Social Sciences
Developing Researchers

Identifying potential collaborators and their contact details

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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 whom to collaborate with or how to find the contact details of the potential collaborator(s) they identified.

One of the main obstacles to collaborations with non-academic organisations is finding the right partner, understanding why they might see value in the collaboration (e.g. compliance, strategic interest, learning a different point of view) and convincing them of why they should work specifically with you or use your research and findings to improve their products, services and processes. This guide will provide you with tools and suggestions to identify and select potential non-academic collaborators that might be interested in working with you and how to find their contact details to reach out to them.

Even if you already have a specific collaborator in mind, it might be helpful to have a look at the tools and suggestions to identify potential collaborators. This could help you strengthen your conviction about who you should contact or open up new opportunities that you had not thought of before.

If you are still unsure about why you would like to collaborate and what collaboration project you have in mind, you should have a look first at the online guides on “Understanding collaborations” and “Deciding what type of collaboration works for you”.

While in the guide we normally talk about “collaborators” or “potential collaborators”, this training will be helpful to get in touch with a non-academic organisation for any purpose, including requests to contribute to your research project, e.g. through data or funds, or to hire you for an internship or placement.

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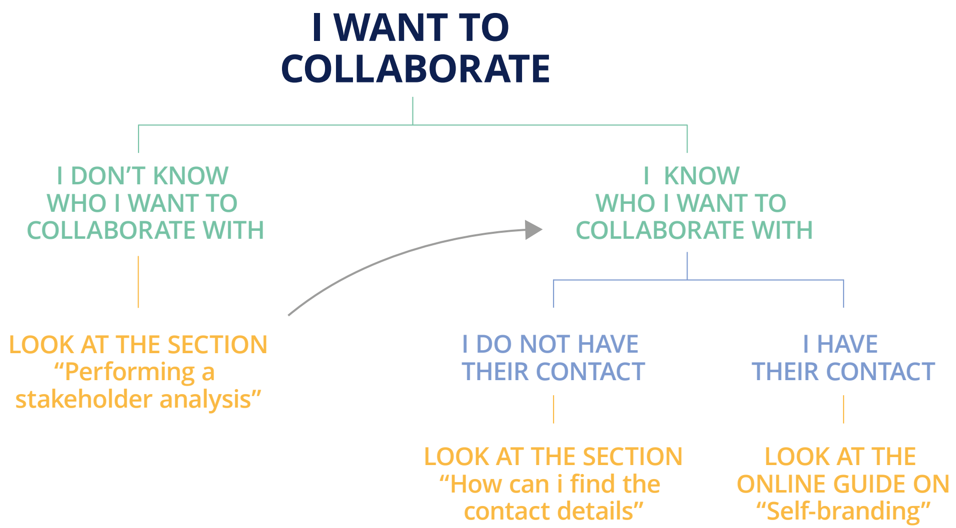
UNDERSTANDING THE FIRST AND NEXT STEPS

Once you have an idea for a potential collaboration, it is time to think about which organisation could be a good collaborator/contributor. At this stage, there might be two paths ahead of you:

1. You have a vague idea about who you would like to collaborate with
2. You already have a specific organisation in mind

If you only have a vague idea, have a look below at how to perform a stakeholders' analysis. If, instead, you already have a specific organisation in mind, you can skip this section and go directly to the section on "How can I find the contact details of a potential collaborator?"



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PERFORMING A STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY A POTENTIAL COLLABORATOR

A stakeholder is a person or organisation who is going to be affected, either in a positive or negative way, by the actions, projects and success of another person or organisation. For example, the stakeholders of the University of Oxford are its students, researchers, faculty, administrators, the colleges, the Oxford and Oxfordshire Councils, the families of the students, the shop owners of Oxford who depend on students' purchases, etc.

A stakeholders' analysis enables the identification of all the people and organisations that are involved in your research (e.g. your supervisor, PI, or co-authors), that might make it possible (e.g. funders, data providers) or that might be interested in or affected by it (e.g. businesses, NGOs, legislators, politicians, etc.). Moreover, it can be a tool to understand why they are stakeholders in your project, what their needs are and how you could frame your idea or research to appeal to them.

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A STAKEHOLDERS’ ANALYSIS TAKES PLACE IN MULTIPLE STEPS:

1. **Brainstorm about all the individuals and organisations that might be related to your research project and collaboration idea.** The list that you are going to create needs to be as extensive as possible. To help yourself brainstorming, you might create categories of stakeholders, such as “university-related”, “public sector”, “private sector” and “non-profit sector” and/or use a mind-map (e.g. https://bubbl.us). Pick the categories that will help you the most to brainstorm.

2. **Understand the relative importance for your project for each stakeholder.** The matrix below can be a useful tool to assess which stakeholders are key to your project, by making you think about their relative power and interest. Power represents the degree to which each stakeholder can affect the realisation and outcome of your collaboration idea or research project. Interest represents the degree to which each stakeholder will be affected by your idea/research project or be interested in it. The stakeholders you want to engage in a collaboration will be those that have both a high power and a high interest in what you are doing. Then, depending on the overall project you have in mind, you might decide to involve even other stakeholders.

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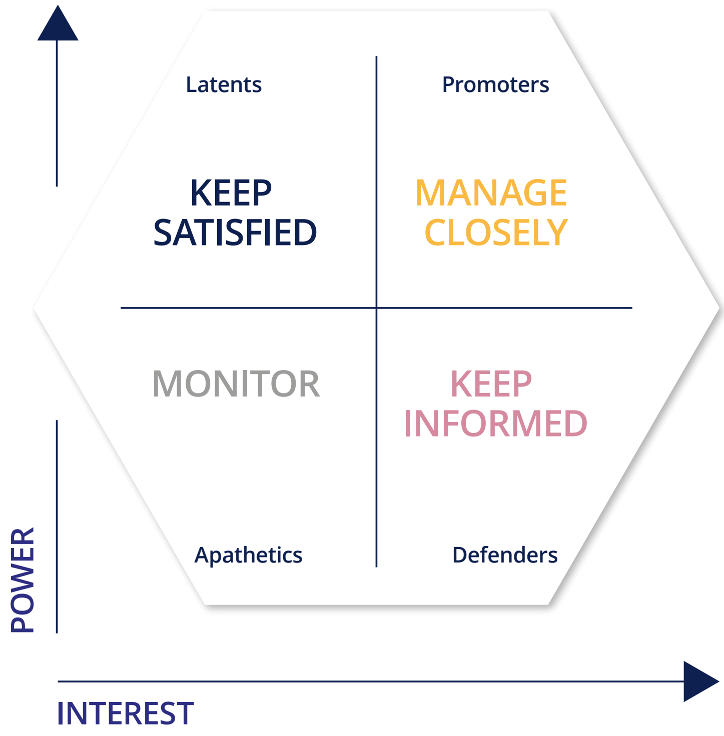

From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stakeholders_matrix.svg

3. **Learn more about key stakeholder(s).** Do some research to understand what interests them, why they would want to be involved in your project and whether or not they have the power or authority to engage with you. For example, if you want to collaborate with the local branch of a multinational corporation, they might need to have the authorisation of the headquarters or of the legal department in order to accept your collaboration proposal. If you know that your desired collaborator has a limited decision-making power, you should include those who have the necessary decision-making power as key stakeholders of your project and get in touch with them.

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4. **As a final step, identify the person or people you would need to contact for each stakeholder group.** For small and medium organisations, you might want to reach out to the owner, while for large organisations you will probably need to identify which roles have a remit connected to your project as well as some decision-making power. Once you have this list, you should figure out how to reach out to them (see section below).

EXERCISE 3.1
Create a stakeholders' map

Following the steps highlighted above, create a stakeholders' map and matrix, until you have a short list of people and organisations you would like to contact.

Ideally, share the map and list with colleagues, your supervisor or PI, and friends to make sure that you list is as complete and accurate as possible.

When you feel like you have identified interesting contacts, either through the exercise or because you already knew who you wanted to get in touch with, you can move onto thinking about how to find their contact details.

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WHERE ARE YOU AT?

Once you have one or few potential collaborators in mind, the next step is to reach out to them. At this point you might be in two different situations:

1. You might have or know how to easily get their contact details
2. You might not know how to get their contact details and approach them in an effective way

If you have already a contact, go to the online guide on "Crafting an effective value proposition". If you want help in finding an appropriate contact, keep reading.

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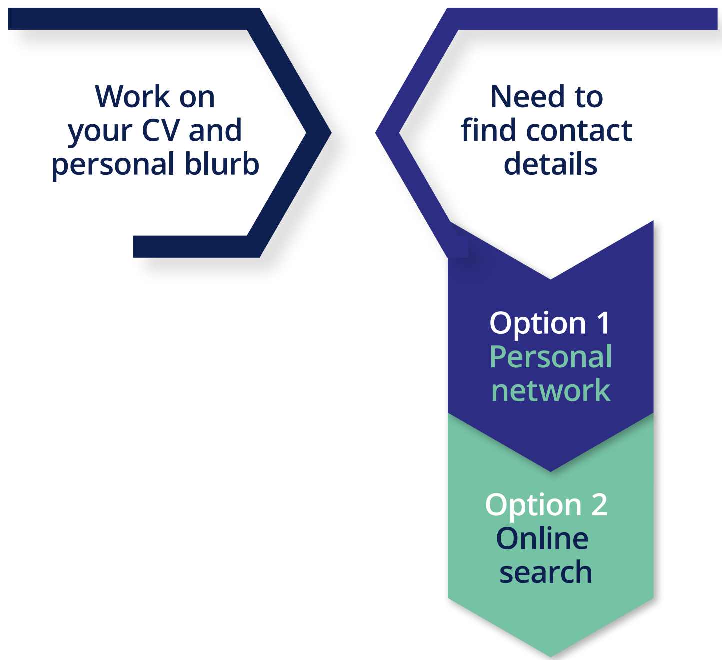
FINDING A CONTACT

There are two main options to find the contact details you need. The first one involves leveraging your personal network and should always be tried out first. The second option is to do an online search through various means until you get a "usable" email address or phone number. By "usable" we mean that they are contact details enabling you to get in touch with the person you need to talk to or with someone who is very likely to be able to put you in touch with them.

For example, if you are trying to reach out to the sustainability manager of a food company, a "usable" contact would be their email address or phone number, the email address or phone number of their personal assistant (PA), or those of a colleague working in their same department or working under their supervision. Writing to the general enquiries address of that organisation or to their HR team might not be enough to be put in touch with the right person.

In any case, while you are working on finding the right contact details, it is good practice to make sure that you CV is up to date and to create a short blurb to introduce yourself and background, in case you are going to contact your potential collaborator in writing.



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OPTION 1 - PERSONAL NETWORKS

Usually, personal networks are the most effective way to reach out to new contacts. Most PhDs and Early Career Researchers who have collaborated with businesses and other non-academic organisations before, have found that opportunity through their network (see, for example, the case studies of Jane Doe, John Doe, Phil Grunewald, Susila Davis and Tracey Denton-Calabrese **socsci.ox.ac.uk/developing-researchers**

Before trying out anything else, you should ask people you know, either personally or professionally, if they know someone in the organisation that interests you. If that fails, you can try to build your own network in a strategic way.

The Economic and Social Research Council and the Oxford Careers Service suggest the following tips to build a personal network:

- **Attend practitioners' conferences and events** - the university often arranges workshops, Career Fairs, and seminars involving non-academic organisations. There might be also conferences and workshops taking place in London, so the cost to attend can be minimal.
- **Join a relevant networking group.** Helpful networking groups are trade associations, chambers of commerce, large foundations and charities supporting several organisations and projects, public-private partnership working groups, Innovate UK, etc.

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- **Talk to established researchers** and department-level or division-level administrators about their networks and join them at meetings with non-academics.
- **Offer to provide advice sessions** for non-academics on a pro bono basis or ask about potential internship and placement opportunities by contacting the HR team of the organisation you are interested in.
- **Join and participate in online discussions** and networks that are popular with professionals.
- **Join the committee** of a community group, voluntary organisation or business network (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships).
- **Have a look at the Alumni online communities of your University.**

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OPTION 2 – TARGETED ONLINE CONNECTIONS

If your personal network is not likely to lead you to the people or organisations that you need, online search can also be a powerful tool. There are 2 main ways to find contacts online:

1. Create a good profile on LinkedIn and then use its search options to look for organisations of interest and people employed in relevant roles within them.
2. Google your organisations of interest and then try to find helpful contacts on their websites. If they do not have email contacts on their website, find out what their "general enquiries" address is, and then try with "name.surname" variations of that. For example, if you would like to talk to Jane Doe at the University of Oxford, and the contact email for the University is info@ox.ac.uk, then you could try sending emails to jane.doe@ox.ac.uk, or j.doe@ox.ac.uk or jane@ox.ac.uk etc. If all else fails, it is always worth trying to send an email to the "general enquiries" email address to ask for who works in a specific role or, if you know who they are, to ask for their email address.

Have a go at the exercise below to practice finding useful contact details by leveraging the suggestions above. Alternatively, use those suggestions to find the right contact details for the potential collaborator you want to reach out to.

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EXERCISE 3.2
Find contacts

Try to find the following contacts and information based on the suggestions above or other ideas you might pick up from colleagues and web resources.

1. Find the email address of a researcher at another institution working on a similar topic as you.
2. Find the email address a non-academic expert in your area of interest.
3. Find the “general enquiries” contact of a business or NGO that works in your area of interest.
4. Find who is the Research Impact Facilitator associated to your department.
5. Find who the right contact is to propose collaborations to the Oxford Local Enterprise Partnership.
6. Find a helpful contact of a trade association or foundation working in your sector of interest.
7. Find who is working on knowledge exchange at a charity organisation.
8. Find out a practitioners’ event in your area of interest happening in the UK or as close to you as possible.
9. Find out if in an organisation that interests you, there is a person working in knowledge exchange or with researchers.
10. Find as many seminars as possible happening in your University next week that involve a business or a non-academic organisation.

Well done for completing this online guide! When you feel ready, proceed to the guide on “Crafting an effective value proposition”.

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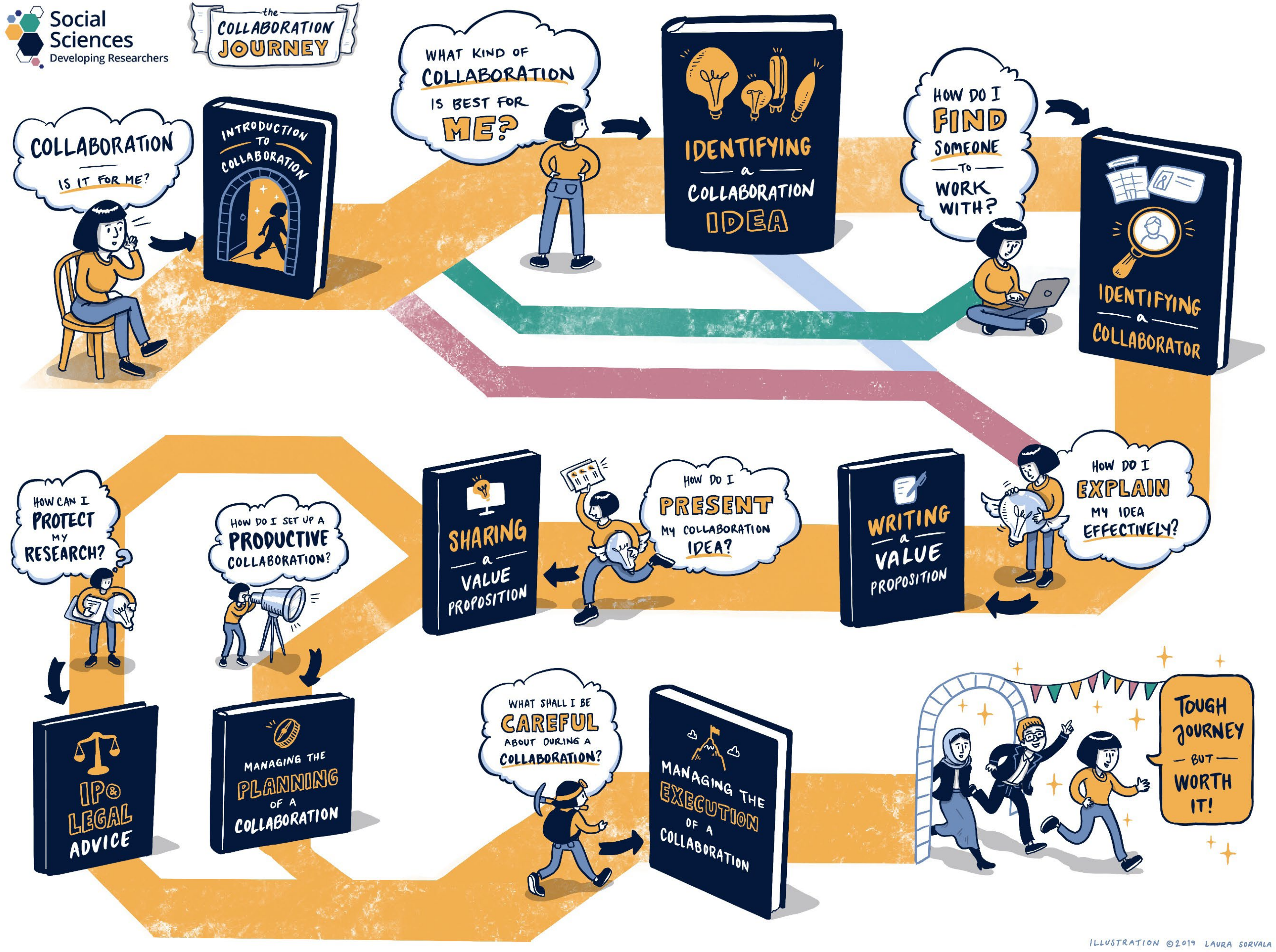
[Building Contacts]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TOUGH JOURNEY — BUT — WORTH IT!
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