

## Guidance on Using research4impact to Find Collaborators

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*Several people have asked for more details about how to use the r4i network to find competent, available, and trustworthy collaborators.*

*In this document we describe this process. There are four main steps:*

- 1. Join the r4i network*
- 2. Generate a list of potential collaborators*
- 3. Narrow down the list by reaching out to them directly via the site, or ask our Executive Director for help or advice*
- 4. Repeat as necessary*

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### **Step 1: Join the r4i network**

The first step is to create a profile. Profiles can contain as much or as little detail as you'd like. We generally advise that, at the very least, they should contain the same kind of information as what appears on any other public-facing website: who you are, where you do your work, and the issue area(s) in which you work. Organizations have told us that it is helpful when scholars provide information about the questions and issues that interest them, the methodologies they are open to using, and previous experience with collaborative research. The more you say, and the more up-to-date the information you provide, the easier it is for potential collaborators to find you.

The key point, however, is this: the *simple act of creating a profile communicates a wealth of information*. It communicates that you are open to a conversation about collaborating. This invitation to start a conversation is invaluable.

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### **Step 2: Search the site and generate a list of potential collaborators**

Research4impact provides both technological and social tools for you to find potential collaborators. We suggest leveraging the technology first: the r4impact.org website. There are two main ways to do that: (1) use the search feature and (2) post an announcement to the network.

(1) Use the search feature: Once you've created a profile you'll be able to conduct detailed searches across the network. You can search by collaboration topics, sector, and location of work. You can also search by name, if you are looking to see a particular person's profile.

Lastly, you can also use the open-ended keyword/phrase search box to search for specific areas, such as “environment” or “education” or “health care” and so on.

The r4i network includes people from across the nonprofit, government, and academic sectors. They work in the US and abroad, including at the national level as well as the state and local levels. The academics have a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including political science, economics, sociology, communication, public health, history, planning, and so on. Given the size and range of the r4i network, it is likely that your search will produce a list of names of potential collaborators.

(2) Post an announcement: In addition to using the search feature, you can also post *announcements* to the network. Whereas profiles typically contain relatively static information about who you are and (broadly) what kind of work you do, announcements are designed for more project-specific and/or time-sensitive information. They don’t have to be super-detailed, but may simply convey updated availability information: “I want to collaborate over the next month”, for example. We’ll then email out announcements via our newsletter in a timely fashion.

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**Step 3: Reach out to potential collaborators directly via the site, or ask our Executive Director for help narrowing down the list**

Now that you’ve searched and created a list of potential collaborators, or perhaps you’ve sent an announcement to the network and a bunch of people have responded. What’s next? One option, of course, is to initiate a conversation yourself. Everyone in the network is open to having a conversation about collaborating.

Yet we’ve also found that at this point many r4i members want a bit more guidance with narrowing the down the list. They want to focus on the most competent, available, and trustworthy matches, and that information may not be readily available online.

Practitioners want to know that academics have the necessary research skills to credibly answer the questions posed. Given that they are often on more time-sensitive schedules, they also want to ensure that any academic partners are available in a specified period of time. Lastly, in some cases, collaboration may mean sharing sensitive information about organizational strategy, tactics, and/or history, and they may only feel comfortable sharing that information with academics that share their values. We have found that this is especially a concern for many in the nonprofit sector.

Likewise, academics may also be concerned about whether partners have the staff capacity to complete a study. They are also sometimes uncertain about whether the partner will allow the results to be published in an academic paper (even anonymously).

Potential collaborators can contact each other directly to ascertain these details. But in some cases they would feel better if they had a bit more background information about each other before beginning that conversation.

That's why we've created the *Board of Matchmakers*. This is a group of people from across the academic, nonprofit, and governance sectors that is here to help make direct introductions and to build bridges among strangers.

Our Executive Director, Tiffany Davenport, along with members of the Board, are happy to help you identify potential collaboration partners or initiate a conversation about a project. You can contact Tiffany directly at [tiffany.davenport@r4impact.org](mailto:tiffany.davenport@r4impact.org), or you can use the general inquiries email as well: [hello@r4impact.org](mailto:hello@r4impact.org).

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**Step 4: Repeat as necessary**

The benefits of academic-practitioner collaborations are potentially enormous, though one key element of their success is that they depend upon finding the right partners. That's why it often takes more than one try. Be prepared to start a new conversation and have it fall short on one or more dimensions. Especially for practitioners, whose schedules are subject to change in response to world events, their availability may be highly variable.