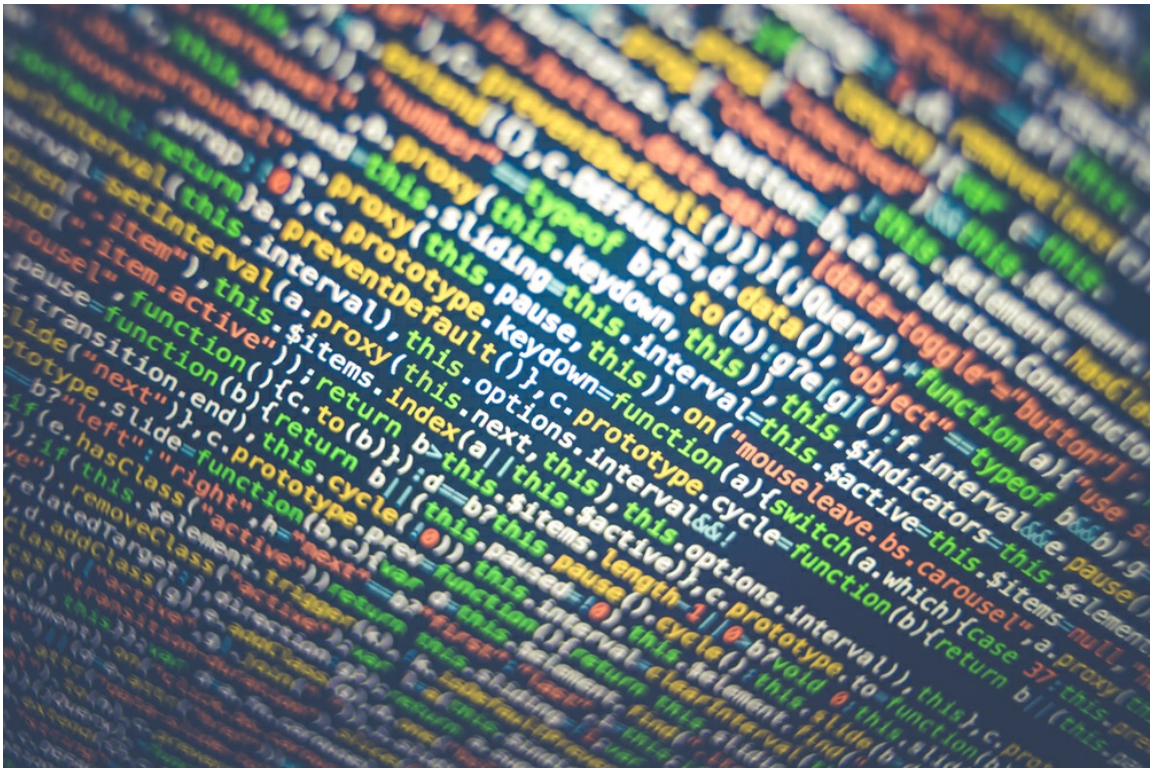
# Partner Response to Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management

by Caroline Winter | 26 February 2018 | English, Observations and Responses, Responses | 0 comments



*This response to the Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management was written by Lisa Goddard, Associate University Librarian, Digital Scholarship and Strategy, University of Victoria.*

The Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management was jointly released by Canada's three major federal funding agencies – the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) – in 2016. The statement of principles lays the groundwork for research data management mandates that are expected to come into effect in 2018. Canadian funders are following a larger global trend towards improving research data management. The Research Councils UK published their Common Principles on Data Policy in 2011. The US National Science Foundation has required all applicants to submit Data Management Plans since 2011.

Tri-Agency representatives have been conducting consultation and information sessions across Canada during 2017 and 2018. These sessions help to clarify what can be expected in the first iteration of the Tri-

Agency Research Data Management mandate. Although the Tri-Agency Principles indicate an important role for researchers, they also outline substantial responsibilities at the institutional level. At a January 2018 information session in Toronto, Matthew Lucas of SSHRC identified three priority areas that will be addressed by the initial mandate.

## RESEARCHERS will be expected to submit research data management plans.

It was initially expected that SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR would require research data management plans to be included as part of all grant applications. The latest word from SSHRC, however, indicates that research data management plans will likely only be required from successful applicants. They will not, therefore, be considered during the adjudication process, but will likely be submitted to the institutional research office after notification of funding has been received. A national data management planning tool, the DMP Assistant, is available to all Canadian researchers, however the mechanisms for oversight are still unclear. Who will ensure that the submitted plan is carried out? What penalties will exist for non-compliance?

## INSTITUTIONS will be expected to produce an RDM Strategy.

Each university in Canada will be asked to produce a document that articulates the ways in which they will "provid[e] their researchers with an environment that enables world class data stewardship practice", which is an institutional responsibility as outlined in the principles. Most Canadian universities do not have a clear policy on research data management, let alone a detailed roadmap for researchers, so this is a substantial new requirement. In order to help institutions to produce their strategy documents, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries has established the Portage Institutional RDM Strategy Working Group. This group of administrators, librarians, research officers, and ethics officers will produce a template document that will guide the development of institutional plans. It is likely that institutions will need to find money in order to operationalize their strategic priorities, but no new institutional funding is currently being offered.

## RESEARCHERS will be required to deposit certain data sets. INSTITUTIONS will be expected to ensure that Data Repositories are available to their researchers.

Concerns about ethics and data ownership have resulted in a cautious rollout of deposit requirements, which will initially be quite limited. It is expected that researchers will be required only to submit data sets that are related to published research articles. This has been disappointing to some open data advocates, as increased sharing of data is arguably the most impactful outcome of improved research data management. It is an institutional responsibility to ensure that researchers have access to "repositories or other platforms that securely preserve, curate and provide continued access to research data"(Government of Canada, 2016). A number of Canadian universities provide access to Dataverse, while others will rely on third party repositories like Dryad, or discipline-specific options like GenBank. The Federated Research Data Repository (FRDR), currently in beta, is a national repository that can support the submission of large data files (>1 TB).

The impending mandates have been met with anxiety by researchers, many of whom view the new requirements as an additional administrative burden that is not offset by additional funding. Although most researchers can imagine the broader benefits of improved data sharing and access, they are rarely rewarded for this kind of work during tenure and promotion. As long as good data management is not recognized or rewarded by university merit structures, it will be challenging to motivate researchers to spend their time and effort to improve research data management practices.

Anxiety around RDM is not limited to individual researchers. University administrators have concerns about institutional readiness to support these new funding agency requirements. Research Offices are concerned about the role that they may be asked to play in compliance. Ethics boards are worried that increased data sharing will lead to inadvertent leaks of private or confidential information.

As data analysis tools become more sophisticated we can leverage well-structured, interoperable, shared data to understand complex global problems like antibiotic drug resistance, food security, and climate change. This is the value of big data that ultimately makes improved research data management a critical issue, and one worth pursuing, despite the many challenges. Better RDM practices require a significant culture change among researchers, and a large national investment in infrastructure and training. The Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management and the anticipated research data management mandates are the beginning of a long-term effort that ultimately promises to address some of our most pressing global problems.

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Bethesda Statement / Déclaration de Bethesda

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Budapest Statement / Déclaration de Budapest

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