

# Trust alone is not enough

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## LCRDM

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.

## The problem

Scientific research is increasingly being conducted in collaborative partnerships that transcend national and institutional boundaries. This is based on the notion that greater diversity amongst project partners will enhance the quality of the output. As a result of this development, collaborative partnerships are getting increasingly large and complex. Project partners need access to each other's research data and resources. This is not always simple in practice, however, due to incompatible data sharing requirements and guidelines from the various institutions, participating private partners and/or funding organisations. Legal and technical barriers may emerge, particularly with regard to confidential data or intellectual property.

Cross-institutional research is becoming increasingly important. This is the case for both researchers and institutions, as such initiatives can enhance opportunities for indirect and contract research funding. Public-private collaboration is another important factor in the advancement of the Dutch knowledge economy and the progress of scientific research. In 2017, Dutch companies spent more than 3 billion euros on research in collaborative projects with universities [\[ref\]](#). According to the EU monitor, in 2015 the Netherlands received approximately 962 million euros in EU research funding [\[ref\]](#) (not only for academic research).

The increasing requirements that are being imposed on research and research data can result in barriers in the absence of proper coordination of rules and guidelines concerning data collaboration.



# The task group

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. Examples include national and international inter-university projects, as well as projects involving partners from the private sector. Based on several use cases, the task group conducted an inventory of the various levels of complexity amongst collaborative partnerships, as well as of the most urgent issues when collaborating on research data. We have used the results of this inventory to make several recommendations that could support researchers with regard to data sharing dilemmas in complex research projects.

## Result: A blog series

The outcome of the task group's efforts is a series of five blog posts. In it, we will present the results of the study at several different levels, in addition to noting how solutions to the issues could be pursued.

In this first post, we will outline the problem that has been identified and the approach taken by the task group. In subsequent posts, we will address the problem from a variety of perspectives: complexity of collaboration, data sharing in collaboration and institutional policies relating to data sharing. In the final blog post, we will present a number of general recommendations. They could help supporting RDM entities with regard to advising researchers at their institutions about working with data in complex collaborative projects.

The most important conclusion that can be derived from the work of the task group has already been presented in the heading of this blog post: mutual trust amongst partners alone is not sufficient for collaboration in research projects and data sharing. The conditions under which the partners will share data and other resources must be agreed in advance. Trust alone is not enough.



# Approach and working method

The task group was composed of experts from various backgrounds (data stewardship, policy, project management, privacy) and institutions. We conducted a number of interviews with representatives of cross-institutional research projects. In these interviews, we asked about the guidelines encountered in their projects, whether these guidelines had resulted in barriers and, if so, how these barriers had been addressed. The experiences of the task group members were obviously used as well.

