Business Research Collaboration Project

## Create Phase Summary Report

(Accessible text version)

## Contents

Introduction page 2

Personas page 7

Concepts page 10

Concept mapping page 16

This is a summary of research findings from the Department of Industry, Innovation, and Science’s **Business Research Collaboration Create Project**, conducted between September-December 2017 and March-May 2018. It is provided to support collaborative policy development, and is not intended as a statement of policy.

## Introduction

### Policy context

Evidence suggests collaboration is important to innovation. Businesses that collaborate and innovate – including those that work with Publicly Funded Research Organisations (PFROs)[[1]](#footnote-1) – are three times as likely to show annual productivity growth than their non-innovative counterparts.[[2]](#footnote-2)

PFROs offer resources and expertise that can be difficult for businesses to generate in-house or otherwise access. PFROs benefit from collaboration through increased research impact and income.

Despite the benefits of collaboration, research suggests that most businesses do not collaborate with PFROs because either they do not perceive it is beneficial, or they are simply unaware of how such collaboration might improve their business performance.[[3]](#footnote-3) This view is supported by findings from the **Discover** phase of this project, completed in 2017.

Building on the Discover phase investigation into the drivers and barriers to business research collaboration, the **Create** phase was conducted in 2017-18. This phase sought to develop ideas and test policy concepts with users and stakeholders to inform future policy development.

### Methodology

The Business Research Collaboration Create project applied a **Human Centred Design** (HCD) approach incorporating three broad phases: Discover, Create and Deliver.

The **Discover** phase includes three sub-phases: Identify Problem; Empathise; and Define. This phase was completed in 2017. The report is available at [https://www.**archive.**industry.gov.au/innovation/reportsandstudies/Pages/BRC-Discovery-Project-Report.aspx](https://www.archive.industry.gov.au/innovation/reportsandstudies/Pages/BRC-Discovery-Project-Report.aspx)

The **Create** phasefeatures two sub-phases: Ideate; and Prototype and Test. It began with ideation in September-December 2017, and concluded with prototyping and testing from March-May 2018.

The entire **Create** project involved continual refinement: from ideas to concepts, to prototypes, and finally to validated policy concepts with delivery potential.

From beginning to end:

* Creating 350 raw ideas
* Grouping into 40 rough concepts
* Refining into 11 refined concepts
* Developing 9 prototypes
* With 9 prototypes recommended for further exploration beyond this stage

Direct engagement with business, research and government stakeholders was a key feature of the policy concept development process (see next slide).

### Key findings from Discovery

The **Create** project builds upon the **Discovery** research conducted in 2017. This research examined the drivers for and barriers against business-research collaboration through the challenge statement: *What inhibits ‘collaboration ready’[[4]](#footnote-4) businesses from collaborating with publicly funded research organisations?*  
  
The key findings from **Discovery** include:

* 5 key needs drive a business’ collaboration behaviour:
  + Financial stability and cash flow;
  + Access to skills;
  + Management capability and leadership;
  + Networks and connections; and
  + Access to information.
* Businesses have a very broad understanding of collaboration and many aren’t aware of the benefits.
* Most of the businesses interviewed have undertaken some form of engagement with research organisations including supplying goods and services, recruitment, networking, advice/consultancy, fee for service research contracts, joint research collaborations, and postgraduate student placements.
* Some government collaboration programs are not marketed effectively to businesses. Some measures lack coordination and would benefit from policy cohesion.
* Businesses have difficulty finding a collaboration partner, and rely on existing networks or internet searches. They value trusted relationships and often prefer connecting with individual researchers rather than going through formal research organisation channels.
* An innovation mindset supports successful collaborations. Some businesses need to build management capability and upskill on innovation or ‘21st century’ skills.
* Researchers need upskilling on business acumen and could be more responsive to business needs.

### From Design Questions to Policy Concepts

The 2017 **Discovery** research identified **four key design questions** for solution development:

1. How might we **market** the benefits of collaboration and government collaboration programs already available to businesses?
2. How might we **connect** businesses with research opportunities?
3. How might we provide innovation **skills** development options for businesses?
4. In what ways could we encourage businesses to **work together** with researchers to solve shared problems?

**The purpose of the Create** research was to work with end-users to develop potential solutions to these challenges.

Industry, research, and other stakeholders helped us develop ideas, refine them into policy concepts, and then test the concepts.

Our final concepts can be considered diagrammatically intersecting these design questions. The concepts are:

* *Comms Strategy* - While all concepts have some kind of **marketing** element, *Comms Strategy* project is the only concept focussed solely on marketing and awareness, and not any other design questions. The Comms Strategy is progressing separately to the Create project and other concepts.
* *Online Collaboration Guide* – this is the only concept focussed on our **skills** design question, without elements of the *working together* or *connections* questions.
* Four concepts featuring **marketing**, **skills**, and **connections** elements: *Collaboration Facilitators*; *Students in Industry*; *Collaboration Pop-Ups*; and *Technology Transfer*.
* Four concepts featuring elements relevant to all the design questions, including **working together**: *Research & Business Exchange*; *Collaboration Mentors*; *Business Collaboration Delegations*; and *Hackathons*.

### Assessment criteria

Three main criteria underpinned the iterative process, from idea generation to ultimate assessment of each concept potential for delivery.

These criteria are **(user) desirability**, **feasibility** and **viability**. An ideal policy solution sits at the point of convergence – when all criteria are satisfied.

Ideation and user testing sought to inform our understanding of each concept’s desirability. Feasibility involved consultation and research within our department, with potential collaborators, and other stakeholders. Viability aimed to gauge how well the concept achieves policy objectives (including ‘bang for buck’).

This approach provides a framework which supports policy development to adjust settings along each criteria with the distinct objectives in mind, while re-assessing how well the concept might provide an ideal policy solution.

Key benefits of the approach and Create research include the engagement (and better understanding) of our end-users and direct integration of user views into concept design. This provides a solid foundation for development of potential new policy options, trials, or program enhancements.

### Create Phase: Engagement Snapshot

Some quick points on our engagement during the Create Phase:

* The phase featured 6 ideation workshops, 3 concept testing workshops, 3 feasibility and viability workshops, and 14 one-on-one prototype testing interviews, plus other consultations. Consultation was done in Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, and Canberra, as well as by phone and electronic communication.
* Across this there were over 188 total participants, including business, research and government stakeholders. 81 for ideation; 97 for testing; and over 10 for other consultations.
* 45 businesses were involved in testing, from sectors including manufacturing, health and fitness, mining services, retail, scientific and technical services, media and telecommunications, among others. We engaged a variety of business sizes: 29% had 1 to 5 employees; 29% had 5 to 20; 38% had 20 to 200; and 4% had over 200. Their collaboration experience also varied, as we worked with businesses that collaborated never (4%); rarely (16%); sometimes (31%); often (27%); and all the time (22%).

## Personas

### Business personas

The 2017 **Discovery** phase research and user engagement identified six business personas. The personas help policy makers make sense of how different businesses may have different needs, and accordingly different interventions may have differing levels of impact.

The project used the following personas:

* *Not Ready Yet:* focussed on the ‘here and now’ and believe they need to stabilise their business before they collaborate. May consider it in the future.
* *Salespeople:* Believe they are collaborating with PFROs but are in fact selling to them.
* *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!:* No burning need to collaborate with PFROs; may collaborate outside these institutions. PFRO collaboration is simply not on their radar.
* *Navigators:* Experienced, networked and savvy at collaborating with PFROs.
* *Ground Breakers:* More technical than business skills in contrast to Navigators. Fewer connections, however working on potentially large, disruptive opportunities.
* *Learning the Ropes:* Either new to collaborating or had past experience, but now applying it to a new venture. Fewer connections and lower business acumen than the Navigators and Ground Breakers.

### Persona pain points and needs

The business-research collaboration journey can be viewed as a sequence of steps, as follows:

1. *Setting up the business:* building capability in the business or individual
2. *Identify an opportunity:* identifying a business need that requires innovation or new technology
3. *Awareness:* identifying collaboration as an option to address the business need, and available collaboration support
4. *Preparing to collaborate:* establishing a collaboration strategy
5. *Finding a research partner:* understanding who to best collaborate with
6. *Making it happen:* Financing collaboration, organising agreement and project planning
7. *Working together:* collaborating with a research partner to address the business need, managing expectations
8. *Integration:* commercialising or integrating collaboration outcomes in to the business
9. *Expansion:* moving on to the next collaboration venture, or business growth achieve through collaboration

Pain points across this journey can relate to:

* Financial stability and cash flow
* Accessible and streamlined information and services
* Connections and trusted networks
* Skilled staff
* Management and business capability

According to participating business’ self-assessment, businesses within each persona group experience different pain points at different points across the journey:

* *Not Ready Yet:* from the beginning (steps 1 to 3) report all the pain points, especially finance and information and services.
* *Salespeople:* At the awareness step only (Step 3), reporting all pain points especially financial, information / services, and skilled staff.
* *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!:* At the awareness step only (Step 3), reporting the two pains with information / services and connections and trusted networks
* *Learning the Ropes:* May experience pain points across the journey, except for step 1. The main pain points are finance, information / services, connections, and to a lesser extent, management and business capability.
* *Ground Breakers:* May experience partial pain points from the 3rd step onward – relating to finance, information / services, and connections.
* *Navigators:* Report partial pain points from Finding a research partner (Step 5) to Integration (Step 8), relating to finance, skilled staff, and information / services.

### Insights into readiness

User interviews and engagement provided insights when considering each persona’s business acumen, access to networks and connections versus their collaboration experience with research organisations:

* The transition from a non-collaborator to a collaborator comes down to ‘collaboration readiness’: a business’ capability and interest in or intent to collaborate.
* Capability may be determined by business characteristics such as business size, sector, and maturity or turnover.
* However, non-collaborating but capable businesses may only need to be made aware of the potential benefits from collaborating with a researcher to cross the readiness threshold.
* Among collaborating businesses, the main difference between them is their understanding of why, how, when, where, and with whom to collaborate.
* The three collaborating personas exist on a spectrum of this understanding: *Learning the Ropes* is positioned at the lower end of understanding, followed by *Ground Breakers* and ending with the *Navigators,* who have the greatest level of understanding.
* Good targets for policy intervention may well be *Learning the Ropes* and *Not Ready Yet*, yet each may require different kinds of support to build acumen or connections (the former) or cross the threshold (the latter). On the other hand, *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!* may only need awareness of the benefits of collaboration. This illustrates the differing capacities for policy measures to impact specific user targets.

## Concepts

### Concept evolution

During the **Create** project, ideas and concepts were progressively refined taking into account feedback from business, research and government stakeholders.

First, in *ideation, u*sers and other stakeholders generated o*v*er 350 ideas. Through prioritisation and refinement, these then became eleven concepts for *user testing*.

The second *user testing* phase tested the eleven *refined* *concepts* with user’s desirability by asking *‘What works?’*, *‘What doesn’t?’* and if there are any desired improvements. Participants then scored and ranked the concepts. Incorporating the feedback whittled our set down to nine *prototypes* before *re-testing* with users and policy stakeholders to assess desirability, feasibility and viability. This informs the research findings presented here and its implications for future policy development work.

Based on type of offering, concepts are now introduced in three categories:

* **Awareness** – increases understanding of collaboration opportunities, processes and its benefits
* **Intro Activities** – introduces businesses to collaboration and research partner identification
* **Advisory** – support and guidance for businesses along their collaboration journey

### Darwinism…?

The transformative evolution of hundreds of ideas into a manageable set of concepts requires tough (and sometimes easy) decisions.

Throughout concept refinement and prioritisation, some ideas didn’t make it to user-testing. Their stories vary, some falling beyond the project scope. Others found more appropriate channels to have greater impact. Some may have been just plain no-good. Of those:

* Marketing and awareness focused ideas are informing the *Comms Strategy* project to improve promotion and awareness of business-research collaboration and related programs and/or services.
* Online platform ideas tended to fall out of scope, though we are using the input in our work with CSIRO Data61 supporting its [*Expert Connect*](https://expertconnect.global/) platform. Here, concepts and user ideas helped Data61 refine the platform and test the desirability of features.
* Some ideas fell out of immediate scope, though may be worth exploring in a cross-agency sense. Such concepts are being considered with relevant agencies (for example, education-centred concepts have been shared with the Department of Education and Training).
* Ideas outside of scope, but related to existing portfolio initiatives, have been shared with relevant policy and program teams.

### Awareness: Concept Overview

Increases understanding of collaboration benefits, opportunities and processes.

**Online Collaboration Guide:** Collaboration information in one easy to navigate online platform

* Key offerings:
  + Brings together all the information needed to kick-off a collaboration
  + Helps resolve key learning and awareness difficulties
  + Low risk and minimal time investment required
* Appeals to all personas except for *Navigators*
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“online repository where you can go and at least receive some guidance on direction and how to get there, how to start the process, I think it's a great idea.”*
  + *“…the case studies that would be the icing on the cake, for sure.”*

**Collaboration Pop-ups:** Information booths/workshops as convenient add-ons to industry and PFRO events

* Key offerings:
  + Raises awareness of collaboration benefits and opportunities
  + Targeted at events already attended by target businesses
  + Helps business make connections through both set-time and unstructured events
* Appeals to all personas
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“We'd definitely be interested in the informal and formal, little get-togethers like these definitely.”*
  + *“you would feel like you got to meet everybody in the room in a way [through a pop-up speed dating event], which would be a really good outcome.”*

**Business Collaboration Delegations:** Coordinated excursions to PFROs and networking events for businesses

* Key offerings:
  + Short, actively facilitated and tailored to business needs
  + Building understanding between researchers and businesses
  + Targeted attendance of participants to maximise collaboration potential
* Appeals to all personas
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“an excellent way of bringing like-minded people together, networking and getting in touch with people who are going down the same path that you are.”*
  + *“… which makes something like this more appealing because it's an opportunity to break out of [our client] bubble.”*

### Intro Activities: Concept Overview

Introduces businesses to lower risk forms of collaboration and research partner identification

**Research and Business Exchange:** Government supported work exchange program for businesses/ researchers

* Key offerings:
  + Researchers can see problems or opportunities not identified by business
  + Broadens researchers’ understanding of industry and how they can contribute
  + Enables a close connection before a potential collaboration
* Appeals to all personas except *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!* and *Not Ready Yet*
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“People are the most expensive aspect of running a business and if there was some kind of way to offset that, absolutely, that's very interesting.”*
  + *“I can't see any negative in having that particular research partner… in-house or working much more closely with us.”*

**Hackathons:** Collaboration events to solve relevant business challenges

* Key offerings:
  + Brings together businesses and researchers on collaboration focused challenges
  + Work with potential collaborators and explore opportunities
  + Participants will be targeted from similar regions and/or industry sectors
* Appeals to all personas except *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!* and *Not Ready Yet*
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“For us, they're a useful recruiting tool.”*
  + *“I don't know if I've actually heard of a hackathon based around researchers. It's a really interesting idea because you can come up with some really cracking ideas.”*

**Students in Industry:** Post-graduate student placement in a business

* Key offerings:
  + Provides businesses access to current university research, knowledge and expertise
  + Introduces businesses to the value of collaboration with researchers to address business needs
  + Appropriate matching and no employment costs - students to receive course work credit
* Appeals to all personas
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“You have access to a whole world of expertise and not just the one student you have there.”*
  + *“I really feel the importance of paying the students… and it brings a business relationship between the two.”*

### Advisory

Support and guidance for businesses along their collaboration journey

**Technology Transfer:** Licensing of existing IP held by PFROs to implement in a business

* Key offerings:
  + Helps businesses find existing university IP to fit their business need fast
  + Offers advice and assistance to negotiate IP arrangements
  + Provides funding to help businesses adapt and implement new technology
* Appeals to all personas except *Not Ready Yet*
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“Negotiating on your behalf – I think that’s a big one! We don’t have all those skills about IP, how it works, IP law, legal jargon.”*
  + *“Having someone who doesn’t necessarily have all that (IP) know how, but can put you in touch with the right people.”*

**Collaboration Facilitators:** Face to face, independent advisory service

* Key offerings:
  + Advice from a person experienced in both research and business reality
  + Connecting businesses to the right research partners
  + Tailored support for businesses throughout their collaboration journey
* Appeals to all personas except *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!* and *Navigators*
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“Every meeting [with a facilitator], I leave there with something new… The facilitators, from my experience, have been essential.”*
  + *“I met [the facilitator] and within 24 hours, they had turned up meetings with [a PFRO]. It was all almost too easy.”*

**Collaboration Mentors:** Expert guidance from an experienced business person

* Key offerings:
  + Access to an established network of business people experienced in research collaboration
  + A trusted source of collaboration advice that is volunteer-based and independent
  + Flexible mentorship facilitated by matching and no eligibility criteria
* Appeals to all personas except *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!* and *Navigators*
* Quotes from Consultation:
  + *“Network of business people who've kind of been through that experience before, who can provide guidance on how they've done it, and kind of share that wisdom.”*
  + *“Have somebody that you can get really close to, that you can trust, that you can just pick up the phone and say – you know, I am having real problems with getting this through.”*

## Concept mapping

### Taking in different views

The breadth of data collected in our research and user testing allows us to view the concepts in many ways. Each vantage point prompts different considerations. This section considers three useful ways to identify areas in which some concepts might succeed, and where others do not. These are:

**Concept satisfaction of business pain points**: shows which concepts are available to help overcome pain points experienced by each persona along their collaboration journey

**Business concept desirability overview**: shows which concepts are more or less desirable by each business persona

**Combined desirability, feasibility and viability**: a snap shot into how each concept performs across key variables within each three categories

Each vantage point helps estimate each concept’s likelihood of success. As noted previously, fundamental to our present assessment is how each concept rates according to *business* **desirability** and *departmental* **feasibility** and **viability**. As suggested earlier, ideal policy solutions sit at the **‘sweet spot’** intersecting these three categories.

### Concept satisfaction of business pain points

We can consider the concepts in terms of their ability to satisfy pain points across the business-research collaboration journey. The steps in the journey are repeated below:

1. *Setting up the business:* building capability in the business or individual
2. *Identify an opportunity:* identifying a business need that requires innovation or new technology
3. *Awareness:* identifying collaboration as an option to address the business need, and available collaboration support
4. *Preparing to collaborate:* establishing a collaboration strategy
5. *Finding a research partner:* understanding who to best collaborate with
6. *Making it happen:* Financing collaboration, organising agreement and project planning
7. *Working together:* collaborating with a research partner to address the business need, managing expectations
8. *Integration:* commercialising or integrating collaboration outcomes in to the business
9. *Expansion:* moving on to the next collaboration venture, or business growth achieve through collaboration

When considering the steps each concept satisfies pain points, try to bear in mind the pain points experienced by each persona (discussed previously in *Persona Pain Points and Needs*).

Awareness Concepts:

* Collaboration Pop-Ups and Business Collaboration Delegations satisfies pain points at steps 2, 3 and 5
* The Online Collaboration Guide satisfies pain points at steps 3 through to 6.

Intro Activities:

* Hackathons satisfies pain points at steps 2, 3, 5 and 7.
* Students in Industry applies at 2, and 5 to 7.
* Research and Business Exchange applies to 2, and 4 to 7.

Advisory:

* Collaboration facilitators satisfies at steps 2 through to 7.
* Collaboration Mentors satisfies at 3 through to 9.
* Technology Transfer satisfies at step 2, and from 5 to 8.

While the above outlines which concepts help to satisfy pain points along the collaboration journey, which ones our personas end up using is determined by the business’ concept desirability.

### Business concept desirability overview

The nine tested concepts are a not a one-size-fits-all approach, and the level of concept desirability is different across personas:

* The key target personas for each concept are ‘collaboration ready’. *Learning the Ropes* and *Ground Breakers* as they are the most likely to benefit from these concepts.
* The *Salespeople* and *Doing Just Fine, Thanks!* will likely find some benefit from the concepts, providing they are aware of the opportunities and benefits that exist (increasing their intent to collaborate).
* Benefits may be harder to find for the *Navigators* and *Not Ready Yet* – for very different reasons. *Navigators* may have been there done that. *Not Ready Yet* may not be prepared (not yet ‘collaboration ready’) to take on research collaboration opportunities right now.

Collected data suggests that each persona will use, might use, or will not use the concepts as follows:

*Learning the ropes:* Will use all concepts except for Hackathons and Students in Industry – which they might use.

*Ground Breakers:* Will use Pop-Ups, Delegations, Hackathons, Students, and Technology Transfer. They might use all the other concepts.

*Salespeople:* Will use Delegations and Students in Industry – and might use all the other concepts.

*Doing Just Fine, Thanks!:* Will use Students in Industry. Will not use Hackathons, Research & Business Exchange, and Collaboration Mentors. Might use the other concepts.

*Navigators:* Will use Students in Industry, and Technology Transfer. Will not use the Guide, Facilitators, or Mentors. Might use the other concepts.

*Not Ready Yet:* Will use the Guide. Might use the Pop-Ups, Delegations, Students in Industry, and Mentors. Will not use the other concepts.

### Combined desirability, feasibility and viability (DVF)

This section outlines the tested concepts’ appeal (business desirability), alongside views on Departmental feasibility and viability. Areas partially meeting the criteria (‘somewhat’) indicate potential areas of higher complexity or risk for implementation. Concepts that better fulfil more areas may be less complex in successful implementation. Satisfying multiple DFV variables will lead to concepts with a broad appeal and will increase their likelihood of success.

This assessment, and the user insights obtained throughout the Create project, is informing more detailed development of concepts for Government consideration.

Collated data from workshops provide the following assessments:

Desirability:

* All concepts address multiple business needs and satisfy businesses’ pain points.
* Businesses will use *Business Collaboration Delegations*, *Students in Industry*, *Collaboration Facilitators*, and *Technology Transfer*. For all the other concepts, business use is assessed as partially met / somewhat.

Feasibility:

* Workshop data suggests the Department has the skills and capability for *Collaboration Pop-Ups* and *Business Collaboration Delegations*, and *somewhat* so for all the other concepts.
* All concepts are assessed as *somewhat* scalable to accommodate growing demand.
* The *Research & Business Exchange*, *Collaboration Facilitators*, and *Technology Transfer* have existing initiatives that can be leveraged. The other concepts do so too, but partially or *somewhat* so.

Viability:

* All the concepts align with the Department’s goals and objectives, though the *Collaboration Mentors* and *Technology Transfer* concepts somewhat meet conditions for this assessment.
* *Business Collaboration Delegations*, *Research Business Exchange*, and *Collaboration Facilitators* were assessed as sustainable now and in the future, leading to long term growth. All the other concepts were assessed as *somewhat* so.
* *Collaboration Pop-Ups* and *Business Collaboration Delegations* are assessed as resulting in a return on investment for the Department. All other concepts are deemed to somewhat result in a return on investment.

The above assessments from collated workshop data, along with the user insights obtained throughout the Create project, are informing more detailed development of concepts for Government consideration.

## Acknowledgements

### Further information

For more information on other department initiatives please visit the department’s website at: www.industry.gov.au

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1. Also referred to as researchers / research organisations in this report [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Australian Innovation System Report 2013, Canberra, p. 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Australian Innovation System Report 2017, Canberra, p. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Businesses deemed capable of collaboration based on key characteristics such as size, sector and maturity or turnover. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)