

Learning from North America

For Australian free-market and libertarian think-tanks, there is little of what in the corporate world would be called strategic planning. At a philosophical level, this may come from the resistance to central planning and rigid programs. However, I think it is more a function of size and reaction to events. The question is; what should be done?

A number of people suggest looking to the United States. I am somewhat sceptical of this approach as large think-tanks in Washington may have their own buildings which include TV studios, numerous floors of staff and events on a single day. In Australia, anything over five people would be considered large.

Last week I came across two articles from [The Washington Times](#) and [Forbes](#) which changed my mind.

In *The Washington Times* Richard Rahn clearly describes what think-tanks do, why they exist and what makes them successful. Moreover, he lays out the management skills and funding critical for their success. I will not try to summarise the article as Mr Rahn is much more eloquent and concise. Rather, I would encourage anyone interested in public policy to read it. Out of this piece, it is absolutely clear that no matter what size, think-tanks should have a very clear mission, build a management skill set to fulfil that mission, and reach out to donors with a compelling story.

The second article by Alex Chafuen appears in *Forbes*. (I will declare an interest here as two Mannkal interns currently in Washington DC helped research this article). Alex's message is simple: as the power and economic strength in the United States shifts to southern states, so should the attention of think-tanks.

In Australia, economic strength and power is shifting west and north. By focusing on the young in these growing areas, Australian think-tanks can change the intellectual climate. I would go one step further. In looking at the demographic shifts occurring in Australia, free market and libertarian think-tanks should be reaching out to expanding migrant communities, who often run corner stores and other small businesses while establishing themselves.

The second generation of migrants tends to be extremely successful in the professions and has a hunger for achievement which surpasses many long-term Australians. These are specifically the sort of people who those freedom-focused think-tanks should welcome and nurture. The left so easily co-opts this group through identity-politics (the subject of another article), but this overlooks the strong free market and entrepreneur spirit, which ensures success. If you don't believe me, visit the corner store and have a look if the kids of the owners are studying or stacking shelves. Chances are, they will become doctors or lawyers and quickly become key contributors to the Australian economy.

This brings me back to the potential for learning from North America. Forming a long-term strategy and judiciously implementing it through sound management and fundraising will help freedom-focused think-tanks change the direction of the country. On the other hand, slavishly adopting everything done by US think-tanks is doomed to failure.

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