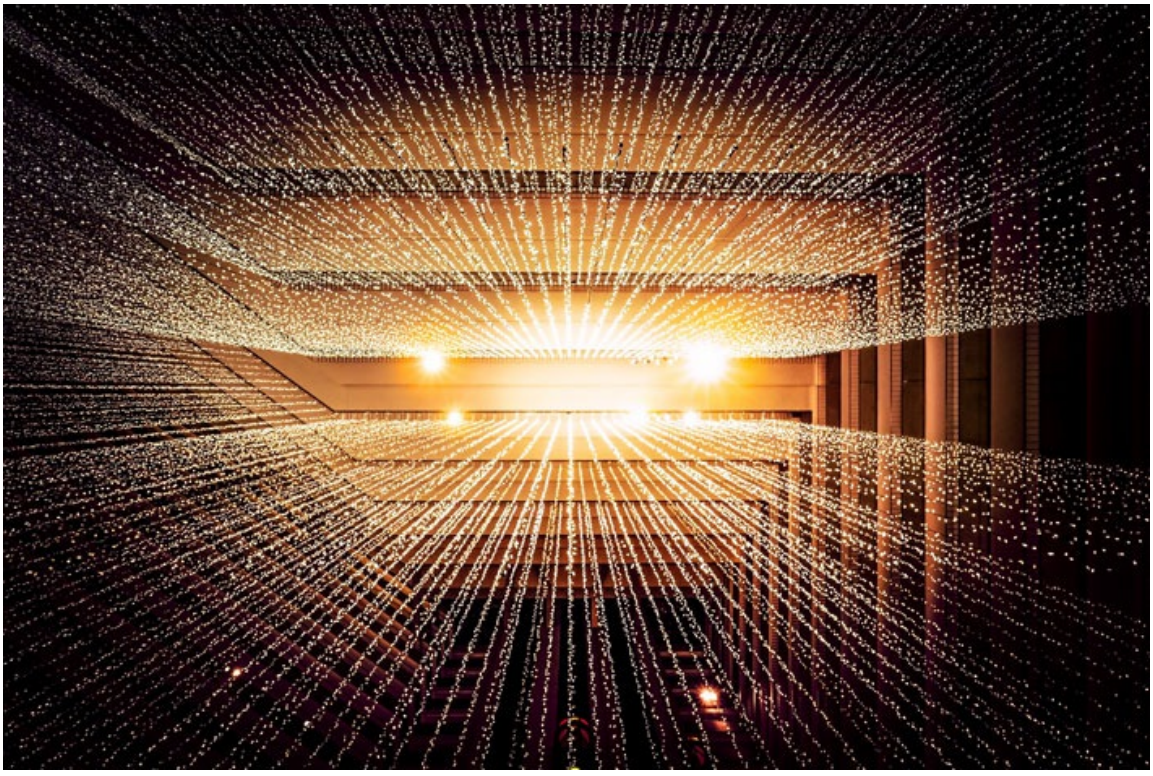
Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management

by Caroline Winter | 3 January 2018 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



Lisez-le en français

This observation has been written by Sarah Milligan.

At a glance

Title	Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management
Creators	Government of Canada via funding councils: CIHR, NSERC & SSHRC
Publication date	2016-06-15
Keywords	Data management; funding agencies; open access; open data

In mid-2016, Canada's federal research agencies—the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and

Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)—released a statement of principles on digital data management. Its objective is:

> to promote excellence in digital data management practices and data stewardship in agency-funded research. It complements and builds upon existing agency policies, and serves as a guide to assist researchers, research communities and research institutions in adhering to the agencies' current and future research data management requirements. (n. p.)

The Tri-Agency reaffirms its commitment to making the results of research as accessible as possible, in order to "advance knowledge, avoid research duplication and encourage reuse, maximize research benefits to Canadians and showcase the accomplishments of Canadian researchers" (n. p.).

The Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management refers to several policies with which it aligns, including Canadian policies, such as *Seizing Canada's Moment: Moving Forward in Science, Technology and Innovation* (2014), *Canada's Action Plan on Open Government* (2014), as well as international policies for which Canada has shown its support, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Declaration on Access to Research Data from Public Funding* (2004), the *Open Government Declaration* by the Open Government Partnership (2011) and the *G8 Science Ministers Statement* (2013). Within the Agencies, SSHRC has had a research data archiving policy since 1990 and the *Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications* (2015) included a special clause for research data funded by the CIHR.

The statement is divided into two main sections: "Expectations" and "Responsibilities," and outlines expectations of best practice with regards to:

- Data Management Planning
- Constraints and obligations
- Adherence to Standards
- Collection and Storage
- Metadata
- Preservation, Retention and Sharing
- Timeliness
- Acknowledgement and Citation
- Efficient and Cost Effective

The statement also recognizes that "ensuring a robust and open research data environment in Canada" requires investment from across the research ecosystem. Therefore, the statement outlines responsibilities for researchers, research communities, research institutions and research funders in order to meet the expectations outlined.

The statement was circulated in draft form and feedback was invited between July 17-September 4 2015. The Agencies received 44 responses during that time. According to Jeremy Geelen, Policy Analyst at SSHRC, responses to the draft focused on six areas of concern: 1) gaps in physical and human capacity, which needed funding to address; 2) researcher awareness of rationale and elements of data management; 3) guidance on data management best practice; 4) applicability of the statement to the humanities; 5) balancing disciplinary freedom and interoperability; 6) role of research institutions in ensuring ethics compliance. The revised Statement attempted to address these concerns.

This statement has received support from several Canadian universities, such as the University of British Columbia, as well as research organizations. The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) also expressed its strong support. CARL noted that the statement relies on the popular ecosystem metaphor for data stewardship, which "expresses the interdependence of the many stakeholders engaged in

research data infrastructure" (n. p.). CARL had previously responded to the draft of this statement. Portage, a national research data management initiative that was launched by CARL in 2015, also welcomed the Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management.

At the core of the statement is a desire to properly manage and share digital data, in order to ensure a "robust and open research data environment in Canada" (n. p.). However, the authors also state that "all data need to be managed, but not all data need to be shared or preserved" (n. p.), calling for a consideration of the costs and benefits of doing so. While expressing a strong desire on behalf of the agencies to make research results they fund as accessible as possible, the statement does not suggest what the limitations of openness and accessibility might be. However, this is not necessarily unusual in data management policies. The UK's Wellcome Trust, which is one of the largest funding providers for scientific research in the world, has developed an innovative and comprehensive open data policy, yet it also recognizes that "in some circumstances, controls and limits on sharing are necessary" (n. p.). Dave Carr, of the Wellcome's Open Research team, acknowledges the importance of flexibility when it comes to managing and sharing data, and that limits may be necessary—for example "to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of research participants, or to ensure intellectual property protection is secured and used to develop a new healthcare product or innovation" (n. p.). Although the Canadian Statement of Principles does not explicitly address potential reasons for limitations, its acknowledgement of the potential need for those limitations is in keeping with many open data and data management policies.

Speaking at Queen's University in May 2017, Jeremy Geelen presented the statement as part of a larger Tri-Agency Data Management Policy Initiative and indicated that the Tri-Agency would be consulting with members of its community over the draft data management policy throughout spring and summer 2017.

Works cited

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