

Becoming RAD

How to Retain, Archive and Dispose of data responsibly

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Tip Sheet 1 - Introduction to RAD

What is RAD?

All collected data has a lifecycle. RAD refers to three key stages of this cycle: **Retention**, **Archiving**, and **Disposal**.

Organisations, and teams within organisations, tend to collect data within certain contexts and for specific purposes – whether that data concerns the organisation's staff, partners, grantees or others the organisation works with. After a while, however, collected data might no longer be relevant, used or needed. At this point, a decision will need to be made on whether to archive it or delete it entirely. **A RAD plan can help an organisation to make sure their data goes through an appropriate lifecycle and is managed safely and securely along the way.**

Data Retention refers to *how long* different types of data will be kept. A responsible data retention plan will be grounded in the principles of data minimization, meaning only holding on to the data and information that are really necessary.

Data Archiving: This covers *how and why* different types of data are stored. A responsible plan will make sure that data is preserved intentionally (rather than by default or accident, for example), and in a format that makes it easy for collaborators to refer back to. The process of data archiving requires careful reflection on why your data might be needed in the future, who might need it and how you can store it.

Data Disposal is the process of *deleting data in a safe and responsible manner*.

Why RAD is important

Having a streamlined process for Retaining, Archiving and Disposing of information shows care, respect and empathy for those an organisation works with, including the organisation's own team, collaborators, partners, grantees and others.

For any organisation, putting a RAD plan in place is an important part of:

- Building a foundation for information management that **aligns with the organisation's values**
- Making sure that the organisation complies with **data protection regulations**

- Establishing a **culture of clarity and care** in terms of information management, by alleviating uncertainty about where data lives and who has access to it, and by making sure everyone has the same baseline knowledge when it comes to managing data
- Ensuring that **work continues smoothly and knowledge remains accessible** for different staff members as team compositions change
- Ensuring that the **privacy and security** of team members, partners and others the organisation works with is protected
- Supporting **trust-based relationship-building** with others

Activity | Making your workflow RAD!

While RAD may require your organisation to redesign some internal processes, it will also have a meaningful, positive impact on the work you do. A RAD plan gives an organisation more agency over the data its teams use for their work. It also provides a structure for team members to follow when searching for, collecting, archiving and deleting information.

To prepare for the process of creating an organisational RAD plan, we invite you to **imagine your RAD future** by working through the questions below.

- How could a RAD plan improve your workflow(s)?
- How could a RAD plan change the way you and your team manage data and information?
- How could a RAD plan help you collaborate with team members?
- How could a RAD plan be useful in supporting your partners?

Resources and learning materials

- [Developing a Responsible Data policy with OTF](#) (The Engine Room)
- [Talking about responsible data: a conversation guide for human rights funders](#) (The Engine Room)
- [Data Retention, Archiving and Disposal](#) (Elan)
- [Responsible Data Handbook](#) (The Engine Room)
- [Data Minimization: key to protecting privacy and reducing harm](#) (Access Now)

Tip Sheet 2 - How do we RAD?

Getting started: Where is your data?

A RAD plan should help an organisation keep its digital home organized and tailored to its needs. There are many ways to create a plan! A common starting point is to get a better sense of where data actually is: doing a data audit, or data mapping, can be a great way to reflect on what data your organisation holds, where it lives and who has access to it. When you know all this about your data, it's easier to plan to responsibly Retain, Archive or Dispose of it.

Activity | Mapping your data

To start mapping your data, it can help to look at each stage of the data lifecycle separately. Do an initial mapping by working through the questions below, each of which focuses on one stage of the data cycle. The mapping can be done as a team, documenting your answers in a shared document.

- **When do you collect data?** Think about your individual and collective workflows and list the moments at which you collect data.
- **Where do you store data?** Consider the data you currently have and list all the places it lives (make sure to include all your remote locations - emails, shared documents, and so on).
- **When do you share data?** Think about times when you need to share data: when does that usually happen?

Next steps

Now that you've got an initial map of your data, the next step is to look at each of these stages of the data cycle in more detail, and examine how your organisation approaches each one.

Data collection: when is data collected and where does it come from?

Since the data cycle starts with data collection, i.e. the process of gathering information for a specific purpose, this is a good place to start your more in-depth mapping. There are three main questions to look at here (no need to answer them at this stage – the table below is designed to help you work through each of them in more depth):

- **What data do we collect, why, and how?** In answering this, it can help to identify the question, or set of questions, you're trying to answer when you collect each type of data. This will also help you to

identify what information is sensitive and allow you to better plan what to do with it.

- **What is the minimum amount of data we need to do our work?** Data minimization is about collecting no more than you need for a specific purpose. Implementing data minimization in your data management plans will help you to avoid wasting time and resources collecting data that is unnecessary or, importantly, that has the potential to lead to harm.
- **Who is reflected in the data we collect?** Considering who is represented in the data you are using allows you to clarify contextual information around the data, which in turn will help you make informed decisions about how to handle it.

Activity | Understanding data collection

The table below looks at the what, why and how of data collection. It can be useful to do this as individuals first, with each person focusing on their own workflow. Add as many rows to the table as needed. Afterwards, combine answers, discuss them, and collectively prioritise areas where you can bring more clarity, establish processes or add safeguards.

What data do you collect? E.g. interview files, contracts, working documents?	Why do you collect this data?	How is this data collected? And how often?	Who provides the data you're using? Did you get their consent for this specific use?	Is there any sensitive information being collected?	What are potential impacts of this data collection?	What is the minimum amount of data you actually need to collect for your work?

Power and Consent

It's the people reflected in the data who should have the most say over how the data is used, but making sure this happens can be tricky. Consider aspects such as inclusion (how might being included in this dataset impact people?), accuracy (does this data accurately reflect the reality of the people involved?), ownership (who owns the data and what does that

mean for the people involved?), and consent (who has given consent, for what, and in what context?).

Consent = FRIES

Freely given (consent is clear, there are no tricks!)
Reversible (people should be able to remove their data at any time)
Informed (takes context into consideration! It's on you to inform people appropriately)
Enthusiastic (people need to be able to actively express consent!)
Specific (consentful data collection processes include being clear and explaining that consent given to a specific goal should be limited to that goal alone)

Data storage:

Where is the data stored and who is responsible for it?

When data is no longer actively being used, we often forget about it (and forget where it lives!). Your RAD plan should help to prevent this, and help your organisation keep tabs on what data lives where and who has access to it.

For instance, you might have collected data about other organisations – some of it sensitive – as part of a specific research project or grant application process. The information you have collected could potentially pose risks to those you are working with if it falls into the wrong hands. So, once the project is over and the data is no longer actively needed, a decision should be made on whether the data should be deleted or stored; and if stored, how best to do this to minimize risk as far as possible.

How you store data should reflect the particular risks you or your partners may be facing, alongside your organisational priorities and needs.

Activity | How is your data stored?

Use the table below to examine your data storage in more detail. Your list of data types from the previous activity can help in getting started, along with the list of storage locations you put together in the “Mapping your Data” activity. Add as many rows below as needed.

Type of data e.g. interview notes, contracts,	Where does it live? e.g. Phone, personal	Who has access to this data?	How often is this data accessed?	If this is sensitive data, how does this	Have the people reflected in
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working documents	computer, email, shared folders, coworkers devices or emails?		Does that affect how you store it?	affect storage? Do you store it somewhere else? Do different people have access to it?	the data given consent to it being stored?

Data sharing: what to consider

It's always important to keep in mind that sharing data can bring unintended consequences. When working with sensitive data, it's better to err on the side of caution and make sure that no sensitive or potentially harmful data is shared in ways that could be accessed by third parties. In refining your plan around data sharing, consider (and practice!) informed consent, data minimization and data anonymisation.

Activity | Sharing your data

The table below is designed to support you in reflecting on how your organisation shares data, both internally and externally. Consult your lists of data types from previous activities as a starting point, and add as many rows as needed.

Type of data e.g. interview files, contracts, working documents	Is there any identifiable information in this data? Is this data 'linked to' any individuals (or groups)? Common types of personally identifiable data include age, ethnicity,	Does this data have the potential to impact an individual, in a personal, business or professional capacity? What are the potential impacts of	Who would you share this data with? e.g. coworkers, partners, advisors, funders, journalists, the public, etc. Do you share differently depending on the situation/	How are you sharing this data? What tools are you using? Are you sharing all the data or only parts of it?	Should this data (or parts of it) be anonymised before sharing?

	gender, location, origin and more.	sharing this data?	person? How so?		

Tip sheet 3 - Building a RAD plan that fits your organisation

A RAD plan can always change and evolve to match your workflows, changes in your team, and new needs and demands. A good RAD plan should ideally:

- **Ask questions** that take the end of data lifecycles into account. This means assessing when and how data retention happens, when and how archiving happens and when and how deletion of data happens.
- **Centre care** – for partners, for your team (including new team members), and for anyone else who might appear in the data you're working with. Your plan should respond to the needs of your internal teams, and reflect your contexts, existing structures, needs and behaviours.
- **Be participatory.** Your plan should involve the participation of different teams and staff, to make sure that each team's specific needs are considered. It can include regular trainings and periodic check-ins tailored to different parts of the organisation.
- **Combine responsibility with flexibility.** Your plan should seek to create spaces for learning and reflection, while maintaining (and adapting!) an information management system that works for the whole team.

RAD: the importance of continued care

Care is at the heart of maintenance. Creating a responsible RAD plan will ensure you're able to adequately maintain your internal information systems and make sure everyone in your team is kept informed on how best to manage the data they work with. It will also signal appreciation for the labour that goes into maintaining a structured information management system.

✍ Activity | Reflecting on keeping your work RAD

To make sure that you continue to incorporate RAD into your work in the future, this activity offers some future-focused questions, as a guide to reflection. The questions below can be answered individually first, and then shared with each other to establish collective agreements.

- How can you maintain a RAD perspective? What does it take to keep going?
- What will you commit to in the next few months? What steps you/your team are going to take in the near future?
- What questions do we still need to answer to become RAD?

