



# The Inside-Out International Think Tank Manual



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# The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program®

## Think Tank Manual

### Introduction

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program® has grown exponentially over the years. It started in 1997 with an initial class held at a county jail in Philadelphia. The first class conducted in a state prison was in Pennsylvania in 2002. It was in this first class, held at the State Correctional Institution at Graterford (now SCI-Phoenix), that the group of both inside and outside students decided to continue meeting after the semester was over. The initial plan was to create projects centered on public education about issues of crime and justice. It quickly developed into the very first Inside-Out Think Tank.

Since 2002, Inside-Out has grown, nationally and now internationally, with 32 established Think Tanks, including four that are international. As the program continues to grow, with more and more instructors wanting to initiate Think Tanks, we are offering some suggestions and best practices for doing so. This manual will inform and assist those who already have Think Tanks and, at the same time, it will hopefully provide guidance to those who are thinking about starting their own Think Tank.

### Inside-Out Think Tanks

These groups serve many purposes. While we do not represent “Think Tanks” in the traditional sense of making policy, Inside-Out Think Tanks focus more on community building, social justice, and public education, along with fostering opportunities for both skills and leadership development.

### Purpose of Think Tanks

Inside-Out recognizes the importance of the community building aspect of the program. Over the years, we have become a program where a large part of the focus is on using the educational process to bring people together, to not only change themselves, but also to effect change in society. Sharing a common experience and uniting around the power of education, this process helps to inspire and empower people to act. We have found that Think Tanks are one of the many opportunities to extend our reach – from behind prison walls -- into the broader community.

The Graterford Think Tank (now at SCI-Phoenix) has served as a model for Inside-Out’s International Instructor Training Institutes, in which both inside and outside members have taken the lead in facilitating parts of the trainings. This involvement has developed leadership skills that are transferable to individuals’ future aspirations and goals.

Some Think Tanks conduct community workshops and other such events that engage, not only people from the community, but also their fellow men and women at their institution or facility. Think Tanks also serve to provide outlets for inside and outside alumni to stay engaged in Inside-Out activities.

## History of the Graterford (Phoenix) Think Tank

The first Inside-Out class at Graterford (Phoenix) had such a powerful impact on its participants that all 30 participating students refused to let this experience fade away and become just a memory. There was an enormous level of energy at the end and the group wanted to keep that energy alive. The group was full of enthusiasm, energy, and ideas. Feeling the impact of the recently completed class, the group felt compelled to figure out a way to keep meeting to discuss criminal justice issues that affected each of us in a deeply personal way. Some members had offended, some were victims, and all were deeply committed to helping raise awareness about the flaws within the criminal justice system. The group believed in the possibility of proposing workable remedies to some of these glaring systemic defects. The group was idealistic, with a felt need to keep the passion going, having no idea where the weekly meetings would lead. The challenge was to put the theories that were discussed into practice.

The Think Tank began with a clear mission: “To re-educate the public about crime and justice.” The initial list of projects was massive, but in the midst of discerning the direction of the group, one of the members suggested that we take the Inside-Out model and develop it into a national program. Figuring out how to make that happen took about nine months, at which point the first national training institute was conducted. To the group’s great surprise, 20 college professors from throughout the country attended this inaugural training. We were off and running!

Since then (as of 5-2020), we have held 67 international trainings in which nearly 1,100 instructors have taken part. There are Inside-Out instructors in almost every US state and in a dozen other countries. While the Graterford Think Tank has been involved in the majority of the trainings, over the past 10 years, Inside-Out has expanded these trainings to other parts of the network and has engaged many Think Tanks in co-facilitating the trainings. Trainings have been offered in British Columbia, California, Illinois, Mexico, Michigan, Oregon, Toronto, and West Virginia.



## Examples of National and International Think Tanks

### Oregon:

Another Chance at Education (ACE) is an Inside-Out Think Tank at Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem. Their aim, in accord with the aspirations of both Inside-Out and the Oregon Accountability Model, is to foster educational efforts that contribute to an increasingly just society, an improvement in public safety, and the creation of opportunities for those involved to become more productive citizens. Their activities incorporate education and community outreach to promote cooperation between ACE and other organizations/groups both within and outside the prison. Their goal is to assist in reducing recidivism, preventing future violence and crime, and to further Inside-Out's contributions to post-secondary education for Oregon's prisons and campuses.

The ACE Think Tank meets bimonthly at Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem and is comprised of about 14 "inside" and 5 "outside" members. ACE formerly served as a site for Inside-Out Instructor Trainings.

### Tennessee:

The SALT Think Tank (Schools for Alternative Learning and Transformation), in Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, has expanded to include Death Row. Insiders on death row asked for a class on community building and conflict resolution, so they created two opportunities, including a bi-weekly discussion group focusing on Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow" and related readings with graduate philosophy students. They also held weekly working/learning 2.5-hour sessions focusing on such themes as: Thich Nhat Hahn's "engaged Buddhism and nonviolence;" the nonviolent direct action rooted in the civil rights movement; the South African and Greensboro, North Carolina, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions; and the Beloved Community's partnership with the Latin Kings gang to increase possibilities for peacemaking. The group on death row is now working to solidify their "SALT II" team and has already engaged a number of folks from the community.

### Michigan:

The Michigan Theory Group is developing its own cultural capital. A concept coined by French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets. Cultural capital includes material and non-material social resources that confer power and status, like higher education. So, in the spirit of the intellectual engagement that is foundational to Inside-Out, they have been working for years to increase their cultural capital through an in-depth educational process.

The Theory Group has also been tapped as one of the primary groups involved in co-facilitating Inside-Out's Training Institutes and has hosted trainings at their facility over the past 10 years. Additionally, the Theory Group has conducted several regional meetings and conferences over the years, engaging hundreds of people from the community, political leaders, religious leaders, and students.

## **Australia:**

The Australia Think Tank is established in a woman's facility and was organized to discuss current topical issues as they relate to the criminal justice system, and to produce reports that outline practical strategies to reduce the likelihood of women returning to prison and to improve their quality of life upon release.

## **Arizona:**

The Arizona Transformation Project (ATP) Think Tank began in 2016 as a collaboration between students and faculty from the Arizona State University (ASU) School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and incarcerated men at the Arizona State Prison Complex in Florence, AZ. The start of the group followed the completion of the first Inside-Out Prison Exchange course in Arizona in spring 2016.

“I’ve gained a new perspective about how women in prison are treated. In addition, there is always more to a story if you look beyond the cover.”

– Amanda  
Outside Think Tank Member

The first course, like most Inside-Out classes, was an overwhelming success. And like most classes, the end left students and facilitators with the sense that there was still more work to be done. Inside students of that first class were invited to apply to be part of a Think Tank that would bring together facilitators with inside student alumni to continue the work they started. Five inside students were selected to be a part of this group, which began to meet biweekly in the visitation room of the East Unit at ASPC-Florence over the summer of 2016. These eight individuals – five inside students and three course facilitators – developed the name, mission statement, goals and responsibilities of the Arizona Transformation Project. The mission of the ATP is to produce and maintain high-quality learning opportunities that will make our communities and correctional facilities more just and socially aware – through collaboration, dialogue, and transformative experiences.

## **County Jails vs. State and Federal Prisons**

### **Starting a Think Tank in Federal Prisons, State Prisons, and County Jails**

It has been amazing how powerful the Think Tank model has become. Think Tanks have sprung up, literally, all over the world. Some are in state and federal prisons, while a couple have established themselves in county jails. When starting a Think Tank, it is important to know the different aspects of each kind of facility. We will attempt to define each in very basic terms, although each jurisdiction will differ from state-to-state, county-to-county, and country-to-country. For example, in some states, there is a difference between sentenced and un-sentenced people. So, we advise checking into how the system functions in a particular area when considering options.

## County Jails

- These facilities house a mix of people. Most men and women incarcerated in jails are there as pre-trial detainees. They have been arrested, charged, given bail but are un-sentenced, which means that their stay at the facility may be brief.
- Some folks may be detained as parole violators, which means that they were released on parole from the county but are now detained as a result of violating their parole. Detainers (a writ to hold) are usually lodged until such time as the matter of the violation is cleared up or s/he is re-incarcerated by the judge. Their stay at the facility may be slightly longer than pre-trial detainees, but again, this is based on the rules, policies and laws of the jurisdiction in which the Think Tank will be based.
- Those sentenced to county jail time are also housed in county jails. What that means varies according to the jurisdiction. As an example, in Pennsylvania, men and women sentenced to county time can serve no more than two years of a maximum sentence. Anything more than two years is considered state time and will be served in a state prison, unless, for some particular reason, the judge orders the state time to be served in the county jail.

## State Prisons

- State prisons are different from county jails; they house longer-term sentenced people (more than two years maximum in many states). In a county jail, people are transient because of bail, dropped charges, transfers, etc., as opposed to state prisons, where the population is more stable. In the United States, when someone is sentenced to state prison time, they will serve a maximum sentence of two years or longer, which includes people sentenced to life-without-parole. While men and women housed in state facilities for longer terms are more stable populations, there are still occasions when a group member may be lost through transfer to another prison or release at the end of their sentence.

## Federal Prisons

- The Federal System is, in many ways, similar to the state prison system. It houses men and women for longer periods, although the federal system also has an un-sentenced or pre-trial aspect to it. However, if the plan is to create a Think Tank or even a class in a federal facility, please note that we have a coordinator for the federal system who can assist in getting things started. We strongly advise, before contacting anyone in the federal system, to first contact our federal coordinator, Jeri Kirby ([jkirby01@fairmontstate.edu](mailto:jkirby01@fairmontstate.edu)).

“The biggest shift that I’ve seen in the group is its cohesiveness. Everyone focusing on one thing, and moving in the same direction... This experience has been rewarding to me, because I know people outside of the walls care about us in here... I realize now that a lot of our concerns are not just our concerns.”

– *Inside Participant*

## What Inside-Out is and What it is Not

First, it is important to again stress what Inside-Out is and what it is not. At its foundation, Inside-Out is an educational program that provides both inside and outside participants with an experience outside the normal realm of classroom education. One of the main principles is to “DO NO HARM.”

### Non-Programmatic Contact

- It is important to recognize that, although we engage inside and outside students in ways that build bonds and friendships, those connections are developed in a very narrow context. Even though bonding is a natural outgrowth of shared experiences, the non-programmatic contact policy remains a mainstay of the Inside-Out program for safety reasons for all participants and for the program as a whole. It is vitally important that we maintain boundaries that will help us to do no harm to oneself, other participants, or the program.

### Vouching or Advocating

- Inside-Out’s general policy is that we do not vouch for or advocate for individuals. As difficult as this policy seems, it is a necessary safeguard for the integrity of the program and to ensure our ongoing access to correctional facilities. When appropriate and approved by the facility, we may write letters of support based on our limited knowledge of an individual’s educational achievements and/or leadership development. However, it is important to remember that, in Inside-Out activities, we get to know people in a very limited way, even through involvement in Think Tanks. Our commitment needs to be circumscribed by the limited experience and knowledge of the person that we have been able to glean.

### Activism and Protesting

- Activism falls into a similar category. The very fact that Inside-Out is an educational program that goes inside of correctional institutions, it would not be in anyone’s best interest to take overt actions against the injustice often found in the criminal justice system, even if, as we go into these institutions, we witness situations that strike a nerve or that seem abhorrent to our views of human dignity. That is not to say that individuals cannot participate in activist activities; we just cannot do so in the name of Inside-Out. Having said that, sometimes doing activist work outside of Inside-Out may still result in the loss of volunteer status at the facility and possibly every prison or jail in the state, should it come up as an issue for the facility. It is essential to understand the context in which we are operating.

Additionally, our program sits on a very fragile plane, and activism against prisons and jails can have ripple effects throughout the country, as DOC administrators often communicate about programs within their colleagues. Any such activity could test the fragility of Inside-Out, putting our ability to teach inside and/or continue with a Think Tank at risk of removal from the institution.

## Helping (Doing For vs. Being With)

- When plans are set in motion to start a Think Tank, it is important for us to also remember that we are not a “helping program.” We are not there to help the inside participants. Helping, as we define it, deals with “doing for” instead of “being with.” It is fundamental to acknowledge and value the human dignity of the men and women inside. These are very capable people who have human capital, capacity, and agency, and Inside-Out essentially provides opportunities for Think Tank participants (both inside and out) to realize their capabilities if they do not already.



“I got here in Inside-Out and then this Think Tank. It has provided me a means to do good finally for the first time in my life. A means to grow in a positive sense. And for the first time it feels like I am floating to outer space and not fighting gravity. So it has given me a proper perspective of who I am, and what I’m meant to do.”

– Tyr  
*Inside Think Tank Member*



## Starting a Think Tank

If the decision is made to start a Think Tank, a few things must be taken into consideration at the beginning of the process. Here are a few questions to ponder when moving forward.

### Why start a Think Tank?

- What is the purpose for starting a Think Tank?
- What activities will the Think Tank participate in?

### Getting institutional approval to have a Think Tank.

- Understanding the facility and making the pitch to administrators to gain approval to create a Think Tank that will meet on a regular basis.

### Who will the members be?

- Decide who will make up the core group of members, both inside and outside.
- How will members be chosen to serve on the Think Tank?

### The time commitment involved for Think Tank members

- Most Think Tanks meet, on average, about twice a month, although some meet weekly and others, monthly.
- Starting a Think Tank is a serious commitment, so those who are involved in organizing it need to be sure that they can follow through on the commitment over a significant period of time.

### Travel time

- Take into consideration that travel time can average about an hour to and an hour back from the facility. Outside members must know and understand the level of commitment involved.

### Finding the link

- An overarching goal is to find common ground among those involved. It is the goal of a Think Tank to come together and think in terms of their objectives. Once the group members are chosen, common objectives are what will bring everyone together and provide the link that will define the identity of the Think Tank itself.

## Think Tank Missions

It is suggested that each Think Tank create its own mission, local goals, objectives, and priorities that are compatible with the particular rules, policies, and procedures within the institution in which they plan to meet. At the same time, all missions, goals, objectives, or priorities must comport with Inside-Out's overarching vision and principles.

- These statements will clearly define for the group and others exactly what your purpose is and give clear direction to the group. It is a good idea to go through a deliberative process of identifying the purpose for meeting and creating a process for accomplishing that purpose.
- Most Think Tanks go through the process of creating a mission statement that clearly lays out objectives and direction in terms of what they want to do as a group. Developing objectives will provide a path to a lucid and cogent mission statement. The mission statement, once completed, will give everyone a clear idea about why they have come together as a group, as well as explaining the goals of the Think Tank's mission.
- Sometimes, using the mission statements of other organizations to give the group an idea about how to formulate one for the Think Tank can be helpful. Based on what is known about the organization being studied, the group can determine if they feel that the mission statement is actually being followed by that organization.
- Care should be used in patiently constructing clear objectives. This is important because, in times of difficulty or when the group seems to have lost its focus, objectives that are easy to understand can be used to stabilize the group. The process of choosing the wording for the objectives can be done in such a way that each member is provided an opportunity to speak, thereby increasing a sense of engagement of the whole group. As individuals articulate their suggestions, they are, in essence, qualifying their reasons for wanting to be in the Think Tank.
- Using the mission statement together with the objectives, the next course is to formulate a plan of action. Several suggestions will probably come up. They can all be considered if they are in tune with the mission and objectives. At times, the various actions that may be suggested might seem a bit cumbersome for the group to accomplish. However, when discussion of implementation begins, only those suggestions that can easily be acted upon or can cause the most measured effect for change should rise to the top. There may need to be adjustments made along the way.



## Best Practices for Getting Started

As we now have several Think Tanks across the United States and internationally, there is quite a bit of expertise and experience that could be helpful when new Think Tanks begin the start-up process. Once the decision is made to form a Think Tank, it would be helpful to consider some best practices from other Think Tanks that were learned during their start-up phase.

### How to get institutional support

- Since Think Tanks evolve out of existent classes, we can assume that permission has been granted to run classes at the facility and that, therefore, there is already some degree of institutional support. However, starting a Think Tank requires another level of investment on the part of the facility and its staff. The decision to meet once a week, biweekly, or once a month will need to be negotiated, as it will require additional staff time, space availability, and security concerns for the institution. If the relationship is strongly established and the administration is open to further expansion, then it is possible to move forward. Otherwise, it may be necessary to shelve the idea for a time and approach the administration at a later date while a stronger relationship is being built.

### Having as equal a number as possible of outside and inside participants

- We have found that Think Tanks works best when it mimics an actual Inside-Out class (e.g. 15 inside participants and 15 outside participants). It's important, as much as possible, to model the Think Tank after a class in terms of equality of voice.

### Membership and the selection process

- We suggest trying to have as much diversity in the group as possible, in regards to race, ethnicity, age, gender, class, religious affiliation, physical ability, sexual orientation, education, etc. This can offer the group a wide range of different opinions and perspectives in terms of dialogue and projects.

### Deciding how often to meet

- There are a number of situations to take into consideration when deciding how often the Think Tank will meet: how often the institution will allow meetings; travel time to and from the facility; the schedules of both the inside and outside participants; etc. Some Think Tanks meet once a week (such as the Graterford Think Tank), while others meet every other week and, some, once a month.

“Frequent self-reflection and critical dialogue is also a key component of Think Tank meetings.”

– Illinois Think Tank Member

## Agreeing on a time commitment for members

- In order to have a successful Think Tank, it is important to decide on the level of commitment needed from all members of the Think Tank. The best-case scenario is having members commit for at least a year (although six months may be more reasonable). The group can decide on the level of commitment. This will bring stability and focus to the group in the long-term. Think Tanks work best when members, both inside and out, are committed instead of new people constantly rotating in and out.

## Creating operational rules for the Think Tank

- When the Think Tank is finally formulated, it is important, early in the process, to decide on the rules that will govern meetings. We have found it most helpful when all members decide on the rules for how meetings will be conducted. Once the rules are agreed upon, they can be written on flip chart paper and hung in the meeting space when the group meets or they can be typed and printed for each member to have until the rules become an integral part of the meetings.

## Think Tank membership

- Members of the Think Tank, and those under consideration, need to think about their other commitments to see whether or not they have the time and determination to participate in the Think Tank on a regular basis. Active participation includes, but is not limited to:
  - ◆ Topical writing
  - ◆ Contributing on a committee
  - ◆ Participating in group discussions
  - ◆ Brainstorming ideas to add to Inside-Out and its agenda
  - ◆ Consistent attendance
- We define consistent attendance as making at least two meetings every month (if the group meets weekly). Missing more than two meetings a month for three months in a row, or missing three meetings in a row (without notification) can serve as a red flag. The member can then be asked if they are still able to commit to the Think Tank. This applies to both inside and outside members. Membership with inconsistent attendance without good cause can be subject to a group vote to remove such persons off the Think Tank membership list.
- If a member in good standing needs to take time off from the Think Tank, they can request a leave during which time they may be placed on a back-up list. S/he must give a date by which they will check in with the group to see when they can return. Members who plan to leave for an extended period of time may want to consider removing themselves from the Think Tank to allow others who desire to join and serve as members.

## Adding new members

- Preferably, a Think Tank is made up of 30 members (maximum): 15 inside, 15 outside. If others desire to join the Think Tank, it is a good policy to maintain a “back-up list,” if there are already 30 in the group. At the Graterford Think Tank, for instance, the prison mandates that only 15 outside people can be on the gate memo at any given time.
- A written application is not necessary. As a practice, there are two main ways an individual can be nominated to be a member of the Think Tank:
  - ◆ The course instructor nominates a student from his/her class or someone who has taken one of the Inside-Out trainings.
  - ◆ Think Tank members can nominate an inside alumni member or a list of names can be offered to the group based on the experience of the individuals in class, as well as knowledge of individuals from life inside the facility.
- Before nominating a member, it is important to take into account how that person might contribute to the Think Tank. This contribution relates to the person’s desire to be engaged in the mission of Inside-Out and willingness to participate in group discussions. Furthermore, it is important to consider the current composition of the Think Tank in terms of a broad array of background factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, sexual identity, religious affiliation, and education.
- Nominations can be confirmed by a group vote or by any process the group determine works best.
- Nominees can go through a “probationary period” to make sure the commitment is there during which s/he participates and contributes.

## Group process

- Creating cohesion isn’t always an easy task. But a series of designed exercises, rooted in large and small group work, can help build a collective, cohesive group. When we really think about what we do, we create spaces for openness and understanding – spaces that say that everyone has a voice and no one voice is bigger than the group.
- It is important for meetings to be facilitated in a circle format by members of the group, ideally, sharing the task of facilitation among all group members, if possible.
- Since think tanks are rooted in Inside-Out classes, the meetings would naturally mirror how an Inside-Out class is conducted (i.e. dialogue, circles, facilitation, staying within the parameters of the program).

“To create a dynamic partnership between institutions of higher learning and correctional systems in order to deepen the conversation about and transform our approaches to issues of crime and justice.”

– Inside-Out Website

## Decision-making process

- Ideally, it would be good for decisions to be made, whenever possible, by the group using the consensus model. Majority voting can serve as a back-up decision-making process when consensus cannot be reached. Attempting consensus allows for everyone to somewhat agree to the direction of the group.

## Power dynamics

- Central to overcoming power dynamics that can be harmful to the group, we found it important to establish the idea of a shared power dynamic (e.g. encouraging facilitation by all members) whenever possible.

## Conflict resolution

- It is helpful to leave regular space for venting/self-reflection and have the group check in with itself from time to time.
- Group members may at times be passionate when expressing their points of view, so rules of engagement need to be established early in the process. This may happen at the initial stage of the first meeting or developed in the process of hashing out the pros and cons of choosing objectives.
- All members of the group need to be given the courtesy to express their ideas, while, at the same time, also respecting the time and space of others.

## Integrity and well-being

- The group needs a process for reviewing issues of integrity and the overall well-being of the group – more specifically, to reiterate the need to maintain the integrity and credibility of the group even to the point of self-policing.
- Having check-ins and holding discussions on issues when they pop up is very important. And if you think you see something that can have a detrimental impact on the group, trust your gut and take appropriate action.



## Term limits

- One of the great benefits of being a Think Tank member is the leadership development, skill building, expertise in facilitation, and personal transformation that takes place over time. These are skills that can be transferred and used in other areas of one's life. However, one of the major drawbacks of having long-term Think Tank members is the limited opportunity for other alumni to participate. From the outset of setting rules for the Think Tank, we strongly suggest that term limits be set (about two years) so that more alumni have access to the personal development opportunities that serving on the Think Tank provides. This is especially good for inside members. Moreover, we know that people, over long periods of being together, form bonds that can easily slip into the personal area. Setting term limits can possibly protect the Think Tank and the Inside-Out program from the impact that personal bonds can potentially have.

## Non-programmatic contact policy

- For The Inside-Out Center and for the continued success we've experienced over the past 23 years, it is a very important practice to maintain the non-programmatic contact policy. The policy is difficult to maintain when people meet over the 15 weeks of the course. That difficulty can increase greatly when participants meet regularly with no clear end in sight. It is important to keep a vigilant eye out for non-programmatic contact or behaviors that are or can be harmful to the overall program and to the credibility of the Think Tank itself.

## Social media

- Some Think Tanks may wish to set up their own social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. If you set up these accounts, we ask that you inform The Inside-Out Center and provide links on your pages to our social media sites.
- As noted above, the Inside-Out program is fragile. Because of this, it is vitally important to be cautious about publicity. Positive or negative attention can have ripple effects on Inside-Out activities around the world. Functionally, connecting to The Center and our media platforms will offer more security and safety for the Think Tank and the program as a whole.



## Conclusion

As you can see from reading this document, starting a Think Tank can be both daunting and exhilarating. It takes a significant commitment of time, energy, and resources. However, creating a Think Tank can also be extremely rewarding. Think Tank participants on both sides of the prison wall have developed their leadership abilities, gained new skills and insights, and have initiated important projects that educate the public, build community, and advance social justice causes. When the time comes to start a Think Tank, feel free to contact The Inside-Out Center for assistance, should you need it.

## **THE INSIDE-OUT CENTER**

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