Guide for Developing National Data Service Plans
– Executive Summary –

The benefits of establishing a national data service

From a research policy perspective there are benefits of national data services to scientific communities that justify the needed investments. First, through their core activities – data preservation and dissemination – data services make possible long-term access to and wider and more effective use of existing data. This means that publicly-funded data are used more fully beyond their original purposes, and that research funders can concentrate on financing fewer new data collections. Indeed, data gathered for original research can be further exploited by "secondary" users for new insights and scientific contributions. Recent work by Beagrie et al.[1] demonstrates the economic benefits of national data services.

In addition, because data are often not appropriately preserved by researchers, they are lost or become unusable over time. This represents a loss of potential knowledge and cultural heritage. The data service, through appropriate procedures, policies, tools and infrastructures, ensures long-term preservation of data.

Second, data services strengthen research practice and quality by rendering research more transparent and open for replicability. By making data and related documentation available for scrutiny, original research can be tested and evaluated, a key pillar of the scientific method. Also, knowing in advance that the data could be used by others in the future is a way to ensure better quality in methods.

Third, more and more funders and journals are requiring that data be deposited at repositories and made available to researchers for secondary use and replication – having archives and repositories as places to store and disseminate data makes possible these requirements.

Finally, the easy availability of secondary data brings value to university teachers and students, who benefit from having data to use for training purposes as well as to illustrate methods and concepts in their courses and projects.

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[1] Beagrie Neil, John Houghton, Anna Palaiologk, and Peter Williams. (2012). *Economic Impact Evaluation of the Economic and Social Data Service.* Available at : http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/research/research-and-impact-evaluation/economic-impact-evaluation-of-the-economic-and-social-data-service/

The creation of a national development plan

The "Guide for Developing National Data Service Plans"[2] aims to assist interested actors or country teams in developing plans for establishing national data services in the social sciences. The guide is divided into three main sections. These sections will constitute the basis of the national development plan.

The first two sections address larger strategic considerations in conceiving and establishing a national data service. The first section assists the country teams in developing a "concept" for a future national data service, that is, the model and key features that are to be put into place. This includes defining: the nature of the organisation; the scope of the collection of data; the offered services and activities; the beneficiaries; the governance structure; and the overall mission.

The second section of the guide helps country teams to evaluate the concept from section one in relation to realities on the ground, including probable resources and challenges for setting up and maintaining a viable data service over time. This includes subsections on identifying the host institution for the data service, defining the human resources required (number and types of staff, internal structure), and identifying potential partners among the existing network of relevant national and international organisations. The country teams will also have the possibility to develop other aspects that are crucial for them.

The third section of the guide is not compulsory, and is meant to be completed by those countries that are further advanced in their intentions to establish national data services for the social sciences. This section helps country teams to make a concrete step by step plan for new data services, both up to "day one" of operations, and after "day one".

The support of CESSDA and its partners

The country teams can count on the support of CESSDA and its partners in drafting their national development plans. But crafting plans for national data services is just a first step. Countries seeking to establish national data services and obtain CESSDA membership must adopt strategic and creative approaches to improve their chances of success. The country teams and/or new data services can also count on the support of the CESSDA main office in Bergen, Norway, especially if the intention is to move toward CESSDA country membership.

The CESSDA SaW project and its many national partners encourage country teams to join CESSDA, the growing European network of data services in the social sciences, which can assist in identifying and employing effective solutions and synergies.

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[2] Link to the complete "Guide for Developing National Data Service Plans": https://cessda.net/CESSDA-Services/Projects/CESSDA-SaW/Work-Packages/WP3/Guide-for-Developing-National-Data-Service-Plans