



# Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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# 4.4. Starting New Data Conversations at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Contributor: Maria Cruz

Staff at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam reflect on the benefits and challenges of starting an RDM community of practice through informal researcher-led events.

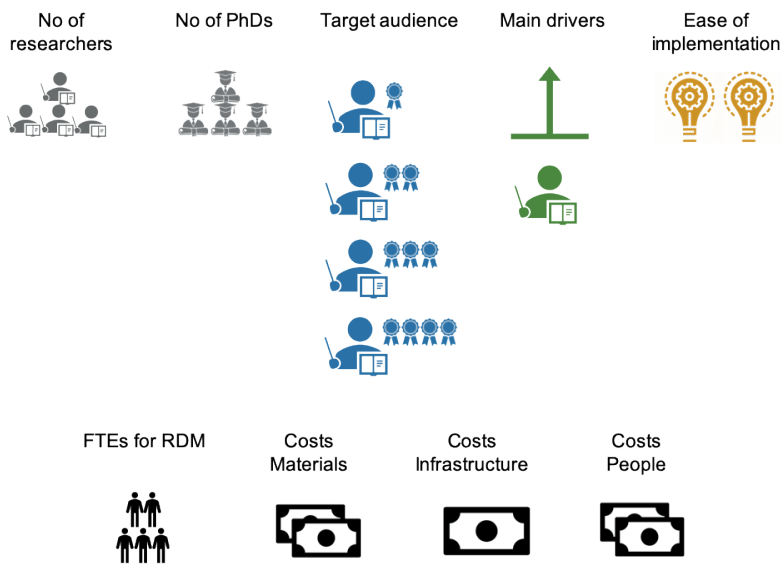


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‘We wanted to build a community of researchers interested in data, but we didn’t know where to start and had only limited resources,’ says Maria Cruz, Community Manager RDM at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). She attended one of Lancaster’s Data Conversations and got inspired. ‘I loved that it was researcher-led: researchers had lively RDM conversations and kept answering each other’s questions on the subject. It was impressive. I loved the concept and seeing it in action made me want to start this at the VU.’

### Getting the Timing Right

The VU had an impressive start. Close to 40 people attended the first event, which was a pleasant surprise given that it took time to build such an audience at Lancaster. Maria thinks that shortening the event to one-and-a-half hours might have helped: ‘one-and-a-half hours isn’t much longer than an extended lunch break;’ however, she warns: ‘ensuring diversity, having at least four 10-minute talks lined up, plus allowing 15 minutes at the beginning for lunch, plus time for discussion, means that scheduling and chairing is tricky. It’s always a pity to interrupt animated discussions between researchers.’

### Good Connections Mean a Lot

Maria also reflected that the administrative effort to put the event together took her only two days. She believes it’s thanks to their existing strong networks. The VU already had good connections with PhD students developed through previous training, which meant less effort spent on advertising. Maria also already knew some influencers from previous events and she could send them personal invitations and ask them to distribute the message. ‘These are people whose emails will translate into registrations,’ she says.

### An Engaging Event Is Not the Same as Community Building

Maria emphasised that it’s important to manage expectations. ‘Putting the event together is not demanding, but a community doesn’t grow by

itself — it requires resources and time.’ People come to an event and then they go away. Keeping track of those who attend these events and staying in touch with them can facilitate community building, but it requires additional effort and careful planning.



Fig. 4.3 Q&A session during a data event. © Jan van der Heul/TU Delft, CC BY 4.0.

## Keep Calm and Get Started

Contemplating starting Data Conversations at your institution? ‘Attend one if it’s nearby, talk to people who organised it; seeing it happen and chatting with people is inspiring and helps to get started,’ says Maria. She believes that as long as you have a gut feeling that Data Conversations could work at your institution, you should go for it and you shouldn’t get discouraged if some people are sceptical. There will be others who will share your enthusiasm!

After the first Data Conversation at the VU, a few of the attendees approached Maria and thanked her for organising the event. This, together with the positive feedback received through a feedback form, made Maria very happy and convinced that ‘it was certainly worth it!’

## Additional Resources

- Information about Data Conversations at the VU, <https://vu-nl.libcal.com/event/3386300>
- Collection of presentations of the first event, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3251806>