

How to share the data

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The National Coordination Point Research Data Management (LCRDM) is a national network of experts on research data management (RDM) in the Netherlands. The LCRDM connects policy and daily practice. Within the LCRDM experts work together to put RDM topics on the agenda that ask for mutual national cooperation.

Collaboration in research is an increasingly important condition for research funding. In the first blog post [www.lcrdm.nl/trust-is-not-enough] of this series on *Collaboration in research*, we demonstrate that, in this type of collaboration, data sharing based on trust is no longer sufficient. In the second post [www.lcrdm.nl/complexity-of-collaboration], we describe how the complexity of the collaborative partnerships can influence data sharing. In this third blog post, we will present two use cases to illustrate how data were shared in the projects described, as well as the choices involved.

Proper agreements and secure infrastructure in public-private partnerships

Wageningen Food & Biobased Research (WFBR) is a partner in the National Food-waste Monitor of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Food-waste Monitor presents the scope of food residues in the Netherlands, based on public data about waste processing, feedstuff production, consumer waste, primary productions and renewable energy. [[ref](#)]. In addition, a supplementary initiative on 'Fighting food was-



te together' collects data from supermarkets, as well as from other companies in the food-supply chain [ref]. Companies provide their data, and WFBR uses them to quantify waste volumes and issue recommendations for reducing food waste.

This project is an example of research that would not be possible without bringing together a variety of data streams, ranging from public data sources to corporate data. For companies, the act of providing access to their sensitive data constitutes a commercial risk, and they are not willing to do so except under certain conditions. For this reason, agreements are made with the data suppliers, which agreements are documented in a three-year 'Data Transfer Agreement' (DTA). In addition, a secured collaborative environment has been created for companies, in which each participating company provides data in a protected area, with access restricted to project researchers. The DTA includes a specification of the data to be delivered, the frequency of delivery, as well as who will be allowed to use the data, during which period, and how the data may be published. In view of competitive interests, the project restricts publication to aggregated data only [ref].

Consortium agreements of the research funder

[Wageningen Plant Research](#) (WPR) coordinated the Horizon 2020 project [Eden-iss](#) (Safe food in space). The objective of the project was to investigate how fresh food can be grown for and during space missions, as well as how participants in space missions deal with fresh food. An experimental station was constructed in Antarctica, where conditions are comparable to those encountered on space missions. In addition to funding from the European Research Council (ERC), the project has received funds directly from WPR, as well as from a number of participating commercial companies. In the project, the ERC prescribed the manner in which data sharing is to be handled. This was documented in the consortium agreement. In practice, this meant that parts of the data were shared among certain partners only, while other data could be shared by other members of the consortium. The data could only partly be published upon completion of the project (photographs taken from the experimental station in Antarctica are available here). Although the EU has guidelines specifying how data is to be processed and provides a template for doing so, it is difficult for the researchers themselves to enter into a contract. For this reason, the various parties were assisted by legal specialists in drawing up the consortium agreement. They also monitored whether the consortium agreement complied with any data policy that the participating institution might have.



Conclusion

Collaborative agreements between research partners are essential to safeguarding the societal objectives while respecting the desire to protect private parties. In this regard, it is important to consider the interests of the private partner (usually resulting in protection of the data), as well as the interests of the public partner (usually aimed at open science). It is essential to be able to provide research-funding entities from the public sector (e.g. NWO, ZonMw, ERC) with a template for a consortium agreement, having data sharing as one area of focus.

As demonstrated by the example of the WFBR, a secure collaborative environment is an important condition for public-private collaboration involving confidential data. Research institutions can share their knowledge and experiences in this area as well. If the requirements overlap to a large extent, demands for this type of environment can be bundled and realised jointly (e.g. within the context of SURF).

In the next blog post of the *Collaboration in Research* series, we will present an example of a code of conduct for scientific practice that specifically mentions data sharing. In doing so, we will demonstrate how such codes and guidelines can enhance clarity for researchers with regard to data sharing in large, complex collaborative projects.