Guidelines for the Management of Research Data at USN

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1. Background

The Guidelines for the Management of Research Data at USN (University of South-Eastern Norway) operationalise the Open Science policy at USN. The guidelines also include principles for the protection of research data.

The guidelines apply to the whole of USN. In addition, each dataset may have its own specific requirements that must be considered. Below you will find criteria to help you assess what can be shared and what cannot be shared.

At USN, the University Library coordinates the research and student support services for research data, with contributions from other departments within USN's central administrative services. You can find guidance and information on how to comply with these guidelines in practice on the University Library's webpages on research data.

By following these guidelines, you help ensure that research data produced at USN are findable, well documented and reusable. In this way, both you and USN contribute to more accessible, transparent and verifiable research, for the benefit of both the scholarly and the wider public.

If you and your colleagues would like training in FAIR research data management, contact us at:

forskningsdata@usn.no

2. What is research data?

Research data are all registrations/recordings/reports in the form of numbers, texts, images and sounds that are generated or arise during research projects. This may include data generated through

new analysis, compilation of existing data, or entirely new data generated through new data collection. Research data are always a direct result of the research, regardless of whether the data are based on existing data or newly collected data.

2.1 FAIR research data

Research data produced at USN must be managed in such a way that they are, as far as possible, in line with the FAIR principles, i.e. that they are Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

Research data must be handled in accordance with discipline-specific research ethics guidelines where such exist. Academic fields without their own research ethics guidelines must comply with the general research ethics guidelines prepared by the National Research Ethics Committees: https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/general-guidelines/

2.2 Archiving and accessibility

Research data that can be archived and made available shall be archived according to the principle "as open as possible, as closed as necessary". USN shall promote the reuse and sharing of research data, as long as there are no legal, ethical, security-related or commercial reasons to protect the dataset.

Criteria for assessing a dataset's potential for openness include:

- What can be shared openly?
- What can be shared in a restricted way?
- What can be shared at a later point in time?
- What cannot be shared at all?

Archiving research data usually takes place at the end of a research process. There are several different archiving solutions; generally, research data at USN shall be archived in:

- USN's solution for archiving research data
- Discipline-specific research data repositories indexed in re3data.org

It is a requirement that the archiving solution complies with the FAIR principles. If the dataset cannot be made available in accordance with the FAIR principles, a metadata record describing the dataset shall be created in USN's research data repository.

2.3 Exceptions to the publication of research data

Exceptions to the publication of research data apply in cases where:

- making the data public threatens the safety of individuals or falls under regulations related to national security, sanctions and/or export control – such datasets shall not be made openly available
- making the data public would lead to a breach of data protection legislation – such datasets shall not be made openly available

- making the data public conflicts with legal provisions, research ethics norms, or the data have commercial value and/or contractual protection – such datasets may be exempted from the general principle of open access
- making the data public may have serious consequences for the university or data collectors – such datasets may be exempted from the general principle of open access

For further clarification on ownership and user rights to research data, see USN's IPR Policy.

2.4 Deletion

Research data that are not to be preserved and cannot be made available shall be deleted. After the project period has ended, research data shall be stored in accordance with the REK approval, the assessment by Sikt, any contractual obligations regarding storage period and/or the data management plan.

3. Data management plan

A data management plan describes how the research data in a project will be managed throughout the entire project period. This makes it easier to maintain an overview of the dataset, uncover challenges, agree on conditions of use, plan for the protection of sensitive data, and facilitate sharing and reuse after the project has ended.

Research projects at USN that generate or use data shall, generally, be equipped with their own data management plan.

Most research funders, such as Horizon Europe, the Research Council of Norway and the Dam Foundation, require a data management plan as part of the project application

4. Processing

While the research dataset is being processed during a research project, it shall be stored using the solutions specified in USN's current storage guide, which indicates where and how data must be stored in a secure manner. Which solutions are chosen is determined by the level of protection the dataset requires. To support this assessment, USN's guide for the classification of information shall be used.

5. Metadata and documentation

To ensure that research data are sufficiently documented for future, independent use, as comprehensive metadata as possible shall be recorded. In addition, a separate file shall be uploaded and published with the data – a so-called README file. The README file shall contain information about how the data were collected and, where relevant, which software and instruments were used in processing, what software is required to open the data files, and any other relevant information necessary to understand the dataset.

The README file should be in a format that is also machine-readable.

In cases where research data cannot be shared, metadata and any associated documentation shall be shared.

5.1 Archival formats

Research data shall be stored in a format suitable for long-term archiving, meaning non-proprietary and open formats. Information about preferred file formats can be found on the University Library's guidance pages for research data.

5.2 License

Research data shall be archived with a license that is internationally recognized and that imposes as few restrictions as possible on reuse: Creative Commons or the Norwegian License for Open Government Data (NLOD). These licenses establish clear guidelines for users' rights and exempt the publisher from legal liability related to data quality and use. If it is relevant to protect the data from direct copying (copyright), the following text may be used:
© 'year' 'Name', for example: © 2025 University of South-Eastern Norway.

6. Roles and responsibilities

6.1 USN

USN is responsible for providing employees at USN with guidance, training and support for FAIR management of research data, including data management plans and open archiving and publishing of research data and metadata.

- To provide solutions for secure storage and archiving data, for both students and employees
- To provide procedures and internal control systems to ensure that USN employees use secure solutions for the processing of research data

USN is also responsible for ensuring that the guidance provided is in line with developments in open science and FAIR data management.

6.2 Project leaders

The project leader is responsible for the data that the project collects and uses and shall have access to all research data covered by the project. The project leader assigns access rights and keeps track of who has access to the data. The project leader is also responsible for the management of active research data and for the deletion and/or secure storage of data when the project ends.

In student projects, the supervisor is formally the project leader, while the student is the one who carries out the tasks agreed upon with the supervisor.

If the project leader's employment at USN ends, either during or after the project, the responsibility for the ongoing stewardship of the project's research data shall be clarified in agreement with the immediate superior.

6.3 Other researchers, academic staff and students

All those who process research data at USN are responsible for managing research data in accordance with the requirements and conditions associated with the dataset. This includes familiarizing themselves with and complying with guidelines related to data protection, information security, storage, access control, archiving, licensing and deletion, as well as ethical guidelines, agreements and the principles of FAIR data management.

Glossary

Sharing

Making data available for use and reuse. This may, for example, be done by storing data in storage services where data can be shared with collaborators during a project and/or by depositing and publishing data in a research data repository. An important aspect of data sharing concerns the extent to which published data can be found, assessed, understood and reused by others than the person(s) who originally collected or generated the data.

Open data

Open data are digital data that are made available with the technical and legal characteristics necessary for them to be freely used and distributed by anyone, at anytime and anywhere.

FAIR

FAIR data are data that are Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

Archiving

Archiving is here understood as all activities that are necessary for digital objects (research data) to be understood, preserved and made available. These activities can also be referred to as (data) curation.

Data management plan

A data management plan (often called a DMP) is a document that describes how data will be managed during a research project and after the project has ended. The purpose of a data management plan is to assess and address the various aspects of managing research data so that the data are handled appropriately and lawfully during the project and are prepared for sharing and/or archiving after the end of the project.

Metadata

Metadata are data about data, or information that describes other information. It is structured information that locates, describes, explains or otherwise facilitates the retrieval, (re)use or management of an information resource / digital object.

README

The README file contains descriptions of and information about the dataset that are necessary for the data to be reused and correctly understood.

Research project

Systematic work is carried out with the aim of generating knowledge and understanding about a given topic.