

# Recommendations for data sharing and support

LCRDM

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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.

Research partnerships are increasingly cross-boundary and cross-institutional, and this development is making them larger and more complex. In many cases, various institutions, private project partners and participating countries have incompatible data sharing guidelines. Barriers to data sharing often emerge with regard to legal and technical aspects. From September 2019 to March 2020, the National Coordination Point for Research Data Management (LCRDM)'s task group for 'Policy and guidelines for collaboration on research data' conducted a small study of the issues and barriers that researchers encounter with regard to data collaboration in projects where the partners are from multiple institutions. The task group's results are presented in the Collaboration in research blog. In the first blog post [[www.lcrdm.nl/trust-is-not-enough](http://www.lcrdm.nl/trust-is-not-enough)], we outline the problem and the approach taken by the task group. The second [[www.lcrdm.nl/complexity-of-collaboration](http://www.lcrdm.nl/complexity-of-collaboration)], third [[www.lcrdm.nl/how-to-share-data](http://www.lcrdm.nl/how-to-share-data)] and fourth [[www.lcrdm.nl/recipe-for-agreement](http://www.lcrdm.nl/recipe-for-agreement)] blog posts address the complexity of collaborative partnerships, use cases involving data sharing, and examples of institutional or other guidelines or frameworks for data sharing agreements, respectively.

In this final post in the series, we state our conclusions and recommendations for policy makers and parties providing support in the field of Research Data Management (RDM). This will improve support for researchers, enabling them to share data in research projects without encountering barriers.



# First, our conclusions

To date, the process of setting up a research collaboration has often been based on researchers' personal relationships, and too few agreements have been made with regard to the data to be shared. Our main conclusion is that simple trust between partners is no longer sufficient due to the scope of the projects and the diversity of the project partners. Obvious though it may seem, it is important for researchers to make good agreements and to document them in contracts.

Research projects are increasingly being confronted with regulations and requirements by research funders, local or other governments, and institutions. These regulations include the GDPR, copyright and database law, as well as arrangements relating to data security and the data policies of specific institutions. In many cases, requirements and regulations are not coordinated with each other, which increases the complexity of contract creation. Ensuring that the agreements made between parties are consistent with these requirements sometimes requires specialised knowledge.

In many disciplines, public-private partnerships are of major importance to both institutions and researchers. Their status, funding and societal relevance are largely dependent on these partnerships. Given the commercial interests of private parties, they often prefer restrictive data sharing. By contrast, researchers working in Dutch institutions are often inclined to share their data under FAIR or Open conditions. This can sometimes create tensions.

Large, complex collaborative partnerships have a major need for standardised storage and data-exchange infrastructure. In current practice, institutions and partners use their own infrastructures, and it is not always a given that external parties can use these facilities just as easily. Issues of data security and the access rights management for data exchange can generate complex infrastructure requirements.

## Recommendations

### *Joint policy by research institutions*

In collaborative partnerships with private partners, researchers do not always have a strong negotiating position. As a consequence of [Open Science policy](#), university researchers are increasingly making their data accessible according to FAIR and Open Science principles. At the same time, they are facing pressure to collaborate with



the business community, for purposes of funding and because of the importance of valorisation. Companies are not bound to Open Science, and they call for data protection. This places researchers between a rock and a hard place. For this reason, research institutions must collaborate in order to coordinate policies and guidelines and strengthen the position of researchers. Although we are aware that this is a long-term solution, we are requesting the Steering Group for Education, Research and Valorisation (SOOV) of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the various Dutch institutions to include this item in the strategic agenda.

### *Legal support*

As illustrated by the use cases in the Collaboration in research blog, researchers stand to benefit from sound legal support in the initial phase of a project. To whom will the data belong, or who will be in charge of the data? How can a consortium agreement be made? Research institutions should combine their knowledge of partnership agreements, in addition to developing and sharing templates for this purpose. The [National Coordination Point Research Data Management \(LCRDM\)](#) could contribute to the sharing of such knowledge through the LCRDM platform.

### *Secure collaborative infrastructure*

The various use cases demonstrate the importance of technical solutions that enable collaboration across institutional boundaries. Although technical possibilities do exist to this end, they require targeted support from the very beginning of the project. In some use cases, a collaborative infrastructure had been implemented, while project partners in other use cases shared data at the level of work packages (rather than at project level) in order to avoid the issue of larger infrastructure. Data sharing at the end of the project is becoming increasingly common (e.g. in Zenodo).

Many institutions of higher education and research offer solid support for IT infrastructure. The recent initiative of the Dutch Research Council (NWO) to establish a Digital Command Control (DCC, a central organisational unit for all data-related questions) indicates that the demand for such support is being taken seriously by both institutions and funders.

### *Better support collaboration from the very beginning of the project*

Support for data sharing is needed from the very beginning of the consortium-formation process. Although no data curation occurs during this phase, it is necessary to consider infrastructure, agreements, authorisation for confidential data, data standards, data sharing protocols, data ethics and other matters from the outset.



At most Dutch institutions, support for Data Management is not yet so holistic. Researchers must approach different departments for different issues, and they tend to get lost in the maze of well-meaning support facilities. Legal or contract-management departments should be a structural component of the support provided for Data Management, which currently still tends to consist largely of support for data storage (IT), data curation and data preservation (Libraries). Such structural collaboration could also enable these legal departments to increase their specialisation in the data-related aspects of the agreements. Larger, more complex collaboration in research calls for a new form of Data Management support.

<sup>1)</sup> Data ownership is a complicated issue which we did not dive into for the purpose of this blog series. With 'owns' we mean the institution that has the final say over whether or not sharing the data.

