

Deciding what type of collaboration works for you

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is for researchers who want to develop a collaboration with a business or another non-academic organisation but are unsure about what the collaboration might be about/what type of collaboration would suit their needs the most.

This guide will help you understand key factors that should shape your decision to collaborate and your evaluation of the type of collaboration that might work best for your purpose. Moreover, it will provide some examples of common types of collaborations that researchers engage in.

It is important to have clear ideas before reaching out to potential collaborators. Therefore, if you are still unsure about what you would like to do collaboration-wise, this guide will be a significant support for you and for increasing your chances of success. If you feel like you already have a clear idea in mind, go to the online guides on “Identifying potential collaborators and their contact details” and/or on “Crafting an effective value proposition”.

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What does a typical collaboration-development journey look like?

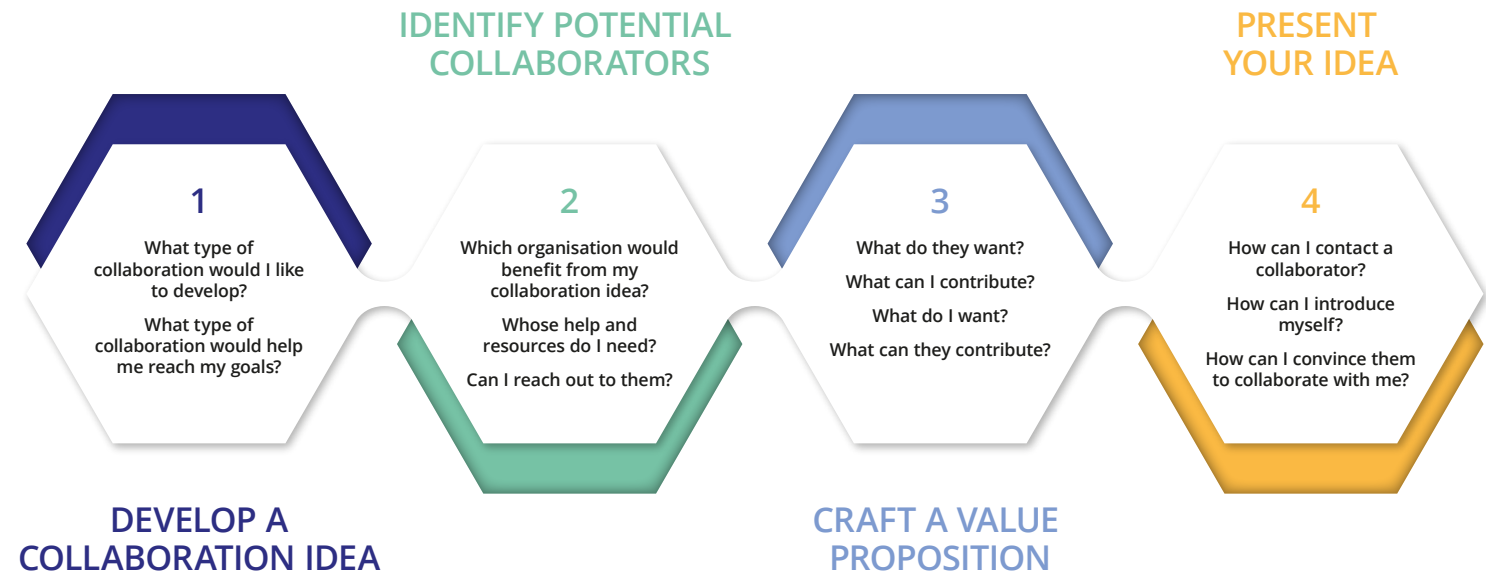
A typical collaboration-development journey unfolds in 4 phases:

What does a typical collaboration-development journey look like?

What factors to consider before/when developing a collaboration idea?

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If you think you already have a well-defined collaboration idea and have reflected in depth on your ability to commit to a collaboration, you can jump to the online guide on “Identifying potential collaborators and their contact details” or, if you also have that covered, to the online guide on “Crafting an effective value proposition”.

On the other hand, if you think you would like to understand better the merits of collaborating or learn more about what it might entail, please go back to the online guide on “Understanding collaborations with businesses and other non-academic organisations”.

What factors to consider before/when developing a collaboration idea?

In order to understand if it is worth pursuing a collaboration and, if so, which one would work best for you, there are six key factors that you should consider and reflect thoroughly on.

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For each factor, there are some key questions that you should ask yourself. For some of these questions, answers will be straightforward, while for others they might be more complicated. Do not be discouraged if the task appears difficult. Trying to answer a question might help you answer others too and, while it would be good to have clear answers for each question, collaborations can be pursued even if there is a high degree of uncertainty. Whether you will be struggling or not in answering these questions, it is always a good idea to check and discuss your answers with colleagues, in order to get their perspective and gather feedback and reassurances in that way.

FACTOR 1: TIME AVAILABLE

KEY QUESTION: HOW MUCH TIME CAN I COMMIT TO THE COLLABORATION GIVEN MY ACADEMIC GOALS AND PROGRESS?

If you think you have a maximum of a month to commit to a collaboration, you might want to look for short consulting projects or micro-internships. On the contrary, if you have several months available, e.g. while waiting for your viva, or if you feel that the collaboration could be integral to your research efforts, then you might want to consider a paid internship or a multi-year collaboration.

For a detailed breakdown of common collaboration projects, in order of length of time/degree commitment, see the section:

“What are common types of collaboration projects?”

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FACTOR 2: GOALS

KEY QUESTION: WHAT DO I WANT TO GAIN FROM THE COLLABORATION?

There are several benefits you might be trying to achieve through a collaboration. You might want to learn new skills, access data for your research, try out a different career path, generate impact through your research or simply bring together stakeholders to receive feedback and understand their knowledge needs. Each of these objectives might be more easily achieved through a specific type of collaboration.

For example, if you want to bring together stakeholders or explore new ideas, organising a seminar or workshop might be ideal, whereas internships and consulting projects might be good to experiment new career paths and develop new skills. Finally, long collaborations and setting up start-ups might be a good option to access data or realise impact.

This said, successful collaborations and research impact could also be achieved through less intensive engagements, such as writing blogs and reports for a company or organisation. Be creative and make sure the effort is proportionate to what you are trying to achieve!

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FACTOR 3: SUPERVISOR / PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)

KEY QUESTION: IS MY SUPERVISOR OR PI GOING TO HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT MY INVOLVEMENT IN A COLLABORATION?

Not all supervisors and PIs are equally supportive of non-academic collaborations. The tide is changing and an increasing number of Senior Academics are engaging in research impact and understand the value of collaborations. However, there is still a significant variation. Any project involving a substantial commitment, e.g. over two weeks, requires the approval of your supervisor or PI, who needs to ensure the collaboration is not going to affect your academic progress and commitments. Therefore, discuss your idea with them before you commit to it or contact an organisation.

Supervisors and PIs who have ongoing collaborations with non-academic organisations or who appreciate the benefit of collaboration to your research, are more likely to be supportive. Make sure you know your supervisor or PI well and, if you expect resistance, think if you can propose different types of engagements as a negotiation tool. For example, you can start by proposing a project involving a significant commitment and be ready to accept a lower-commitment project if that could be a good compromise between your desires and their concerns.

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FACTOR 4: BENEFITS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

KEY QUESTION: WHY IS MY COLLABORATION IDEA IMPORTANT? WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM IT (APART FROM ME), WHY AND HOW?

In order to attract collaborators, and, more broadly, support, a collaboration idea needs to have clear benefits for a target group. This group can be your collaborator(s), a social group that you are analysing or that is facing an issue you are aware of and have a solution for, legislators, regulators, public bodies, NGOs tackling a specific issue, etc.

It does not matter how large or small the group or problem is or where your beneficiaries are located, as long as you can articulate why the idea you have in mind brings added value for someone outside of the academic world. To understand better how to identify potential stakeholders of your project and their needs, have a look at the online guides on “**Identifying potential collaborators and their contact details**” and on “**Crafting an effective value proposition**”.

FACTOR 5: RISKS

KEY QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE COMMON RISKS OF COLLABORATING? AM I AWARE OF THEM AND OF WHAT I COULD DO?

Common risks and challenges that have been highlighted by PhDs, Early Career Researchers and Senior Academics, who engaged

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in collaborations, are in the picture below. The size of the bubble represents the relative frequency.



Moreover, there are risks and challenges that are specific to a given type of collaboration. These are highlighted in the section on **“What are common types of collaboration projects?”**

For potential solutions to prevent and manage common risks and challenges you can have a look at the online guide on “Managing the execution of a collaboration”. To get ready to face project-specific risks have a think and try to have a plan B or a rough idea of what you could do to prevent or manage that risk, shall it arise in your collaboration project.

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FACTOR 6: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (IP)

KEY QUESTION: WILL IP BE AN ISSUE? HOW CAN I PROTECT MY WORK AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY? WILL I NEED A FORMAL AGREEMENT?

Not all collaborations necessarily pose a threat to your IP and to the outputs of your research efforts. However, in some cases, you might want to be very careful before committing to a collaboration and to make sure you have in place sufficient protection for your work. A detailed breakdown of which common collaboration projects might pose a risk for IP is available in the next section on **“What are common types of collaboration projects?”**

If the type of collaboration you will chose does not normally pose a threat to the intellectual property developed through your research, you should still remain aware of this risk and learn more about how to protect your work, but you will not need to elaborate contractual protections or similar.

If the type of collaboration you will chose is likely to pose a threat to the intellectual property developed through your research, you should discuss this matter with your supervisor or PI and contact university administrators who have experience in this area (e.g. your division, the departmental administrators that look after researchers and enterprises).




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| COMMITMENT | TYPE OF COLLABORATION | FREQUENT BENEFITS | SPECIFIC RISKS | IP RISK | CASE STUDY |
|---|--|---|--|---|-------------------------|
| HIGH FOR A VERY SHORT PERIOD (1 week to 1 month) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers Service Micro-internship (DPHils) Careers Service Micro-placements (Postdocs) Short consulting projects (own initiative or Careers Service) Providing lectures or training to practitioners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New skills CV boost Exploration of other sector Network enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting the information and data needed Obtaining enough face-time with the collaborator Dealing with a collaborator who does not really know what they want |  | Siyang Zhou John Doe |
| LOW FOR A LONG PERIOD (Years) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sitting on advisory boards Joint publication with a practitioner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network enhancement Reputation CV Boost | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the right opportunity to get benefits Maintaining prolonged commitment |  | NA |
| MEDIUM FOR A MEDIUM PERIOD (1-6 months) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising a workshop or public engagement event | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network enhancement Feedback on own work Managerial skills Research impact Data Opportunities for further collaborations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring participation Involving other academics Getting the contacts of key speakers & participants Booking rooms & catering and having enough funds for that Dealing with organisational details, e.g. creating name tags Developing interesting sessions & networking Dealing with last-minute issues |  | Phil Grunewald |

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| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| HIGH FOR A MEDIUM PERIOD (2-3 months) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internship or short placement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational skills • CV boost • Exploration of other sector • Network enhancement • Funds • Exposure to new ideas & ways of working • Future opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and dealing with organisational hierarchy • Working long hours • Taking a term off work • Learning to work on projects with no prior expertise in that area • Accepting the lack of control over the project and its management | | Bertie Vidgen Olivia Gable Tracey Deton-Cala-brese |
| HIGH FOR A LONG PERIOD (Years) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up an enterprise or social enterprise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network enhancement • Funds • Exposure to new ideas and ways of working • Impact • Managerial skills • Relational skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming flexible and good at multi-tasking • Remaining positive in periods with little money and results • Handling stress • Learning how to pitch for non-academic audiences • Developing managerial and administrative skills | | Diana Dajer Alex Barnes |
| HIGH FOR A LONG PERIOD (Years) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting involved in a multi-year project organised by your supervisor or PI • Patenting or licensing • Organising a knowledge exchange partnership throughout your DPhil or postdoctoral appointment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusive access to data • Funds • Research impact • Managerial and relational skills • Understanding the users of your research • Exposure to new ideas and ways of working | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing on findings and outputs • Having to re-think the data and knowledge produced to make it fit the needs of the partner • Negotiating and respecting timescales and expectations • Measuring outcomes and impact • Understanding and dealing with the partner's hierarchy • Defending boundaries of researcher's independence | | Susila Davis Jane Doe Louis Willi-ams Thibaut Deviese |

To learn more about each type of collaboration, and the risks and benefits associated with it, have a look at the experiences of PhD students and Early Career Researchers who collaborated with businesses at socsci.ox.ac.uk/developing-researchers

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EXERCISE 2.1

Develop a collaboration idea

1. Answer questions 1-5 presented above on a separate sheet.
2. Look at the different options to set up a collaboration presented in this guide.
3. Identify what option(s) might work for you.
4. Learn more about how that option might look like.
Potential ways to do so include:
 - a. Check out if there are any case studies about that type of collaboration at this link (www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/developing-researchers).
 - b. Ask colleagues or administrators in your department if anyone else has done something similar, and try to meet them to learn more.
5. Once you are aware of the benefits, risks, commitment and of the key organisational steps needed to bring to life your desired collaborative project, start sketching an idea:
 - a. What is the topic of the collaboration?
 - b. Why do you need a non-academic collaborator?
 - c. What are the objectives of the collaboration?
 - d. What is the rough timescale?
6. Talk about your idea with friends and colleagues to see what they think and refine the goals of the collaboration with the help of the table below.

SMART Goal Setting Template for Coaching or Individual Use

| GOAL | SPECIFIC Who? What? When? Where? Why? | MEASURABLE How will you know when it is accomplished? What will it be like? | ACCURATE How does this goal help you to meet your overall objectives? Is it relevant to your role? | REALISTIC Can all objectives pertaining to the goal be achieved out? How? Has anyone done this before? | TIMELY What are the deadlines for this goal? How long do you have to complete it? |
|--------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
| <p>SMART GOAL:</p> | | | | | |

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Well done for completing this online guide! When you feel ready, proceed to the guide on **“Identifying potential collaborators and their contact details”**.

04 —

Links to helpful resources

[Knowledge Exchange and the Social Sciences](#)

[Planning Tools: Stakeholder Analysis](#)

[Improving your employment opportunities](#)

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the
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