



# Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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# 6.1. Data Stewards at TU Delft: A Reality Check for Disciplinary RDM

Author: Yan Wang  
Contributor: Alastair Dunning

*TU Delft employs former researchers as Data Stewards within each faculty, creating a full-time local contact for RDM advice who engage with researchers and inform them about other institutional support services and resources.*

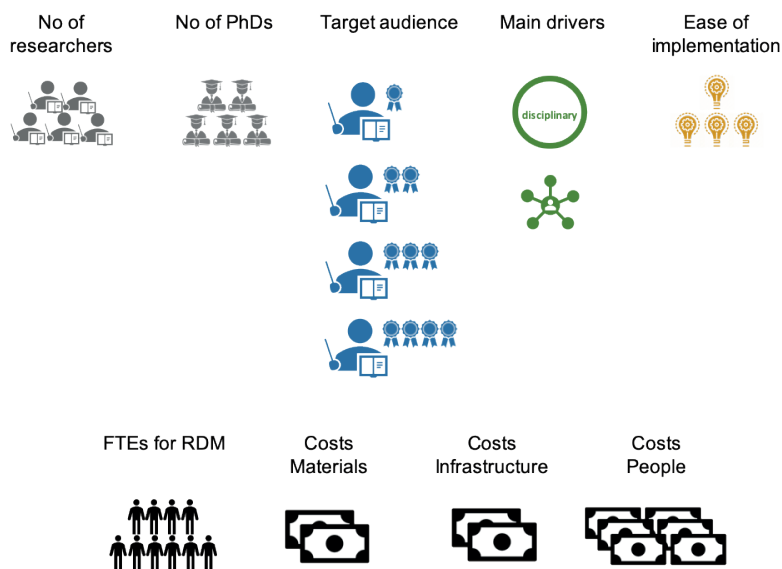


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Fostering cultural change is the objective of the Data Stewardship program. Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) in the Netherlands were bold: they hired 8 researchers to act as Data Stewards at each faculty. These are professional Research Data Management (RDM) specialists tasked with improving daily data management practices within their research communities. 'Our message is simple. If researchers have any questions about their research data, the Data Steward is their go-to person. Researchers are there to do research; they can't be expected to know everything about the latest tools available, or about all the nitty gritty details of policies and regulations. Data Stewards serve as bridges between the researchers and all other research support services, such as the library, ethics committee, ICT (Information, Communication and Technology), privacy and legal teams,' says Yan Wang, the Data Steward at the Faculty of Architecture and Built Environment. The daily job of the Data Steward is therefore to respond to researchers' requests, advise them, and promote good RDM practices.

### **Job Definition: Have Disciplinary Expertise in Data Management, Take Initiative and Be a People Person**

All Data Stewards are former researchers. They have a PhD degree, or equivalent experience to match the research background of the faculties they work for. This allows them to fit in with the faculty culture and develop discipline-specific data policies.

Being the only RDM person serving the entire faculty presents challenges. 'You need to take a lot of initiative to define the job, to reach out to people and make yourself visible. RDM is still a new subject, and it is challenging to help researchers, especially those who are not aware of the benefits of good RDM practices. The only way to raise awareness is to meet them, talk to them, get to know their work and make them understand what the benefits of good data management practices are,' explains Yan.

This is why Data Stewards need to have exceptional communication skills and enjoy working with people. 'Interpersonal skills are key to the success of the Data Steward,' reflects Alastair Dunning, the Head of Research Data Services at TU Delft. Alastair was one of the founders of the Data Stewardship programme. 'Once we connect with researchers,

the interactions are typically very positive and allow development of strong relationships and incremental improvement of data management practices,' adds Yan.



Fig. 6.1 Software carpentry workshop organized by Data Stewards. © Yan Wang / TU Delft, CC BY 4.0.

## Coordination Is Crucial to Create Operational Synergy

Data Stewards are embedded in faculties and centrally coordinated by the library-based Data Stewardship Coordinator. In order to provide comprehensive research support, operational synergy among all support teams at the university is paramount. Good RDM practices put new requirements on the workflows where different teams are involved. The Data Stewardship Coordinator plays an important role in bringing the different teams together. The Coordinator constantly steers the communication and facilitates joint efforts.

## Institutional Support Is Needed for Implementation

In response to emerging trends, new positions are needed at research institutions. This is not a common practice, and needs support from senior management willing to take risks and provide adequate investment to allow innovations and developments. 'Perhaps we should focus not so

much on having the perfect technical infrastructure, but on whether we have the right people. People are key drivers of cultural change and that's the essence of our data stewardship initiative,' concludes Alastair.