A Guide to Engaging with Business for Academics
from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Collaborating with external partners is a great way to achieve impact from your research. Working in partnership can provide opportunities to develop new ways of thinking and working to bring about change.

**HOW CAN THIS BENEFIT ACADEMICS?**
- Sourcing data or information that could help influence the direction of your research
- Benefit from the knowledge and expertise in sectors outside of academia
- Tap into different working methods and resources such as people or facilities
- Identify and access new audiences or users
- Put your findings into practice in the wider world
- Access to funding

**HOW CAN THIS BENEFIT BUSINESS?**
- Enhanced reputation
- Influence product and service development
- Identify different ways to solve problems: people, internal processes, products and services, community
- Deliver social impact

AND IDEALLY BENEFITS THIRD PARTIES AS WELL!
DEFINING YOUR PROJECT AIMS

Before considering how you might engage with external partners, it’s important to be clear about what you want to achieve and why you think another organisation can help you do that.

Consider some of the questions below to help you articulate your vision.

- What do I want to achieve?
- How do I see the outputs from the partnership being used?
- What do I need from a collaborator?
- What can I offer a partnership?
- How would a partner help me do that?

Try to imagine the whole project lifecycle, even if a partner will only work on a part of it.
IDENTIFYING YOUR NEEDS

There are several factors to consider when looking for a collaborative partner. Start by making a list of the important factors such as expertise, reputation, access to resources.

Think about what is essential and what is nice to have.

You may have worked with external organisations before or have some contacts you are considering. Cast a wide net when thinking about potential collaborators. Are there new sectors where a partner could bring a different point of view, skills or contacts?
WHAT ARE YOU OFFERING?

Now that you’ve thought through in more depth what you are looking for from a collaborator, it’s time to consider what you would bring to the partnership such as knowledge and expertise, data and resources.

What do you have to offer and why would a partner value it? Think about: WHY are you worth collaborating with? HOW can your work be of benefit to your collaborator?

Doing this before you start contacting potential collaborators will be beneficial in setting the right expectations and communicating the value of the project.
MAKING CONTACTS

By now you may have some organisations in mind or be starting from scratch. In an ideal world you would have several potential partners interested in working with you. To get to this position you may need to initiate contact with a number of different people. Consider some of the points below to help you go about that:

- Beware of using jargon when talking to non-academics
- Use social media to identify contacts and events
- Work out a sixty second elevator pitch for your project
- Ask yourself: what’s the best way to initiate contact?
- Join sector-relevant professional networks
- Tap into existing networks through colleagues and connections
- ‘Semiotics.’
- ‘Othering’
Once you’ve talked with a number of organisations, go back to the list you made earlier. Re-evaluate your criteria - has anything changed? Are any of the potential partners you’ve met what you’re looking for?

Think also about personalities, do you see yourself being able to work with them? Are there any core values you would expect a partner to share? Trust your instinct and make decisions based on both your criteria and who you feel comfortable with.
NOW YOU’RE GETTING STARTED

Once you’ve found your collaborative partner the next phase is to build a framework for how you would like to work together. The most successful collaborations have clear shared goals and expectations on both sides.

Time spent going into some detail now is a good investment in building a lasting and productive partnership. Go back to your Project Aims and Needs and consider:

- Responsibilities—Who is going to do what?
- Outcomes and deliverables.
- Key project milestones and deadlines.
- Budget and costs.
- Your project aims and scope.
- Putting a contract in place to cover this is always advisable and sometimes essential.
Don’t underestimate the amount of time and energy you may need to invest for a successful collaboration. You will need to maintain a strong working relationship with your collaborator to get the most out of the opportunity and to be able to work together to overcome any challenges. Regular, clear communications are key to this and include:

- **Team meetings**—think about how often you need these and who needs to attend.

- **A project plan** that helps you keep track of progress against your key milestones.

- **Your project brief**—refer back to this to help maintain focus on your original aims and aid decision making. Make sure you don’t lose sight of what you committed to deliver to your collaborator.
COMMON CHALLENGES

Pace: business can move more quickly than academia. Agree realistic timelines you’re comfortable with. If things slip, communicate.

Changes in direction: ensure you discuss and agree these with your collaborator. It’s not always possible to change project deliverables in a business setting.

Scope Creep: don’t feel you have to say yes to every opportunity that comes your way. Beware of a project becoming unwieldy.

Confidentiality and Reputation: address early if you forsee any conflict of interest between your academic work and your collaborator’s business reputation.

Intellectual Property: you may well be co-creating new work. Make sure there are clear expectations between you and your collaborator as to who owns this and how any I.P. will be used after the project.
Most collaborations will involve some investment of time and resources on both sides, e.g. joint activities, co-creation of events and materials or working with the general public in some way. This means that you need to consider important aspects such as contractual obligations, risks, Intellectual Property and GDPR.

Whilst these may seem outside your area of expertise, there are teams across the University who can advise you in these matters. Make use of these teams at the start of the project to ensure you follow University policy and guidelines and avoid issues further down the line.
There are several departments in the University with specialised expertise that can help you navigate University policies:

**Warwick Ventures** – can advise you on Intellectual Property and how you might wish to use the project outcomes to deliver Impact
https://warwick.ac.uk/services/ventures

**Research & Impact Services** – can support with all elements related to research (grant applications, contracts, research collaborations, planning & measuring impact) https://warwick.ac.uk/services/ris

**Legal** – can assist on non-research contracts and NDA’s (non-disclosure agreements)
https://warwick.ac.uk/services/legalandcomplianceservices/

**GDPR** – can advise on managing personal data of external people
https://warwick.ac.uk/services/idc/gdpr