**Erin Richards Q and A with Mike Ford, assistant professor of public administration at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, who collaborated with her on** [**Lessons Lost**](https://projects.jsonline.com/news/2018/10/5/high-student-turnover-in-milwaukee-stalls-achievement-despite-reforms.html)**.**

**Would you have collaborated with another reporter?**

FORD**:** Yes, I would have. Obviously knowing and trusting you made it easy, but I would have worked with someone else (nothing personal). I think there are two big factors. One is that I am in a public-facing field with an interest in having an impact on policy and practice. I was also in a good place in terms of my overall research output where taking time to do something like this didn't put my tenure path at risk. Two is that you had something very tangible to offer, which was data. I have one paper under review, and several more in the pipeline from that dataset, being able to collaborate to get that is a big deal. Getting data like that is tough, any would be nearly impossible for someone who isn't at Madison, so that incentive was a major draw for me. A lesser reason I would work with someone on a similar proposal is that I have a genuine interest in doing practical work. I am just wired that way.

**Would you have responded to a cold-call pitch? How should reporters approach you?**

FORD: I would definitely respond to a cold-call, and I think there are a lot of researchers who would be flattered to get such a pitch. For example, I have had multiple researchers thank me for mentioning them to you, so many academics welcome working with media but have no idea how to do it. A key thing here is being open to looking outside the box, i.e. not just at a top name university, and not always in an ed school or econ. department. Many universities have departments set up to try to connect researchers with media, but in my experience they are not great at it. It is really slow, clumsy, and tends to focus on only a handful of people at institutions. Calling directly is the way to go IMO.

**Any other guidance for reporters to consider?**

FORD: My main piece of advice is to recognize that many academics would love this opportunity. In outward looking fields, like education policy, people want their voice heard but have no idea how to go about it. It is also true that this type of collaboration in an of itself is not an incentive for career advancement in academia. But, if you make clear the benefit to the researcher, i.e. data and impact, the incentive is there.

**Researchers open to being approached about collaborating:**

Sarah Woulfin at UConn: [https://education.uconn.edu/person/sarah-woulfin/](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/ELmXC4xv1RfBonAYLTO-je-?domain=education.uconn.edu)

Chris Curran at UMaryland, Baltimore: [http://www.fchriscurran.com/](http://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/kBPgC5yw29hZvzYgqhO1UTM?domain=fchriscurran.com)

Carrie Sampson at Arizona State: [https://education.asu.edu/carrie-sampson-0](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/xtzDC68x3RHrDglVQTmiwzW?domain=education.asu.edu)

Richard Blissett at Seton Hall: <https://www.shu.edu/profiles/RichardBlissett.cfm>

**Erin’s other random tips:**

If you have a data project in mind, do your homework and figure out exactly what data is available, both under a FOIA and under a research request. Going the research-request route can get you access to student-level data from a district or state, so think about what story you’d like to get at with that kind of data and where it sits before you approach a researcher about teaming up.

The Spencer Foundation people approached me after the session. They have a lot of contacts with education researchers that often are dying to get their work more “seen,” and some of those folks might be open to collaborating. Contact the Spencer Foundation staff about it.

If your news outlet has a budget, you can also hire academics to do some research for you. For example, a parent survey or an actual numerical analysis. I was incorrect when I spoke on the panel: Erin Einhorn and the team at Chalkbeat paid two Wayne State researchers to crunch the numbers on student school switching in Detroit.

Start with researchers at your local colleges or universities. And if they’re not the right person, ask them who they would recommend in their field who might be open to collaborating. It’s also best to shoot for the non rock stars. Raj Chetty or Matthew Desmond or Doug Harris (at Tulane) are not likely to be interested. Go for rising researchers at mid-level colleges or regional branches of state university systems. Also, you can find people in the economics departments or public administration departments that are interested in this stuff; you don’t necessarily need to team up with an education school academic.