

PREFACE

There is no easy way to plan for impact in the ever-moving terrain of policy ideas. A few years ago, as the director of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Mexico Institute, encouraged by our board, I started off by trying to figure out how to do this better. I talked to people around the Wilson Center and at other think tanks and mined the business and nonprofit management literature for ideas, but I was troubled by the lack of a good strategy book for think tank professionals. In the end, I decided to take a shot at writing that book, if nothing else so as to learn something myself in the process. What emerged is this brief book, which is designed as a practical guide for think tank professionals—researchers, fellows, program directors, senior leaders, and board members—who want to think strategically about what they do and how they can do it better.

For the sake of economy, I limited the research for this book to think tanks in the United States and kept the interviews to a manageable number that I could juggle alongside my day job. While I strove for a fair sampling of think tanks large and small, those inside the Beltway and outside of it, those that have political or ideological ends and those that don't, it is in no way an exhaustive list, and there are many excellent organizations that are

not mentioned. I hope they will forgive the omission and still find the conclusions useful and relevant for their work. For those who agreed to be interviewed, I am grateful they took the time to be part of this project and share their experience, and I trust that others will find it useful for their own efforts.

Several people were crucial in making this book possible. First and foremost, I was fortunate during almost ten years as the director of the Wilson Center's Mexico Institute to have an exceptional advisory board that invested in strategic planning and worked regularly through the steps discussed in this book. I am particularly grateful to Jose Antonio Fernandez Carbajal and Roger W. Wallace, co-chairs of the board, and to Guillermo Jasson, the chair of the Strategy Committee, as well as to all the other members, who have taken time twice a year to engage in strategic discussions to create, grow, and nurture the Institute. More recently, I have been fortunate to work on many of the same challenges on an institutional level as a vice president of the Wilson Center with Jane Harman, Mike Van Dusen, Peter Reid, Liz Byers, Meg King, and many other colleagues. I have benefited from their wisdom, and I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Barry Jackson, co-chair of the Wilson Center's Strategy Committee.

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Finally, I am eternally grateful to my wife, Alejandra Vallejo, who has been both my companion in life and a source of intellectual inspiration, and to our daughter, Lucia, who reminds me every day that the truly important things in life are as much the product of serendipity and inspiration as strategy.