

# Crafting an effective value proposition

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## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for researchers who have identified their potential collaborator(s) and want to develop a convincing collaboration idea to present to them.

This guide will support you in creating a value proposition, which should maximize your chances of success in getting attention from your potential collaborator and, possibly, in starting a collaboration with them.

You are ready to work on this guide if you already have specific collaborators in mind and have their contact details, and have a rough idea about the project you would like to develop or the internship/ placement you would like to have. If this is not the case, please have a look first at the online guides on “Deciding what type of collaboration works for you” and “Identifying potential collaborators and their contact details”.

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# How can I grab the attention of a potential collaborator?

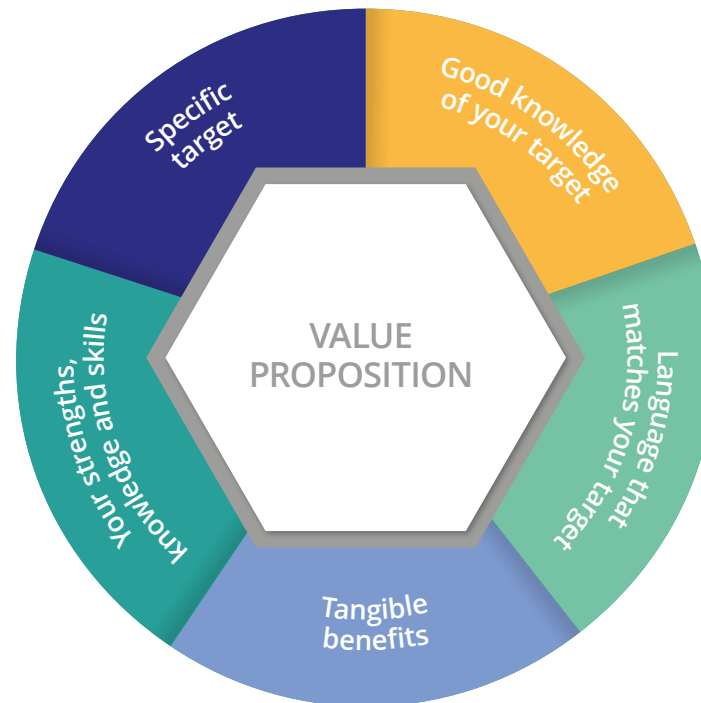
Just reaching out to someone, without putting significant thought and care into it, is not likely to gain their attention and interest. Most people, whatever sector or organisation they work in, have several demands on their time. Therefore, they are only going to respond if they see a clear benefit for themselves/their organisation or if you make them curious enough to want to know more about you and your project.

A helpful way of explaining your ideas and project in a way that is attractive and understandable for a potential collaborator is to draft a value proposition.

## What is a value proposition?

A value proposition is a clear statement of the unique value you and your project can bring to a potential collaborator, in order to convince them to partner up with you, to hire you or to give you a resource you need, e.g. funds or data.

A good value proposition entails:



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- **Specific target.** The target should be your potential collaborator and you will need to develop a specific value proposition for each collaborator you have in mind.
- **Good knowledge of your target.** You should do some background research on your potential collaborator in order to understand their goals and needs. You should also know if they have the capacity and decision-making power to collaborate with you.
- **Your strengths, knowledge and skills.** You should present a list of your skills and knowledge that are relevant for the collaboration and that give your potential collaborator the confidence that talking to you is a “good investment” of their time.
- **Language that matches your target.** You should write or present your value proposition using terminology and a style that your potential collaborator(s) can relate to, avoiding academic jargon. For example, if you are writing to a start-up or a small charity, they might appreciate less formal language, while if you are approaching the law department of a large multinational, they might expect a very formal tone.
- **Concrete/tangible benefits.** You should explain clearly and in very concrete terms what your potential collaborator(s) is going to get out of the collaboration and why you are in a unique position to offer that benefit.

## How can I create an effective value proposition?

To develop a value proposition, it is helpful to use a “Value proposition Canvas”, like the one you will find below. A value proposition canvas consists of 2 parts: the collaborator profile and the value map. The goal is to fill in as much information as possible in the collaborator profile and then to brainstorm about your idea, knowledge and skills and what they can deliver. The final step is to match your offer with the characteristics of your potential collaborator(s) to identify the added value that you can create.

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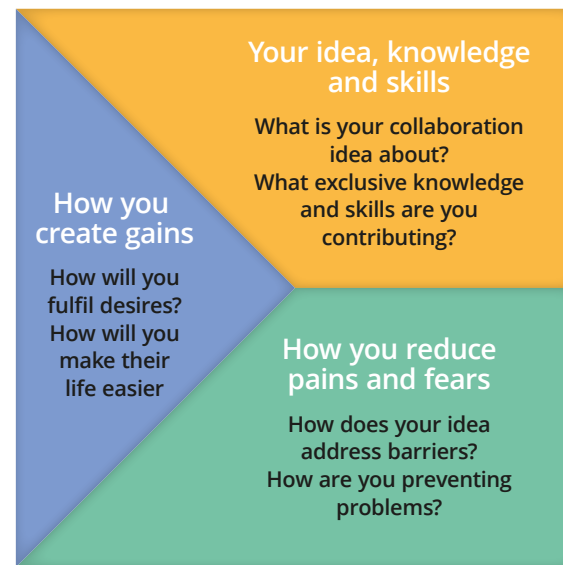
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Example of a Collaboration Value Proposition Canvas for Researchers:

## Collaboration Value Proposition Canvas

What you can offer



Your collaborator



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## Example of a Collaboration Value Proposition Canvas for Researchers:

### COLLABORATOR PROFILE

- Talk to as many people as possible who might know something about your collaborator(s), what they do, what they want and what they fear or struggle with
- Leverage any online resource that you can find on them (e.g. website, blogs, reports, LinkedIn, news articles)
- See if you can have a brief email exchange or phone call with one of their employees, founders, etc.
- Be ready to update the profile whenever you have new information

### KNOWLEDGE MAP

- Brainstorm about your idea as much as possible
- Think about your knowledge and skills from your collaborator's point of view
- Since it is not easy to self-assess your strengths, you may want to ask other people about them. For example, you could talk to your supervisor or PI, colleagues, friends and others who know you from a professional point of view.

Once you have created a collaborator file and a knowledge map you can start to:

- Spot if there are matches between them and, if not, how they could be realised.
- Elaborate what added value can be created for your collaborator and what added value you could create for other stakeholders and why your collaborator should care about it.
- Check out if you are making assumptions in any of the points above and if, so, try to test them to make sure they are valid. The easiest way to test an assumption is to talk about it to other people, but you can be very creative here.

## How to write up a value proposition?

A value proposition's length should be between a couple of sentences and a couple of short paragraphs. Its content should include:

- A brief outline of the problem currently experienced by your target/collaborator or by their beneficiaries or customers.
- What the collaboration will be about and how it will be conducted.
- An explanation of how it will help them to solve the problem.
- A brief outline of its unique added value for key stakeholders.

The following two exercises will help you understand what makes a good value proposition and translate these insights into practice.

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## EXERCISE 4.1

### Evaluate value propositions

Read the following examples of value propositions written by academics who work on Social Sciences topics and answer the questions below.

#### A. Example of a collaboration value proposition to attract no-profit organisations to a workshop:

Though no-profit organisations may have much smaller environmental footprints than corporations, they have a critical role to play in addressing climate change and other environmental problems. However, it is not always easy for them to have the resources to learn about the latest options to reduce their carbon footprint, to modify their practices, or to lobby corporations.

This workshop will leverage our research on the practices of no-profit organisations and the expertise of our partners in engaging no-profit organisations through communication. It will help no-profit organisations gain a better understanding of sustainable operations and their implications for their own activities and practices.

#### B. Example of a collaboration value proposition to receive funds from a Research Body:

Text mining approaches to documents tend to concentrate on the textual content. In this project, we will explore the impact of complementing such approaches by considering how subjects are discussed, as well as using semantic approaches to explore complex document collections. We will add ways of exploring the different narrative logics used to present accounts of the ‘same event’ or set of events. This may assist analysts and investigators, giving them a new lens to sift through large amounts of material. In this 12-month pilot project, we will work with staff at a software development company creating investigative, intelligence and data visualisation solutions to explore the possibility of adding automated or semi-automated narrative analysis to the document management and analysis systems that the company has currently developed. This will pave the way towards developing a longer term and sustainable relationship with them and extending the PI’s current research.

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## QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

1. Which one do you think was successful and which one wasn't?
2. Why? Can you spot differences in their formulation?  
What makes one value proposition more effective than the other?
3. What would you add/delete/change in the value proposition that convinces you the least?

To make this exercise more fun and helpful, do it with a colleague or friend and see if your opinions match or not and if, together, you can come up with more ideas to improve the value propositions.

Once you have read the theory behind a value proposition and completed this exercise, you are ready to try out building your own value proposition!

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## EXERCISE 4.2

### Develop your value proposition(s)

Create a value proposition for the collaboration project you have in mind. You will need to write one for each of your desired collaborators, starting from the key one.

Steps to follow:

1. Print out the Value Proposition Canvas above on a sheet as large as possible or re-create it manually writing on A2 or A3 sheets of paper.
2. Get some Post-It notes. Using Post-It notes is helpful because you can colour-code information, move things around and add or change things easily as your idea, understanding and plan develop. Ideally, you might want to have different colours of the Post-It notes for the different sections of the Customer Profile (as suggested in the Value Proposition Canvas). However, Post-It notes of the same colour will also be fine.
3. Write as much information as possible in each part of the Collaborator Profile by using the Post-It notes. Make sure the information you write in there is not based on assumptions but on sound data that you collected.
4. Once you are satisfied with your understanding of your collaborator, start to fill in the Value Map with other Post-It notes, collating as many ideas as possible for each section. Brainstorm to extract all your ideas on the collaboration, all your strengths, relevant knowledge and skills. Before finalising this section, ask someone's feedback to make sure your self-portrait is correct and complete and to check if some of the information you wrote is not needed.
5. Once you have filled in both section on the Canvas, see where they match or how they could match
6. Translate that insight and the information on the Canvas into two/three sentences or short paragraphs, highlighting the following:
  - What problem are you addressing and why should your target/collaborator care about your idea?
  - What project are you proposing and what activities will be involved in it?
  - Whom will it benefit and how?

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Share your value proposition with as many people as possible to get feedback on it and try to spot any assumptions you might be making. If there are assumptions, you should try to test them before finalising your value proposition.

Once you feel like your value proposition is clear and well-targeted, you can contact your desired collaborator.

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## Links to helpful resources

[Build Your Personal Value Proposition](#)

[Value Proposition Canvas](#)

[Webinar: Crafting your Personal Value Proposition with Joanna Bloor](#)

[Tips For Doing Knowledge Exchange](#)