sector with low political engagement, given the low voter turnout and the low percentage of youth who belong to a political party.<sup>39</sup> They are therefore more likely to be among the general population. Through their communications, especially through easily accessible social media campaigns and links, the organizations attempt to engage the general public and encourage them to get involved in the political process. As they become politically engaged, they then can access some of the other programming offered by the think tanks, such as training and networking.

## **Training**

A clear distinction between traditional think tanks operating in Canada and the Manning Centre and Broadbent Institute is the strong emphasis these organizations place on training. Both organizations plan in-person training sessions with interested people. The Manning Centre also provides webinars for which you can sign up, while the Broadbent Institute has posted videos of training sessions held in the past. Both organizations cited the tension between delivering programming online and in person. While online programming was seen as advantageous due to the ability to easily reach people across the country, as politics is seen as a people-centered activity, it was important to be present to translate some of that knowledge in person and to ensure that a full understanding of the training needed by the person who was participating.

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Pat Mackinnon, Sonia Pitre and Judy Watling. *Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement*. Research report. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks. 2007, 5.

<sup>39</sup> André Blais and Peter Loewe. *Youth Electoral Engagement in Canada*. Working Papers. Elections Canada. 2011, 13; Mackinnon, Pitre and Watling. *(Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement*, 15.

The training opportunities provided by the Manning Centre are more oriented towards entering the traditional political arena, with courses on campaign management, social media and information on things to consider before running for political office. Dr Sam Shaw, VP of Training at the Manning Centre, even mentioned the possibility of having certain courses offered accredited by a university.<sup>40</sup> The Broadbent Institute's training capabilities are more oriented towards issue campaigning. Training, according to Mr Mitchell, was about "supporting activists and campaigners and equipping them with the policy tools and advocacy tools to advance their issues to the public space."<sup>41</sup> Training provides those already engaged in the political process to become more effective in their work. The goal of both organizations is to have the people on their side of the political spectrum succeed in their political goals and advance whether conservative or social democrat interests.

## **Networking**

Another opportunity provided by the Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute is networking. Through its training opportunities and in conferences and other activities, the organizations are in regular contact with other think tanks; political parties; industry and labour groups; activist organizations; and the media. The Broadbent Institute is even located in various locations across the country, allowing staff to be embedded in the networks of organizations throughout the country and to have an on-the-ground understanding of the needs, according to Mr. Mitchell.<sup>42</sup> The most important networking event for each organization, the Manning Networking Conference (MNC) and the Broadbent Institute's Progress Summit, attract hundreds of delegates to Ottawa. Both Preston Manning and Ed Broadbent were clear to define that these

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<sup>40</sup> Sam Shaw, Telephone interview by author, April 17, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Graham Mitchell.

<sup>42</sup> Graham Mitchell.

conferences were quite different from traditional party conferences. Mr. Manning described the MNC as “not as controversial and not as controlled as party conferences [because there isn’t] tension over some vote, over some issue out of fear that somebody will go offside, or a competition for some executive position.”<sup>43</sup> The lack of political tension also allows for a more open discussion of tensions within the political movement. In this sense, the organizations seek to act as sounding boards, where “instead of prescribing specific policies or options, they can provide a congenial environment for decision makers to reflect, propose and experiment with new ideas, getting feedback from receptive and critical audiences.”<sup>44</sup> In this regard, Mr. Quist pointed to the MNC hosting a panel on euthanasia shortly after the Supreme Court decision overturning the ban against physician-assisted suicide.<sup>45</sup> Both the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre’s networking events seek to provide a ground in which the various political players in policy debates can not only create links with one another, but also debate issues within their respective movements.

Through the three forms of programming outlined above, these organizations hope to influence citizens to participate actively in the political process. Media peaks citizens’ interests and encourages them to become engaged, where they can then access training and networking opportunities. Instead of attempting to reach already overburdened individuals among the political élite, both the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre have reversed the traditional think tank approach to address the lack of information and programming available to the general public and giving them the skills to move up the pyramid of political influence in the hopes of ultimately reaching policy change at the top.

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<sup>43</sup> Preston Manning.

<sup>44</sup> Baier and Bakvis, “Think tanks and political parties in Canada: Competitors or Collaborators?,” 39.

<sup>45</sup> Dave Quist.

## A Liberal Do-Tank?

Despite the fact neither the Broadbent Institute nor the Manning Centre have direct links with political parties and that there has been some outreach to Liberals by the Broadbent Institute, the question remains as to whether a Liberal do-tank of the same caliber will emerge. Historically, at the federal level, the party with the least party foundation activity has been the Liberal Party of Canada. Given their role as the so-called “natural governing party”, instead of building their own institutions, the Liberals have relied on the bureaucracy for policy advice.<sup>46</sup> Their lack of experience in this function may make the organization as a whole less inclined to create a do-tank for the advancement of their policies. Recently, it has been suggested that Canada 2020 could become such an organization.<sup>47</sup> This organization does have clear Liberal ties, in both senior staff having worked with the party in the past and in its speaker series, which this year included the Liberal Minister of Finance of Québec and as closing Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau. However, its continued focus on largely elite-based activities, including the release of books and speaker series while it lacks training functions. Its activities are those more often used by traditional think tanks and therefore unlike those identified in do-tanks.

Furthermore, another notable difference is that the Liberal Party of Canada is a brokerage party, while both the NDP and the Reform Party, in which both Ed Broadbent and Preston Manning developed their political identity, are parties based on participatory grassroots, populist policy development. While the NDP and Reform Party are both rooted in allowing members of the political parties to participate through elaborate processes for participation among grassroots

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<sup>46</sup> Baier and Bakvis, “Think tanks and political parties in Canada: Competitors or Collaborators?,” 41.

<sup>47</sup> Michele Austin, “Manning Centre Networking Conference is the Coachella for conservatives”, *The Hill Times*, March 2, 2015. <http://www.hilltimes.com/opinion-piece/2015/03/02/its-the-coachella-for-conservatives/41231>.



supporters, the Liberal Party (and the new Conservative Party) have not used such mechanisms.<sup>48</sup> As such, these parties may lend themselves better to the form of bottom-up approach used by this new form of think tank. Finally, there may be no former political party leader who may be able to take on the important role of founder. While both Mr. Broadbent and Mr. Manning served in the House of Commons as leaders of Opposition parties, the Liberals do not have a past Leader who has served for a significant amount of time who is not a former Prime Minister. Regardless, at the time, there is little indication that a think tank with Liberal ties similar to the Broadbent Institute and the Manning Centre will develop.

## Conclusion

The reduction in government funding to public policy institutes through direct funding and charitable status as well as the changes to political party financing has created the financial incentive to develop partisan think tanks within Canada. However, both the Manning Centre and the Broadbent Institute have attempted to maintain independence from political parties while simultaneously influencing their work. The current political environment places constraints on these institutions' role in public policy debate. Most importantly, these organizations have foregone traditional think tank approaches of influencing the political élite to instead work their way into the policy debates from the bottom-up. Through their media communications, the organizations seek to interest citizens to participate in public policy creation before providing training and networking opportunities to help these citizens effectively advocate and integrate the political process.

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<sup>48</sup> William Cross, "Policy Study and Development in Canada's Political Parties," *Policy Analysis in Canada: The State of the Art*, edited by L. Dobuzinskis, M. Howlett, D. Laycock Toronto: University of Toronto Press (2007): 430-431.

The creation of do-tanks indicates a further politicization of think tanks. Given the strong focus on programming in both organizations, the tendency of the public to recognize them as think tanks may ultimately be to their detriment, as they will then be judged through the scientific and research-based models. Such an approach downplays their important training and networking roles and misjudges the role they are attempting to play within the policy community. Given the decline in political activity among the Canadian population, the Manning Centre and Broadbent Institute could work as stepping-stones to increased political engagement. Equating of these organizations with research-based think tanks does not shed proper light their merit of their work.

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## Appendix A – List of Interviews

Below is the list of the seven people with whom in-depth interviews were conducted. Interviews ranged between half an hour and one hour and a half, with the typical interview lasting around one hour. Most of the interviews were conducted by phone, with some conducted in person in Ottawa. Interviews took place between March and June 2015.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
<b>Ed Broadbent</b>	Founder and Chair	Broadbent Institute
<b>Andrew Jackson</b>	Senior Policy Fellow	Broadbent Institute
<b>Preston Manning</b>	Founder and President	Manning Centre
<b>Graham Mitchell</b>	Director of Training and Leadership	Broadbent Institute
<b>Dave Quist</b>	V.P. Administration	Manning Centre
<b>Jonathan Sas</b>	Director of Research	Broadbent Institute
<b>Sam Shaw</b>	V.P. Training	Manning Centre