



# Measuring the Research Data Alliance (RDA) Compliance with the Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure (POSI)

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# 1 Context

Measuring the Research Data Alliance (RDA) Compliance with the Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure (POSI)<sup>1</sup>



## The RDA Values

### Vision

Researchers and innovators openly share and re-use data across technologies, disciplines, and countries to address the grand challenges of society.

### Mission

RDA builds the social and technical bridges that enable open sharing and re-use of data.

### Guiding principles

- ✓ Openness
- ✓ Consensus
- ✓ Inclusivity
- ✓ Harmonisation
- ✓ Community-driven
- ✓ Non-profit & technology neutral

<sup>1</sup> Bilder G, Lin J, Neylon C (2020), The Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure, retrieved [date], <https://doi.org/10.24343/C34W2H>

The Research Data Alliance (RDA), launched in 2013, is founded on six fundamental Guiding Principles:

1. **Openness** – Membership is open to all interested individuals who subscribe to the RDA’s Guiding Principles. RDA community meetings and processes are open, and the deliverables of RDA Working Groups are publicly disseminated.
2. **Consensus** – The RDA moves forward by achieving consensus among its membership. RDA processes and procedures include appropriate mechanisms to resolve conflicts.
3. **Inclusivity**– The RDA seeks to promote broad, balanced and inclusive representation of its membership and stakeholder communities.
4. **Harmonisation** – The RDA works to achieve harmonisation across data standards, policies, technologies, infrastructure, and communities.
5. **Community-driven** – The RDA is a public, community-driven body of volunteer members and organisations, supported by the RDA Secretariat.
6. **Non-profit and technology-neutral** – The RDA does not promote, endorse, or sell commercial products, technologies, or services and the development of open and re-usable recommendations and outputs within the RDA is mandatory.

Bearing this in mind, RDA has conducted a self-assessment of its Compliance with the Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure (POSI). The assessment uses colour coding (see legend below) and includes some explanatory text on compliance.

Measuring RDA Compliance with the Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure	
	<b>Compliant:</b> The RDA has established successful processes and procedures to meet its goals and objectives. It does not, however, mean that the RDA's work to satisfy the principle is complete and without fault.
	<b>Making Progress:</b> The RDA is working on processes and procedures to meet its goals and objectives. The goals and objectives are, therefore, partially met.
	<b>Not Compliant:</b> The RDA does not currently meet its goals and objectives. Work to satisfy the principle is, therefore, required.

Legend 1 - Measuring RDA Compliance with the Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure

## 2 Governance

Principle	Compliance (Nov 2024)	Self-Assessment (Nov 2024)
<p><b>Coverage across the scholarly enterprise - research transcends disciplines, geography, institutions, and stakeholders. Organisations and the infrastructure they run need to reflect this.</b></p>		<p>The RDA is a non-profit, community-driven organisation dedicated to building social and technical bridges that enable researchers and innovators to share and reuse data across technologies, disciplines, and geographical boundaries.</p> <p>The RDA boasts a community of 14,500+ members representing 150+ countries; 150+ community groups focussed on all aspects of Open Science and research data management (RDM); 80+ Organisational and Affiliate members; and, 35+ regional networks, demonstrating its substantial coverage across the scholarly enterprise.</p>
<p><b>Stakeholder Governed – a board-governed organisation drawn from the stakeholder community builds confidence that the organisation will take decisions driven by community consensus and a balance of interests.</b></p>		<p>The RDA consists of five organisational bodies that are each responsible for different aspects of organisational governance, as outlined in the <a href="#">RDA Governance Document</a>.</p> <p>In brief:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">The Council</a> is responsible for the overall oversight, success, strategy, and sustainability of the organisation. The Council maintains the RDA's vision, mission and Guiding Principles, in addition to formally endorsing community groups and their deliverables.</li> <li>2. <a href="#">The Secretariat</a>, composed of an internationally distributed team including the <a href="#">Secretary General</a>, conducts the administration and daily operation of the organisation.</li> <li>3. The <a href="#">Technical Advisory Board (TAB)</a> provides technical expertise and advice to Council, as well supporting, developing, and promoting RDA groups to promote their impact.</li> <li>4. The <a href="#">Organisational Advisory Board (OAB)</a>, composed of representatives of the RDA's Organisational Members, advises Council on the directions, processes, and mechanisms of the RDA from an organisational perspective.</li> <li>5. The <a href="#">Regional Advisory Board (RAB)</a>, composed of representatives of the RDA's Regional Partners, advises Council on the directions, processes, and mechanisms of RDA from a regional perspective.</li> </ol>

**Non-discriminatory participation or membership** – we see the best option as an “opt-in” approach with principles of non-discrimination and inclusivity where any stakeholder group may express an interest and should be welcome. Representation in governance must reflect the character of the community or membership.

Built upon [Guiding Principles](#) of openness, consensus, and inclusivity, membership is open to all individuals, organisations, and regions who share and support the RDA's mission, vision, and values. RDA processes and community meetings are open, and deliverables available for adoption and reuse by anyone around the world.

**Transparent governance** – to achieve trust, the processes and policies for selecting representatives to governance groups should be transparent (within the constraints of privacy laws).

The RDA has an [Organisational and Process Plan](#) that provides publicly accessible descriptions of processes, procedures, policies and other important operational documents. It is an evolving hub of living documentation on how the RDA works that is maintained and disseminated by the Secretariat, developed by the OAB, and reviewed and evaluated by the Council.

In terms of ensuring transparent and consensus-based selection of representatives to governance bodies, the RDA has successful election processes in place for nominations and voting by the community. For the [RDA Council election process](#), candidate Council members are nominated by a [Nominations Committee](#). Shortlisted candidates are interviewed and eligible candidates presented to the RDA community who are able to vote using an online system according to election procedures. Similarly, the [RDA TAB election process](#), and processes by which formal agreements with [RDA Regions](#) and [Organisational and Affiliate members](#) are made are clearly and transparently documented online.

Another example of transparent governance also applies to the endorsement of [RDA groups](#) and their deliverables. New group Case Statements and Charters, and [Recommendations and Outputs](#) are submitted to the RDA Secretariat, before undergoing a period of community and TAB review, and final endorsement by the Council.

Finally, the [RDA's Strategic Plan](#) is collaboratively designed, developed, and drafted by the Council and Secretariat, and takes into consideration feedback received from the community as well as RDA Governance bodies (TAB, Regional Advisory Board, and Organisational and Affiliate members) during several consultation periods.

<p><b>Cannot lobby</b> – infrastructure organisations should not lobby for regulatory change to cement their own positions or narrow self-interest. However, an infrastructure organisation’s role is to support its community, and this can include advocating for policy changes.</p>		<p>The RDA is a community-driven, non-profit organisation with the objective to advocate for Open Science and infrastructure that enables data sharing and reuse. Based on its Guiding Principles of 'Harmonisation' and 'Non-profit and <i>technology-neutral</i>', the RDA works to achieve harmonisation across data standards, policies, technologies, infrastructure, and communities. It does not promote, endorse, or sell commercial products, technologies, or services but supports development of open and reusable services and infrastructure to facilitate Open Science around the world. The RDA, therefore, does not lobby to promote specific initiatives or infrastructure. The RDA does, however, represent a large, influential community of data experts who pioneer and drive important developments within the Open Science and research data landscape at the national and international level.</p>
<p><b>Living will</b> – a powerful way to create trust is to publicly describe a plan addressing the conditions under which an organisation or service would be wound down. It should include how this would happen and how any assets could be archived and preserved when passed to a successor organisation or service. Any such organisation or service must adopt POSI and honour the POSI principles.</p>		<p>As a non-profit organisation supported by limited adhoc funding for over a decade, the RDA endeavours to secure organisational sustainability and, in particular, optimise processes for financial sustainability.</p> <p>In 2020, the RDA Council established a short-term Financial Sustainability Task Force which focussed on identifying appropriate and achievable revenue models for the RDA, aligning financial plans with strategic focus, and engaging with regional offices and representatives to align revenue and business models. Proposed models, including Regional Engagement, Organisational Membership, Plenary Meeting Revenue, and a financial summary, are outlined in the <a href="#">Financial Sustainability Report</a>. In addition, the recent <a href="#">five-year Strategic Plan (2024-2028)</a> strategic theme titled 'Sustain' demonstrates how the RDA plans to diversity funding sources to ensure the organisation meets objectives, and expand relationships with funders, ministries, national governing bodies and others to communicate the value of the RDA and realise financial sustainability.</p> <p>Whilst such sustainability and preservation plans are publicly available, and the practicalities of organisational wind down are known to the Council and Secretariat, a public wind down plan is unavailable.</p>
<p><b>Formal incentives to fulfil mission &amp; wind-down</b> – infrastructures exist for a specific purpose, and that purpose can be radically simplified or even rendered unnecessary by</p>		<p>As a neutral social platform that brings multidisciplinary data experts from all corners of the globe to discuss topics relevant to all stages of the research data lifecycle, the RDA occupies a unique niche within the Open Science ecosystem.</p> <p>Due to the organisation's grass-roots and community-driven approach, community groups and their</p>



technological or social change. Organisations and services should regularly review community support and the need for their activities. If it is possible, the organisation or service (and staff) should have direct incentives to deliver on the mission and wind down.

deliverables are organically created by community members which means the RDA remains ever-versatile and adaptable to fast-evolving changes within the data landscape. The Secretariat, as a lean managerial layer, comprises dedicated community development staff who support the community's work and provide a diversity of engagement opportunities according to the needs and desires of the community.

The RDA Governance Bodies regularly solicit feedback from the community to evaluate the RDA's offering against its mission, vision, and values. Furthermore, ongoing international support and feedback from Regional, Organisational and Affiliate members means that the RDA is continuously shaped, improved, and refined to ensure it remains a successful mission-aligned organisation.

### 3 Sustainability

Principle	Compliance (November 2024)	Self-Assessment (November 2024)
<p><b>Time-limited funds are used only for time-limited activities – operations are supported by sustainable revenue sources - whereas time-limited funds are used only for time-limited activities. Depending on grants to fund ongoing and/or long-term infrastructure operations fully makes them fragile and distracts from building core infrastructure.</b></p>		<p>The RDA was launched in 2013 by the European Commission, the United States Government National Science Foundation and National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Australian Government's Department of Innovation. The <a href="#">RDA Foundation</a>'s income continues to be provided primarily from two sources, <a href="#">funding agencies</a> (grants and donations) and <a href="#">Organisational memberships</a>, with a further smaller ad-hoc other funding revenue streams.</p> <p>In 2023, the RDA established a <a href="#">public-private partnership model</a> to engage industry in RDA efforts and support the development of new RDA Recommendations and Outputs. For example, the <a href="#">RDA's partnership with Oracle</a> supported the facilitation of two RDA Working Groups focussed on domain-agnostic and disciplinary research data topics of interest to the community.</p> <p>More recently, the RDA was selected for the <a href="#">(Global Sustainability Coalition for Open Science Services) SCOSS funding cycle</a> to support standards development and implementation, and academic community engagement in the Global South.</p>
<p><b>Goal to generate surplus – organisations (or services) that define sustainability based merely on recovering costs are brittle and stagnant. It is not enough to merely survive; organisations and services have to be able to adapt and change. To weather economic, social and technological</b></p>		<p>An aspiration of the RDA is to generate a surplus income to enable continued growth and development of the global community. This means planning beyond 'Business as usual' operational costs to support innovation.</p> <p>Meeting the ever-changing needs of an expanding global community requires investment of finances and human resources. Examples of such investment include, but are not limited to, the development and</p>

<p><b>volatility, they need financial resources beyond immediate operating costs.</b></p>		<p>deployment of a new collaborative web-based platform for the community and its work; the recruitment of new staff members to offer increased services and support for the community; and, the provision of training opportunities to develop staff expertise and organisational knowledge. As part of the <a href="#">RDA's Strategic Plan 2024-2028</a>, titled 'Sustain, Empower, Innovate' the RDA will continue to explore ways to ensure financial sustainability, community empowerment, and innovation in the future.</p>
<p><b>Goal to create financial reserves – a high priority should be having ring-fenced financial reserves, separate from operating funds, that can support implementing living will plans, including a complete, orderly wind down or transition to a successor organisation, or major unexpected events.</b></p>		<p>The <a href="#">RDA's financial subcommittee</a> (FSC) monitors policies and rules for sound financial practice of the RDA Foundation, and shares periodic financial reports to the Council for approval. The FSC is responsible for generating a five-year financial forecast to ensure that the organisation has ring-fenced financial reserves to cover wind down costs. Due to volatility of running an organisation on grants, donations, organisational memberships, and other smaller adhoc funding sources, it is important that the financial forecast is regularly monitored and renegotiated to adapt and align with changing financial circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Mission-consistent revenue generation</b> – revenue sources should be evaluated against the infrastructure's mission and not run counter to the aims of the organisation or service.</p>		<p>In alignment with the RDA's mission, vision, and Guiding Principles, RDA membership is open and free to all interested individuals. RDA groups are free to join and their deliverables free to adopt and reuse by anyone. Revenue generated by the RDA's various income streams enables the RDA community and its services remain freely accessible to individual members from all over the world, irrespective of their profession, discipline, and geographical region. Where fees are necessary to generate income they are tailored to affordability. By way of example, <a href="#">Organisational membership fees</a> are based on the number of full time employees (FTE), and income and region (as defined by <a href="#">The World Bank</a>). Also consistent with the RDA's mission to foster a community that is</p>

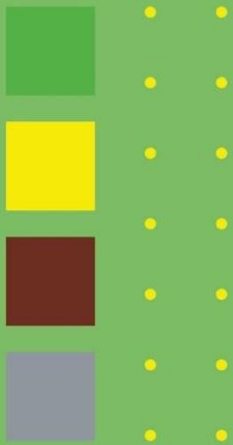
		<p>global, culturally diverse and inclusive, is the launch of the new <a href="#">Equity and Diversity Programme for RDA Plenaries</a> which invites members to support plenary participation for members residing in low or middle income countries (LMICs). By purchasing an optional extra ticket, members can provide a unique opportunity for those who may not otherwise have the financial ability to participate.</p>
<p><b>Revenue based on services, not data</b> – data related to the running of the scholarly infrastructure should be community property. Appropriate revenue sources might include value-added services, consulting, API Service Level Agreements or membership fees.</p>		<p>The RDA's core asset is its community. As the 'beating heart' of the organisation, the community is responsible for the creation, operation, and management of RDA groups and the deliverance of flagship Recommendations and Outputs that are designed <i>for the community, by the community</i>. It is, therefore, imperative that the community takes ownership of its achievements, and that the deliverables are free and publicly accessible in the spirit of Open Science.</p>

## 4 Insurance

Principle	Compliance (Nov 2024)	Self-Assessment (Nov 2024)
<p><b>Open source</b> – all software and assets required to run the infrastructure should be available under an open-source licence. This does not include other software that may be involved with running the organisation.</p>		<p>The new RDA web platform infrastructure uses WordPress, an open-source software written, maintained, and supported by thousands of independent contributors worldwide. In addition, all RDA Recommendations and Outputs are deposited in <a href="#">Zenodo</a>, an open source repository built on the foundation of the open source Invenio digital library. Some groups have also elected to use <a href="#">GitHub</a> to deposit their work.</p>
<p><b>Open data (within constraints of privacy laws)</b> – for an infrastructure to be forked (reproduced), it will be necessary to replicate all relevant data. The CC0 waiver is the best practice in making data openly and legally available. Privacy and data protection laws will limit the extent to which this is possible.</p>		<p>To ensure the continued right to share, use, and build upon the work produced by the RDA community through its various groups, the RDA rightfully applies the following licensing information: 'All RDA Recommendations are under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) and all authors, generators, contributors and users of RDA Recommendations are governed by these licensing regulations.'</p>
<p><b>Available data (within constraints of privacy laws)</b> – it is not enough that the data be “open” if there is no practical way to obtain it. Underlying data should be made easily available via periodic open data dumps.</p>		<p>As stated above, in alignment with the RDA's Guiding Principle of openness, all RDA work is open and accessible to all. With the deployment of a new web platform in 2024, the RDA aims to enhance the findability and accessibility of its work and deliverables.</p> <p>As a community-driven organisation, the RDA manages different types of data in alignment with current <a href="#">European legislation on data protection</a>.</p>
<p><b>Patent non-assertion</b> – the organisation should commit to a patent non-assertion policy or covenant. The organisation may</p>		<p>As an organisation that builds social and technical bridges that enable researchers and innovators to share and reuse data across technologies, disciplines, and geographical boundaries, the RDA does not hold patents. Whilst Recommendations and Outputs are created, and therefore owned, by</p>

obtain patents to protect its own operations but not use them to prevent the community from replicating the infrastructure.

the RDA community, they are made openly available to the public under a CC-BY license which means re-users are permitted to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator.



# research data sharing without barriers

[rd-alliance.org](http://rd-alliance.org)