

Charter proposal: Professionalising Data Stewardship Interest Group

1. Name of Proposed Interest Group

Professionalising Data Stewardship Interest Group

2. Introduction

A brief articulation of what issues the Interest Group will address, how this Interest Group is aligned with the RDA mission, and how this Interest Group would be a value-added contribution to the RDA community.

Data stewardship: *the responsible planning and executing of all actions on (digital) data before, during and after a research project, with the aim of optimising the usability, reusability and reproducibility of the resulting data¹.*

Data stewardship and data management skills are essential in research. The lack of consensus on the responsibilities, knowledge, skills, and value of data stewards leads to confusion about the role and hampers building adequate data steward capacity. To our knowledge, a coherent approach and dedicated training for data stewardship on the (inter)national level is lacking as well. This, combined with scarce resources for data stewardship at many institutions, limits vital developments such as defining recruitment procedures and career paths for current and future data stewards.

At the 14th RDA Plenary, a Birds of a Feather session was organised on professionalising data stewardship, with over 60 participants. Eight challenges were identified and discussed: a business case for data stewardship, data stewardship terminology, the integration of data stewardship across an organisation, job profiles for data stewards, training for data stewards, career tracks for data stewards, networking and knowledge exchange, and certification. This was followed by another Birds of a Feather session at the 15th RDA Virtual Plenary, which was attended by more than 100 participants, who reiterated their interest in these topics.

Against this background, this Interest Group will focus on sharing good practices, initiatives, and projects that could help research organisations in professionalising data stewardship. It thus aims to stimulate collaboration within and outside the RDA community.

We expect that the activities of this Interest Group will help current and future data stewards as well as the organisations that incorporate, facilitate and require data stewardship, both within and across disciplines. This aligns with the grass-roots, inclusive approach of the RDA, and with its mission to build bridges, exchange views, collaborate on relevant topics, and tackle current hurdles experienced by the international research data community.

¹ Salome Scholtens, Mijke Jetten, Jasmin Böhmer, Christine Staiger, Inge Slouwerhof, Marije van der Geest, & Celia W.G. van Gelder. (2019, October 3). Final report: Towards FAIR data steward as profession for the lifesciences. Report of a ZonMw funded collaborative approach built on existing expertise. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3474789>

3. User scenarios or use cases the IG wishes to address

What triggered the desire for this Interest Group in the first place.

We identify four direct triggers for proposing the establishment of a Professionalising Data Stewardship Interest Group.

First, in recent years, many discussions have taken place concerning data stewardship, which is considered a hot topic in Research Data Management and Data Science. RDA, which is at the forefront of innovation in research data management, should take a leading role in these discussions and in shaping the future landscape around data stewardship.

Second, these discussions, and the high attendance rate of the 14th RDA and the 15th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather sessions, demonstrated the need for professionalising data stewardship. As a community, we need to ask ourselves what is needed to professionalise data stewardship. Additionally, we must ask how we can contribute to initiatives and projects aimed at profiling, organising, developing, and educating current and new data stewards.

Third, there currently is no network that builds on the various useful initiatives and projects on professionalising data stewardship, such as the FAIRsFAIR project, and the GO-FAIR Data Stewardship Competence Centers network. A forum, which could bring together the relevant stakeholders, is needed and we believe that the RDA may actively take such a role, by establishing a Professionalising Data Stewardship Interest Group. This Interest Group could liaise with communities, initiatives and projects outside the RDA, thus fostering synergies, facilitating practice exchange, bringing new groups and members to RDA, and conversely bringing the Interest Group activities to the attention of external parties (e.g. policy makers, national bodies, funders, publishers).

Fourth, the very practical challenges identified at the 14th RDA Plenary and the 15th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather sessions on professionalising data stewardship are a call for action. As an Interest Group, we could be a platform to lead to the formation of more specific task groups, stimulating cooperation between members within and outside the RDA to tackle challenges and set joint, collaborative steps.

4. Objectives

A specific set of focus areas for discussion, including use cases that pointed to the need for the Interest Group in the first place. Articulate how this group is different from other current activities inside or outside of RDA.

The Interest Group will focus on exchanging good practices, initiatives and projects that could help research organisations in professionalising data stewardship. This Interest Group will liaise with communities, initiatives and projects outside RDA, thus fostering synergies. To our knowledge, there currently is no network that connects and bridges between the various initiatives and projects on professionalising data stewardship.

Specific objectives of this Interest Group are:

- Provide a forum for knowledge and experience exchange in national and international efforts to professionalise data stewardship.
- Define challenges which need to be addressed to professionalise data stewardship.
- Design a strategy to tackle the identified challenges.
- Convene task groups, as appropriate, to pursue specific outcomes and deliverables (see section 4).
- Contribute to global RDA community growth through new members joining this group.
- Stimulate collaboration, creation of new connections and cooperation between group members and beyond.
- Organise webinars to promote the work of the Interest Group.

This proposed Interest Group is distinct, but will work in conjunction with many other Interest Groups, initiatives and projects to professionalise data stewardship across all disciplines. A few examples of complementary RDA groups with which we would like to collaborate are:

- Education and Training on Handling of Research Data Interest Group: experts from this Interest Group could provide vital advice on training development and this connection could also facilitate knowledge exchange with regards to existing training resources.
- CODATA/RDA Research Data Science Schools for Low and Middle Income Countries: collaboration could provide useful perspectives of how data stewardship training could be applied also to LMIC countries.
- Disciplinary Collaboration Framework Interest Group: collaboration could help determine which aspects of data stewardship are discipline-specific and how to best address disciplinary challenges.
- Software Source Code Interest Group: experts from this Interest Group could help understand what the essential software skills are that data stewards should have and how these should be incorporated into data stewardship training curricula.
- Libraries for Research Data IG: the libraries are often the drivers for institutional implementation of data stewardship
- Engaging Researchers with Data IG: it is essential that the groups takes into account the researchers' perspective into professionalising data stewardship

Below we list the specific challenges identified at the 14th and the 15th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather sessions on professionalising data stewardship, which are explained in more detail in a separate document².

- **A business case for data stewardship:** case studies and a framework on how to convince both the institutional management, as well as the research community about the need for professional data stewardship.
- **Data stewardship terminology:** community-agreed terminology and skills for data stewardship, in collaboration and based on existing work, frameworks and taxonomies (e.g. Terms4FAIRSkills, CReDiT).

² Community-contributed notes with more information and ideas on the specific deliverables proposed by the group, explaining the rationale for each output (the challenges), as well as the format of each output:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-SFpAM3HfqNv2L1MiegwCBDocFKqV8D3eQUMXgWX73E/edit?usp=sharing>

- **Models. How to best integrate data stewardship within an organisation?** How should data stewardship be organised within institutions? The group will produce a framework and case studies to help decide what works best and when.
- **Job profiles for data stewards:** there exists a great variety of jobs that includes some role in data stewardship, with varying tasks, with different skills required, and different degrees of expertise. The group will produce job profiles and case studies to explain the different types of data stewards roles.
- **Training for data stewards:** there is currently no agreed, coherent and sufficient approach to training for data stewards. The group plans to work with multiple stakeholders internationally (such as FOSTER, RDNL, CODATA, GO FAIR) to evaluate existing training, look for any potential gaps and devise strategies how these could be addressed through collaboration.
- **Career tracks for data stewards:** data stewardship is not yet recognised as a career. There are not many examples of what a career path would look like, as there is insufficient experience. The group will gather case studies and produce a report on career path examples, specialisation profiles, job profiles and payment schemes, with recommendations for employers.
- **Networking and knowledge exchange:** there is a need for data stewards to be part of a community in order to share knowledge and practice. But how to organise such communities? The group will collect case studies as well as a document with top principles to create a common ground for community formation/practice exchange.
- **Certification:** the community also wished to explore the need of certification of training programmes for data stewards and of data stewards themselves (including a possibility of online certification).

5. Participation

Address which communities will be involved, what skills or knowledge should they have, and how will you engage these communities. Also address how this group proposes to coordinate its activity with relevant related groups.

This Interest Group brings together those interested in professionalising data stewardship, and, more specifically, in actively engaging with each other to contribute to current discussions about, initiatives and projects on tackling challenges in professionalising data stewardship.

This may be current or future data stewards, but we also actively reach out to people in the broader data professional community, including data librarians, data managers, data scientists, data archivists, IT staff, research support staff, policy makers, funders, and managers and executives. This explicitly includes students and researchers, potentially being our future data stewards.

At the 14th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather session, over 60 international participants expressed interest in joining the Interest Group, including actively engaging in its activities (see the list in Potential Group Members). The participants represented various stakeholder groups (Fig. 1), which demonstrates that the topic of professionalising data stewardship is highly relevant for a broad range of audiences.

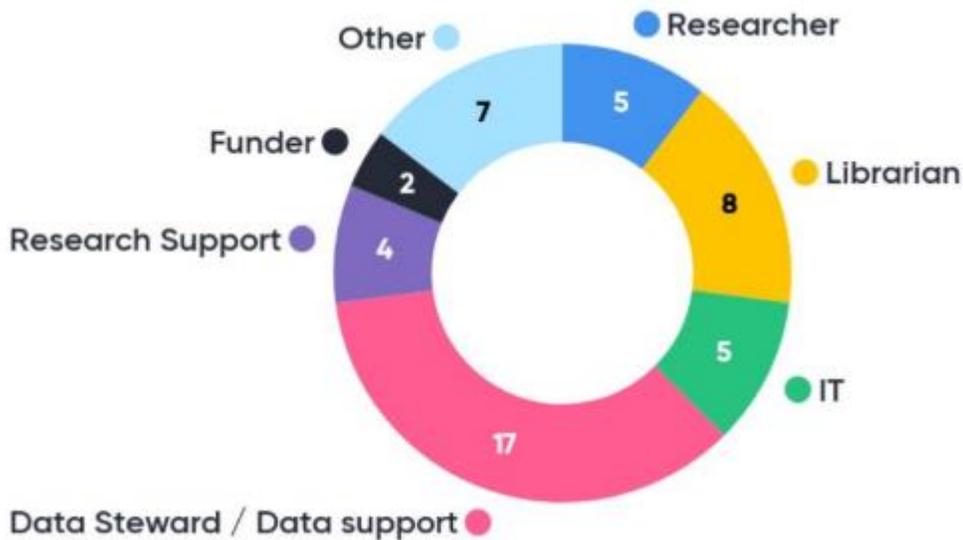
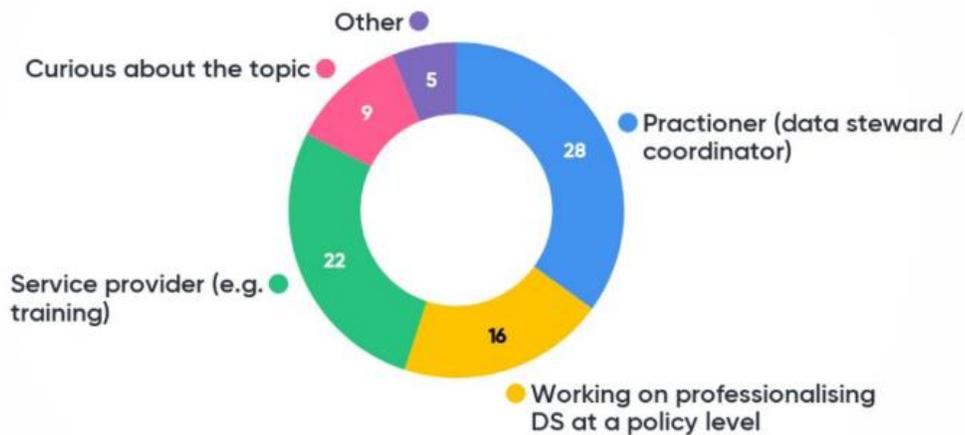


Fig. 1. Stakeholder groups represented at the 14th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather session (Mentimeter survey results).

Participants also had different involvement in data stewardship, which provided an additional confirmation of interest in data stewardship across various stakeholder groups (Fig. 2).

What is your involvement with data stewardship?

Mentimeter



52

Fig. 2. Involvement in data stewardship among the participants of the 14th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather session (Mentimeter survey results).

Additionally, over 25 participants of the 15th IDCC unconference session on data stewardship training and certification have shown interest in joining the Interest Group (their names are added to the list in Potential group members).

The global interest in the topic was reiterated at the 15th RDA Virtual Plenary Birds of a Feather session of the group, which was attended by over 100 participants. Crucially, more than half of the attendees who participated in the Mentimeter online survey indicated that they would like to actively contribute to the activities of the group (Fig. 3).



Fig.3. Interest in active contribution to the activities of the group expressed by the attendees of the 15th RDA Virtual Plenary Birds of a Feather session (Mentimeter survey results).

In addition to coordinating with some of the existing RDA groups (as indicated in section 4), we will keep connections with existing initiatives and projects on professionalising data stewardship to reinforce each other, instead of repeating work. Over the last year, the potential co-chairs of the Interest Group have actively engaged with related initiatives, such as FAIRsFAIR, Terms4FAIRSkills, the EOSC pilot (FAIR4S), the Edison network, and the Dutch professionalising data stewardship project by ZonMw/NPOS (which is chaired by one of the potential co-chairs).

6. Outcomes

Discuss what the Interest Group intends to accomplish. Include examples of Working Group topics or supporting Interest Group-level outputs that might lead to Working Groups later on.

For the very practical challenges identified at the 14th and the 15th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather sessions on professionalising data stewardship, we jointly set the possible outcomes of the Interest Group for the eight challenges identified and discussed in section 4. For this, we will distribute a survey to decide and prioritise topics, define concrete deliverables for each topic, and divide tasks, which will result in specific task groups and working areas for the Interest Group.

7. Mechanism

Describe how often your group will meet and how will you maintain momentum between Plenaries.

The group will meet in person at RDA Plenaries to exchange new ideas and tactics for facilitating professionalising data stewardship, and also to update each other on the progress of task groups working on specific deliverables. Plenary meetings will also be used as an opportunity to recruit and engage with new members.

Between Plenaries, the group will communicate through the formal RDA Interest Group page (posts and events) and Slack, as this proved to be very effective in another project one of the potential co-chairs is involved with ('Engaging Researchers with Research Data: The Cookbook', which led to an Interest Group in formation, namely the Engaging Researchers with Data Interest Group).

Separate task groups will be formed to work on specific deliverables and people will work on these between Plenary sessions. These task groups will be coordinated by the potential co-chairs of the Interest Group.

In addition, the group will organise regular webinars to stimulate discussion and practice exchange.

8. Timeline

Describe draft milestones and goals for the first 12 months.

The first Birds of a Feather session of the Group was at the 14th RDA Plenary. Following the ambition of the participants to establish a formal RDA Interest Group, after the session, a draft charter has been written, and shared for feedback with the 75+ prospective members. The charter was further discussed during dedicated Birds of a Feather session at the 15th RDA Virtual Plenary. Subsequently, the draft charter will be submitted to the RDA for official consideration.

We propose the following activities, goals and milestones for the first 12 months after formalisation:

- Create the official RDA Interest Group:
 - Launch the official group page on the RDA website, and provide a link to the charter, as it contains detailed information about the challenges we aim to tackle, including expected RDA outcomes (a draft group page has been already created in preparation for the 15th Virtual Plenary).
 - Transfer the existing list of members in the charter to the official RDA mailing list.
 - Ask for co-chair nominees, including formal voting.
- Distribute a survey to decide and prioritise topics, define concrete deliverables for each topic, and divide tasks, which will result in specific task groups and working areas for the Interest Group.
- Formalise task groups and start working on prospective new outcomes (see section 4).
 - Convene a session at the following Plenary.
 - Report on the progress of individual task groups.

- Presentation and discussion about new developments in professionalising data.
- Encouragement of new members to join the task groups.
- Organise webinars to promote the work of the Interest Group.
- Communicate and align with various stakeholder groups, initiatives and projects within and outside the RDA, thus fostering synergies on professionalising data stewardship.

9. Potential group members

Include proposed chairs/initial leadership and all members who have expressed interest.

The list below consists of people who were already members of the informal group, based on the 14th and 15th RDA Plenary Birds of a Feather sessions on professionalising data stewardship, the 15th IDCC unconference session on data stewardship training and certification, as well as other discussions and meetings about data stewardship professionalisation.

This list will be further extended at the 16th and 17th RDA Plenary, with a particular aim of increasing the participation of colleagues from the US, Asia and Africa.

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