

FAIR Supporting Resource (FSR) Description Article

Community building via the DTL Data Stewards Interest Group (DSIG)

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Received 10 February 2023

Accepted 19 March 2023

Abstract. This article describes the Data Stewards Interest Group (DSIG), an informal and inclusive community hub for data stewards and like-minded in the Netherlands (and abroad) to share experiences, fostering the (Dutch) national implementation of data stewardship.

Keywords: Data stewardship, data steward (http://purl.obolibrary.org/obo/T4FS_0000178), community building (http://purl.obolibrary.org/obo/T4FS_0000249), peer learning, knowledge exchange

1. Context

Data stewardship is a relatively new profession [8] that emerged to support researchers in data handling before, during and after a research project. For example, data stewards are trained to make data as FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) as possible and to advise researchers on data reuse. With the support of data stewards, data becomes more sustainable and remains valuable after a research project ends.

Community building, knowledge exchange and peer learning are essential to support the growing community of data stewards, and contribute to capacity building, career development and professionalisation of this new occupation. In the Netherlands, the Data Stewards Interest Group (DSIG) [2] is such a community that connects data stewards and people with related jobs, even beyond the Dutch geographical borders. In principle, anyone interested can join the community, attend meetings and contribute to the discussion in the communication channels.

The bottom-up approach of this community has proven to be very successful in reaching out to a wider group. Over the years, templates and best practices, such as recurring agenda items and the shared notes, have made it easier

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and more efficient to convene, chair and attend meetings. Via the DSIG website [6], these materials are available for others who want to set up a similar community within their own region or discipline.

To get an impression of these materials, see for example the agenda of the September 27, 2022 meeting [1] guest-chaired by Angelica Maineri [10] of ODISSEI [19], the national research infrastructure for the social sciences in the Netherlands; or browse one of the other agendas on the website.

2. Description

2.1. Origin

The Data Steward Interest Group was initiated in 2017 in the Life Sciences and Health domain, by two medical centers – Leiden (LUMC) and Utrecht (UMCU) – together with DTL, the Dutch Techcentre for Life Sciences (DTL) [16]. The DSIG met in person every other month, chaired by then UMCU's Daphne van Beek [11]. When Jasmin Böhmer [13], then also of UMCU, took over the chairing position at the end of 2018, monthly virtual meetings were alternated with face-to-face meetings.

From 2020 onwards, during the Covid-19 crisis, in their role of formal chair respectively community manager, Irina van Dijk (UMCU) [12] and Mijke Jetten [14] (DTL, Health-RI [18] & ELIXIR-NL [17]) organised six virtual meetings a year. The DSIG also gradually changed into a cross-domain community: it currently welcomes data stewards related to all three Dutch Thematic Digital Competence Centres [20] (formally established in September 2022 for respectively Life Sciences and Health (LSH), Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), and Natural and Engineering Sciences (NES)).

2.2. Aim

The DSIG aims to establish a community hub for data stewardship that enables informal and inclusive knowledge and experience exchange. It provides a platform for data stewards and like-minded in the Netherlands (and abroad) to share experiences, and it fosters the (Dutch) national implementation of data stewardship. The DSIG is open to everyone who is interested in data stewardship and is not limited to a specific academic discipline, nor to the Netherlands, but it is Netherlands based.

The distinctive feature of the DSIG in comparison to other initiatives regarding data stewardship is the hands-on and solution-oriented approach for practical matters. Via its meetings (see below), the DSIG specifically facilitates and stimulates direct peer-learning and knowledge sharing in a very fruitful way. This way, it is of added value in the broader landscape of for instance the worldwide Research Data Alliance (RDA) Professionalising Data Stewardship Interest Group [15], the European topical ELIXIR communities [7], the Dutch National Coordination Point Research Data Management (LCRDM) [3] and local networks like the Leiden University Data Management Network [9].

2.3. Meetings

2.3.1. Agenda

The DSIG meetings have recurring agenda items, such as an informal start with coffee/tea and loose talks, an introduction round to allow new people to introduce themselves, and an overview list with participants and their affiliation and contact details to allow peer networking. This attention for the individual participant is typical of the DSIG, as participants usually join based on personal interest (versus formally representing their organisation). Since participants vary a lot from meeting to meeting, this approach makes people feel welcome even if they had to miss previous meetings.

In any case, the shared notes, including links to presentations, are openly available on the DSIG website after the meeting so that those who can't always attend still benefit from the information shared.

All meetings have an extensive New and Newsworthy section, in which the data stewards are offered the opportunity to share and ask in-depth questions on data-related events, projects and activities. Additionally, DTL, as a facilitating organisation, always presents the In Case You Missed Its, 10 data-related things or events the data stewards need to know about.

2.3.2. Rotating chairs and topics

To allow variety and include the various local activities on data stewardship, each meeting is organised and chaired by another organisation. This organisation oversees the agenda, choosing topics, presentations or other ways of interacting that showcases what the organisation is currently working on or the challenges it faces.

Recent topics put on the agenda included a.o.:

- How to set up an institute-wide infrastructure for reuse of clinical data
- FAIR support for the social sciences
- Reuse of data by FAIRification for a patient-led registry: The Duchenne Data Platform
- Knowledge database: data stewardship info snippets
- DANS training in the Dutch and EU research data landscape
- Covid-19 data and Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC)
- Data support from central Research Data Management (RDM) support vs. the decentral data steward perspective

A series of topical/Special Interest Groups (SIG) have resulted from the discussion in the DSIG meetings, for instance on Data Management Plans (DMP) and for the Dutch ZonMw Covid-19 programme [21].

2.3.3. Division of tasks and practicalities

As DTL officially facilitates the meetings, its community manager arranges all documents including the agenda and recurring items, registration form, and PR, so the preparation time for the chairing organisation is limited.

Most organisations have volunteered to chair, or were requested by DTL to do so because of a specific topic they addressed or because they actively engaged in past meetings. Chairs have reported back that it was very useful and fun to chair a DSIG meeting, particularly because of the always engaging data stewards in the group. After every meeting, via the shared notes, feedback is requested from the participants, including a Keep, Add, Less & More section.

Due to Corona, all recent DSIG meetings have been organised online, with between 50 and 75 participants. These participants come from various domains and companies, including international members.

2.4. Further community activities

To connect data stewards between meetings, the DSIG also facilitates a mailing list [4] and a slack community [5], to promote events, ask each other questions or feedback, and share experiences. These channels are also used to promote DSIG meetings, in addition to the DTL website announcement, and Twitter and LinkedIn messages. In an early stage, the preliminary agenda is shared via the DTL website, just like afterwards the shared notes of all meetings. Participants are invited and actually help out to make those shared notes.

3. Conclusion

The DSIG actively welcomes participants from the Netherlands and abroad. Check the DSIG website for the agenda and registration for the next meeting or join the mailing list and slack community to be kept updated. If you are planning to start your own community and could use some help, the corresponding author is happy to get you started and exchange experiences.

Acknowledgements

The authors have no acknowledgments to report.

Funding

The authors have no funding to report.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

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