EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2021 Research World Café, we asked researchers, ‘How can we improve our research engagement with industry?’. Four key themes emerged from these discussions.

First, the researchers expressed concerns about several challenges and risks in the current environment, including a lag in administrative processes and a lack of time and resources.

Second, the researchers proposed various ideas and initiatives that would help to facilitate industry engagement. These suggestions included creating a business development environment and providing the resources to build engagement, fostering opportunities to develop industry relationships (e.g., PhD industry partnerships), supporting multidisciplinary teams, and mapping connections and capabilities across the University so we know about existing partnerships and can identify new opportunities.

Third, the researchers also identified the need to build their understanding of the relevant industry environments and increase their capability to engage with industry through training and development.

Finally, the researchers highlighted that there was an opportunity to increase the visibility of the research expertise at Flinders to attract new industry partners.

DETAILED SUMMARY

Researchers (N = 66) from all Colleges participated in this discussion. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of comments captured by each statement.

Challenges and risks in current environment

1. The speed of administrative processes across application, contracts, ethics, and commercialisation might not align with the expectations of industry. (6)

2. Researchers need time for high quality, long-term engagement and this needs to be resourced (e.g., funding, workload model). (6)

3. As a university, we do not have a clearly defined strategy for industry engagement nor a clear definition of ‘industry’. (6)

4. Foreign interference concerns limit our ability to engage in certain circumstances. (2)

5. Nationality as a consideration when developing partnerships (e.g., citizenship requirements when working with defence). (3)

6. Some partnerships are at risk if they are dependent on one staff member who could leave Flinders (2)

7. Opportunities are limited in certain disciplines and industries. (3)

8. Ethical considerations for the kinds of industries the University engages with – some researcher may have objections or concerns. (2)

9. Concerns that government or industry will drive our priorities as an institution and is there a need to understand the role of ‘social accountability’ in the research space. (2)
Initiatives to facilitate industry engagement

1. Building a business development environment. (12)
   - Need more strategic business and development specialists (with experience and expertise) to broker relationships and generate opportunities. This could be by sector/industry or college and consider other cities, such as Canberra.
   - Support from professional staff who are specialists in developing professional research proposals, commercialisation, etc.
   - Champions of knowledge who can work across the university.
   - Opportunities to access external consultants/reports for areas that are less developed to level up.

2. Creating opportunities to develop industry relationships. (18)
   - Bringing the industry partners to Flinders. Industry events, workshops, or days at Flinders. Partnership showcase (industry researchers). Invite industry, academics, politicians to Flinders conferences. Many of the respondents who discussed these events mentioned the importance of providing high-quality catering at these events.
   - Invite industry partners to sit on research committees. Can we engage with alumni?
   - Develop researchers’ presence in industry. Examples include mini-campus in government departments, pop-ups in industry, sabbaticals within industry. Encourage our staff to sit on relevant industry boards and committees.
   - Using teaching and learning as opportunities to engage (e.g., work–integrated learning, placing graduates in industry, connections through education could develop into research).

3. We need to break out of institutional silos. (8)
   - Build multidisciplinary research teams/centres.
   - Build cross-college or cross-institutional teams rather than individuals.
   - Need strategy to build cross-college grants.
   - Use research centres/institutes to leverage industry connections.

4. Using PhD students to increase industry engagement. (8)
   - Scaffolding internships, building engagement from Honours up.
   - Co–funding for PhD scholarships.
   - Embedding PhD projects with industry.
   - PhD placements and internships in industry.

5. Need to recognise industry engagement in research performance metrics. (6)
   - Points for engagement with industry.
   - Recognition of non–traditional research outputs.
   - Time required to build relationship comes at the cost of time devoted to traditional research.

6. Institutional support to build relationships with partners. (7)
   - Support needed for staff and students to build relationships.
   - Fly in interstate partners or provide support to attend industry events.
   - ‘Need optimistic funding or institutional investment to promote blue sky thinking.’
   - Long–term support from university beyond seed funding.
   - Building relationships are part of a pipeline that needs to be supported.

7. Mapping connections and capability. (4)
   - Database of who Flinders researchers are engaging with.
   - Coordinate goals; we don’t want multiple researchers going to the same partner.
   - Matching opportunity with capability.
Importance of building researchers’ knowledge and capability

1. Increase understanding of industry environment. (16)
   - ‘We don’t know what problems they are trying to solve.’ Identify industry needs.
   - Understanding the industry and government funding cycle.
   - What are the state and national priorities?
   - Develop clear expectations between academics and industry partners. Understand reciprocal benefits.
   - Need to understand industry-led research. Importance of co-design.
   - How do we position ourselves competitively?

2. Build capability through training and development. (10)
   - Run project pitch labs where researchers can workshop ideas and develop value proposition. Increase media training and conduct mock interviews.
   - Run master classes with knowledge champions.
   - Need to learn how to stop being academic for non-academic audiences.
   - Provide strategies for how to approach industry.

3. Mentoring opportunities to build capacity and provide support across all career stages. (5)

Increasing the visibility of our expertise

1. Make it easier for industry to find researchers who can solve their problem. (10)
   - Provide an appealing front door for industry (e.g., Enterprise Hub at UniSA).
   - Improve ‘find a researcher’ search function on website.
   - Increase public profile of researchers at Flinders via social media and public relations.
   - Develop reputation as an outstanding industry partner.