



HOW TO START A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH CONVERSATION

Academic and professional practitioners can benefit from direct conversations that set the stage for effective research collaborations.

This worksheet guides prospective research partners through discussion questions that facilitate dialogue - whether they are considering applying to one of LAF's research programs in collaboration or pursuing another type of research partnership.

This resource is most effective if used in the earliest phases of a proposed research collaboration, but it can be consulted any time.

Though not all questions may apply to all situations and projects, LAF offers this resource to LAF program participants and the broader landscape architecture and design community to promote effective research collaborations.

Getting to Know You

Consider starting with introductory questions exploring research terminology and concepts.

- How do you define "research"?
- Is your interest in research about:
 - Knowledge creation or inquiry?
 - Learning and establishing expertise?
 - Conducting research using design?
 - Applying research in design work?
 - Something else?
- Why is engaging in research important to:
 - Your firm/organization?
 - Your university/department?
 - You as an individual?

Goals

Discuss the goals and motivations for the collaboration and the proposed research. Write down a list of goals and refer back to it regularly.

- What brought you to this topic, research idea, and/or partnership opportunity? What motivates you?
- What do you want to achieve...
 - As an organization/entity?
 - As a team?
 - As an individual?

Research Design

It is important that all partners understand research design, even if they will not be directly engaging in the research.

- What is the research question?
- Is this research project a pilot, a one-time study, or longitudinal?
- What research methodologies will be employed?
- Does data exist? If so, who is collecting it? Does the firm have data? Can it be shared? Are there privacy or proprietary concerns?
- Will the firm help collect new data or is that the responsibility of the academic partner?

Outputs

Outputs differ from goals in that they represent tangible deliverables or results.

- What would the output(s) be?
- How would the output(s) be used?
- Where and how might the output(s) be shared? Can output(s) be shared publicly? Can they be published?
- What is the audience for the output(s)?
- Who would provide peer review? (if any)
- Who owns any intellectual property that results from the collaboration?

THE BRASS TACKS: TALKING DETAILS

Discuss key aspects of structure and logistics for the research as early as possible so there are no surprises.

- Who are the key people involved in the research?
 - Who is the project lead? Who is responsible for checking in and moving things forward?
 - What is the role/involvement of firm leadership (if any)? Of students (if any)?
- Are there other partners or stakeholders to consider? If so, how and when might they be engaged?
- What is the project timeline?
 - Will there be regular check-ins? What timeline for response is typical (e.g. how many days to return an email)?
 - What are the primary collaborators' general availability?
 - How does the project timeline interact with what's going on at the firm overall and in the academic year? Are there anticipated "blackout" or busy times?
 - What are the major milestones?
 - What happens if the timeline is disrupted?
- How will the collaboration and/or activity be funded?
 - What is each party able and willing to realistically contribute? Consider financial and in-kind.
 - Will a binding or non-binding legal agreement e.g. an MOU be required? If so, what this would entail and how might it impact the project timeline?
- Have you done something like this before? If so, what did you learn from it? What were success factors?

If the proposed collaboration is project-based:

- What is the project's design/construction/evaluation timeline?
- If it is not complete, are delays anticipated?
- Are there any privacy/contractual considerations to the proposed research?
- How will physical access to the site (if applicable) be arranged, especially for privately owned sites?
- What level of priority will the research component have within the larger project?

SPECIALIZED QUESTIONS FOR...

Firms & Practitioners

- What priority is the research for the firm as a whole in relation to other other activities during the proposed time frame?
- How engaged does the firm want to be in the research process? Do you see your role as facilitator, data provider, active research participant, or something else?
- If clients are involved, how and when might researchers engage with them? Will all client contact go through the firm or can the academic partner work directly with clients/stakeholders?

Academics/Faculty

- What is your previous research experience? How does this fit into your research trajectory and academic career?
- What is your experience with the specific topic(s) and research methodologies for this project (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods)?
- Does this research live with your institution or with you as an individual? If you move institutions, what happens to the collaboration?
- How will students be engaged? Will the work mostly be carried out by the student under your supervision or advice? How are responsibilities divided among faculty and student(s)?

For more on LAF's research programs and additional resources, visit LAFoundation.org/Research.