

How to build a crowd-powered collaboration

[Rachel Glickhouse](#), ProPublica

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What is a crowd-powered collaboration?

Collaborative journalism is the practice of two or more newsrooms working together on a story, a series of stories, a reporting project, or a data set. Collaborations may also include newsrooms working with non-media entities, like universities, non-profits, researchers, or libraries.

Collaborations allow multiple newsrooms to tell a larger number of stories, reach different audiences, make the most out of large data sets, and ultimately, have important impact.

Crowd-powered collaborations harness audiences by surveying the public and collecting tips in order to gather data, find sources, and report stories.

What's [Documenting Hate](#)?

It's a collaborative, crowd-powered project launched by ProPublica in January 2017 to investigate hate crimes and bias incidents in the United States. More than 160 newsrooms are partners, as well as nearly 20 college newspapers and various j-schools. To date, the project has collected nearly 6,000 tips and journalists have produced nearly 200 stories.

What are some other examples of crowd-powered collaborations?

- [Electionland](#) (ProPublica + 100 newsrooms)
- [Zero tolerance](#) (ProPublica + 10 newsrooms)
- [Rehab reporting network](#) (Reveal)
- [Crosscheck](#), [Comprova](#), [Verificado](#) (First Draft News)

Why collaborate?

- Pool resources
- Save time
- Reach a wider audience
- Find the sources you need to reach
- Build on each other's work
- Do more and better journalism

Should you crowdsource?

You'll need to consider:

- What's the question you want to answer?
- Can this question be answered by surveying the public?
- Do you need to file records requests or find existing data sets?
- Is your reporting priority quantitative or qualitative?

- What audience do you need to reach?

It's important to consider what information you're hoping to get. It's not enough to define a topic you want to report on; you need to spell out exactly what you want to find out. For example, it's not useful to just say you want to report on an election. Some questions you can ask are: What kind of problems do voters face? Which groups of voters face the biggest hurdles to voting? What cities or states are experiencing serious voting problems? The questions will ultimately shape the form you'll build to survey your audience.

Who should you partner with?

Think about:

- Who is best equipped to report these tips out?
- Who serves the audiences you want to reach?
- Which newsrooms have journalists willing to participate?
- Who do you already know that you could work with?
- What kind of stories will this effort likely produce?

Once you've decided on what you want to investigate, there are a few considerations you should take into account when building partnerships:

- Trust
- Geography
- Specialization
- Reach
- Scale

How should you recruit partners?

- If you have mutual friends in common, it can be useful for them to put you in touch. It helps build trust.
- Cold emailing. Set up calls or in-person meetings via email to tell potential participants about the project. Email is a good starting point because you can lay out a basic description of what you're trying to do ahead of time. It's helpful to start with the reporters who would work directly on the project, who then can get buy-in from the higher-ups.
- After you announce the project, recruit participants at industry events. One way to do that is to do a panel or talk about the project as a starting point and pitch a group of people at once.
- Post and circulate a sign-up form to allow participants to come to you.

How should you set up your tip form?

You'll want to keep it simple, but also include:

- Who/what/when/where/why
- Two types of contact information (email and phone)
- Space for links/uploads

You should also consult with experts or look at similar questionnaires to find the most appropriate language and structure to use.

How should you distribute the form?

- Embed the form on all partner sites
- Circulate it on social, newsletters, etc
- Link to the form on relevant stories
- Get the word out IRL

How does collaborative reporting work?

It depends on the collaboration. Here's how we do ours:

- Exclusivity-free
- Each tip can only be worked on by one person at a time
- Contact information is given on a first come, first served basis
- We track the status of each tip
- Share the wealth (give contact info to others, revisit tips)
- Build on each other's work

What kind of stories can you do with with crowdsourced tips?

- Report individual tips as standalone stories. This is particularly useful when you're working with local media outlets.
- Identify patterns in the data and report out as many tips as possible that are part of that pattern.
- Use the database to identify sources for stories you're already working on.

Want to find out when ProPublica's guide and open-source tools are ready?

Sign up for updates: <http://bit.ly/signuptool>

Interested in learning more about collaborations?

- The Center for Cooperative Media has:
 - a [database of journalism collaborations](#) from around the world available in English, Spanish and Portuguese;
 - [Recommended tools](#);
 - [Tip sheets and best practice guides](#);
 - [A breakdown of the different types of collaborations](#);
 - A [Slack group](#) and a [newsletter](#);
 - [Research on past collaborations](#).
- Heather Bryant's Project Facet has a [collaborative journalism workbook available in both English and Spanish](#). It will soon be available in French and Italian.

Want to chat?

Get in touch: rachel.glickhouse@propublica.org

