

Proposal for UBC Research Data Portal Operations Team

April 2022

PURPOSE AND PROPOSAL SUMMARY

This proposal document formalizes ongoing work that has been taking place over the course of the last year. Through partnership and collaboration across UBC units and portfolios that offer training, support, and services for researchers that pertain to research data management (RDM), it has become evident that a more strategic and centralized web portal is needed to assist UBC researchers in navigating this complex ecosystem. The UBC RDM Data Portal Operations Team (hereinafter “Data Portal Team”) proposes that through a formal project a centralized web portal be developed, initially as a pilot project, but aiming to a sustainable model after the pilot phase completes.

Background

RDM is broad in scope. While there are discipline-specific needs and idiosyncrasies, RDM writ large requires tools and guidance in planning, grant applications, project management and coordination, data collection and dissemination, metadata standards and their application in specific use cases (including research design, data collection, analysis, storage, and dissemination), issues of privacy and security, and storage to support active work and funder, institutional, and publisher deposit requirements, in addition to deposit to support contributed data sets that enhance research pursuits.

University supports reflect this broad scope, with various pieces being managed and coordinated by distinct units with distinct mandates. Within this distributed environment there are few formal connections. From the researcher's perspective, the services and supports for RDM are scattered across the institution, making them difficult to identify and connect. From an administrative perspective, this introduces knowledge gaps, inefficiencies, redundancies, and risks of misinformation being disseminated. Together, this creates barriers for both researchers and service providers, engendering an information landscape that lacks clarity, continuity, and relevant, up to date information.

These issues have most recently been highlighted through: a) an informal environmental scan of online RDM resources at UBC conducted in partnership by UBC Advanced Research Computing (UBC ARC), UBC Library, and the Office of Research Ethics; b) participant feedback at the UBC RDM Strategy Focus Groups; and c) the UBC Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) Needs Assessment, a faculty wide awareness survey of DRI training and supports, conducted by UBC ARC and UBC Library, of which RDM was a key component.

Project Description

Through this project the Data Portal Team will develop and maintain a unified institutional research data web portal to connect and enhance the discovery of, and access to, RDM services across UBC for researchers. The proposed team will leverage work-to-date from a pre-existing ad-hoc group consisting of members from UBC ARC, UBC Library, and UBC Behavioural Research Ethics, and will expand membership for additional representation.

Rationale and Benefits

In order to support and continue to attract top tier researchers, UBC must provide research data services that not only enable meeting funder and publisher requirements, but also foster an innovative, world-class research ecosystem. Formalizing a venue for partnering among relevant units and a single portal for researchers to access the respective campus expertise on all aspects of RDM will address redundancies, misinformation, and frustration, thus enabling researchers to adhere to mandates and excel in their research.

Resource Analysis

There is no direct financial ask associated with this proposal, but the proposed work will require the endorsement from the UBC RDM Strategy Project and Steering Committee, and the formal recognition of time commitments for the proposed members.

Implementation Considerations

In support of this work, the Data Portal Team will reference a similar model implemented at the University of Oxford. To maximize institutional resources and develop a streamlined, researcher-focused service model, the [Research Data Oxford](#) group (RDO) has formulated a website and governance model that leverages expertise and resources across multiple research support departments, including the Library, IT, ARC, Ethics, and researchers from a variety of disciplines.

This model recognizes that researchers rarely require services from a single department, and fostering collaboration is a way to ensure consistency and accuracy in the services and information researchers receive. To support this collaborative website and service model, RDO employs a governance structure in which an [RDM Delivery Group](#)--with representatives from each unit--convenes regularly to provide updates, discuss issues, and manage the content of the portal website. This group in turn reports to the [Research Data Working Group](#), consisting of the executives from these departments, which provides strategic direction.

Reflecting on work already done to date and feedback from RDO on their processes, one of the early tasks of the proposed team will be to solidify a local working framework alongside a timeline for development and implementation of the proposed portal.

Risk Analysis

In its initial implementation, success of this proposal is predicated on this team reporting to, and being supported through, the UBC RDM Strategy Project Steering Committee. As the Strategy Committee leads the development of the institutional RDM strategy, the proposed team and portal offer a critical opportunity to connect their recommendations and other implementations to a centralized avenue of discovery and communication. Failure to have this proposal endorsed by the Strategy Committee will jeopardize this work.

Program Assessment

This proposal—the team and the portal—intersect with several other existing or potential RDM initiatives. Consequently, assessment will not stand independent of other progress in this area. However, initial, internal assessment will focus on two elements: a) qualitative feedback from participants on the team as this relates to the role of a venue for information dissemination and collective approaches to issues that span more than one unit; and b) completion of a pilot portal in line with established timelines to be articulated by the team once formed and early metrics associated with portal use, both by support staff and by researchers.

Sustainability

Of key importance to this work is its sustainability. After the initial portal is developed, this would include developing a review process for the portal to assess its ability to meet researchers' needs in a continually changing research and RDM environment. The sustainability will also include the ongoing maintenance of the portal from the Data Portal Operations Team, as well as an ongoing reporting and governance structure to the Steering Committee.