Engaging Researchers with Data Management
The Cookbook

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https://www.openbookpublishers.com

This is the eighth volume of our Open Report Series

ISSN (print): 2399-6668

ISSN (digital): 2399-6676

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-797-9

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-798-6

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-799-3

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-800-6

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-801-3

ISBN XML: 978-1-78374-802-0

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0185

Cover image: Photo by Johannes Groll on Unsplash, https://unsplash.com/photos/mrIaqKh9050

Cover design: Anna Gatti.

8.1. Soliciting Deposit and Preservation of University-Produced Research Data as Part of Broader Archives and Records Management Work

Author: Elli Papadopoulou
Contributor: Katherine McNeill and Rachel Wise

Staff from the Harvard Business School (HBS) Archives share their views on how the transition from physical to digital management practices helps engage with researchers who are about to leave the institution.

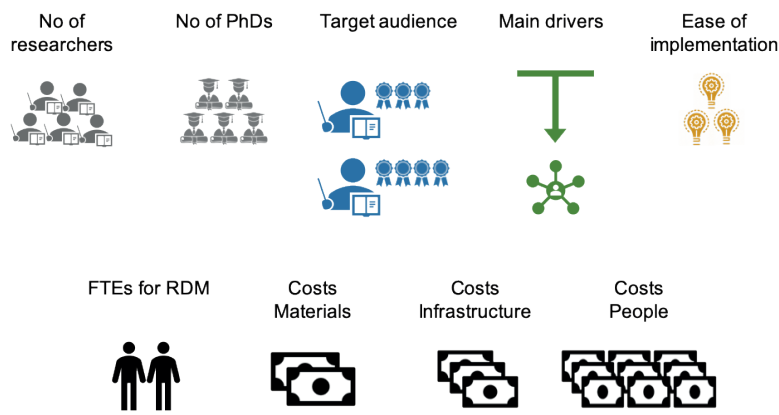

Table 8.1, CC BY 4.0.[1]

1 Note that the figures above are for Harvard Business School and not for Harvard University overall.

https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0185.22

Don't Forget about the Physical Data!

You might think that research data management is a recent trend resulting from funders' requirements for open and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable), machine-actionable data. But is that the only driver? Katherine McNeill, Research Data Program Manager, explains the role of the Harvard Business School (HBS) Archives: 'Since the early twentieth century, the HBS Archives have been preserving the data produced by the School's faculty as part of its mission to preserve its research in all forms. Activities include a proactive program of data collection, as well as a storage service for post-project research records.' She points out that 'many organisations have an opportunity to collect research data by leveraging programs that already exist to actively preserve institutional records.'

Their key message from this long history of curation is that, despite current discussions about big data and digital disruption, data are not always in a digital form and archives have experience of looking after physical data that can also be applied to digital data. Rachel Wise, HBS Archivist, explains that the Archives have a tradition of curating and storing paper forms of research data, including notes, physical articles and other published papers, survey data, agreements, consent forms, accepted proposals, correspondence, etc. The steps followed for physical research records are not drastically different to managing digital data: researchers first hand over the data collected during their research and an archivist works with them to clean up and curate the data, and to decide what to keep for the long term.

It's about Shifting Perspectives

Of course there are as many challenges when dealing with physical data management, as there are for digital asset management, and some are similar in nature, but the HBS Archives prefer to look at challenges as opportunities to grow. The importance of integrating electronic data management procedures into existing workflows is one challenge shared with physical data management, along with having the infrastructure to carry out the necessary actions for that data management; such activities necessitate expanding the archive's partnerships with research

computing services to better facilitate the transition between the active phase of research and the long-term data management.

For the HBS Archives, developing infrastructure from scratch is not necessary, as they already make use of the university's repository for web-based publishing of research data. However, they are working on improving their local IT (Information Technology) infrastructure for medium-term storage of digital files to help faculty members retain research data until they are ready to share or archive their data. This is the same service the HBS Archives have provided to faculty members for physical records for decades, adapted to address digital data.

Finally, many HBS researchers are not subject to producing funder-required data management plans, whether for physical or digital data, and thus miss an opportunity to plan responsible and reproducible research practices from the beginning of a project.

What the Future Holds

Katherine and Rachel both highlight the need to be more proactive, and to continuously develop and expand the archive service so that digital data can be effectively curated in the archives. Rachel continues: 'Now the approach is more reactive: when someone reaches out to us before a career shift or retirement, we are there to support them by providing guidance and physical storage; this could be for a researcher at any level of their career'. Being more proactive means cultivating researchers' mind-sets so that they are willing to organise and prepare data for sharing before they leave the institution, or prior to the end of their project; it means exploring the best ways to reach out to faculty members, and it means applying technical solutions that will facilitate digital data-sharing of valuable research assets.

Confused about Where to Start? Foster Data Champions and Build upon Existing Services

Both Katherine and Rachel agree that one of the top priorities when establishing an engagement activity is raising awareness and educating researchers about what you can do. 'You have to be able to talk to people in a language that they understand. And who better to take on

that role than researchers themselves? So it is wise to encourage faculty users of the service to educate their peers. Having a faculty champion, who can talk about how much their data has been re-used because of your services, can go a long way in promoting your research data management program,' they state.

There is an opportunity to partner with, and leverage, your institutional archives to preserve research data since they are already set up as a service provider and repository for institutional records. Archives have policies, procedures and relationships in place, which can be extended to organise, store and provide access to research data in all formats.