



A Long Way to FAIR and Short Time to Get There: Small Steps Towards Big Promises

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Where We Started



- FAIR Data Austria (2020-2022) & RDM WG (since 2021): Development of the data stewardship program
- Pilot phase (2022): one coordinator (UB) + three (embedded) data stewards
- Growth phase (since 2024): data stewards established as permanent positions and growth of the data steward network to cover all 20 faculties/research centers
- New team structure (June 2025): Integration of the data stewardship network into a larger RDM team as part of the new department Research and Publication Services

Goal: Help researchers improve their data management and their Open Science practices.

What We Found When We Hit the Road

The Reality of RDM in Research Groups

Infrastructure

- Many systems were fragmented.
- Key tools were missing.
- Lots of individual solutions.

Workflows

- Pain points were extremely practical.
- Practices were highly heterogeneous.

Human Factors

- Knowledge was lower than expected.
- Attention could be scattered.
- But people were genuinely supportive.



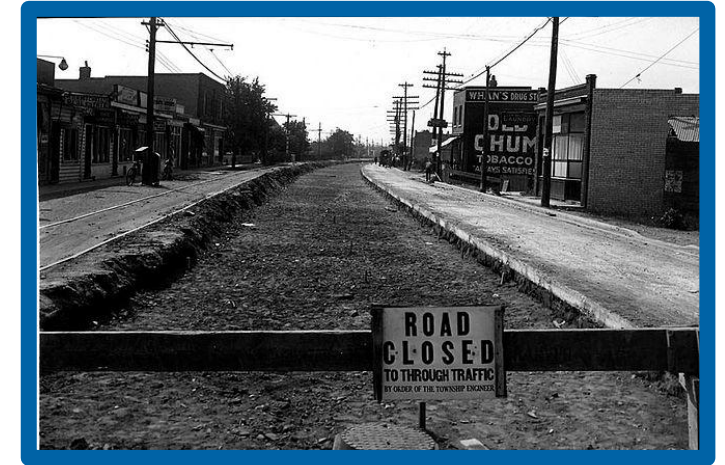
Speed Bumps, Detours, and Big Questions

Translating High-Level Ideals into Practical Action

Two deceptively simple questions.

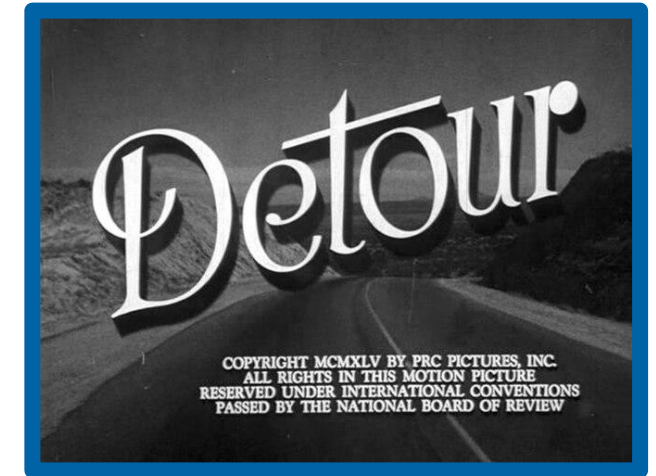
Question 1: The “What”

- What did “better RDM” look like in concrete, attainable terms?



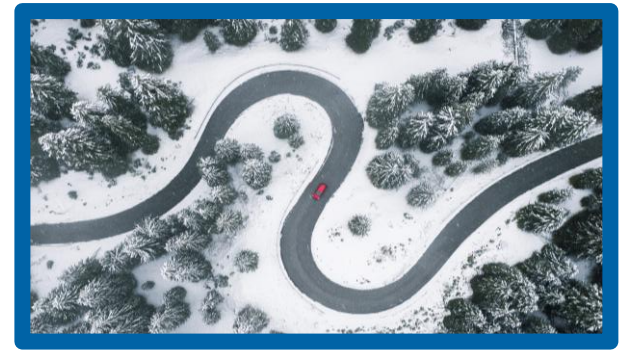
Question 2: The “How”

- How do we convince people to let us help them, get the resources to do it, and structure our work in a way that produces results?



Defining the Destination

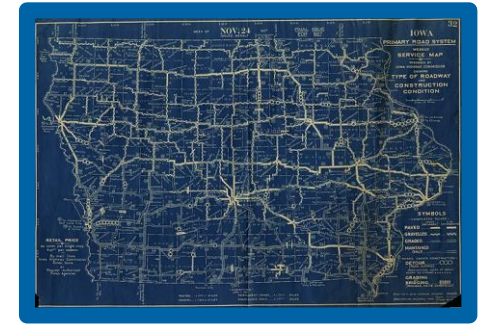
Question 1: What Did Better RDM Look Like?



- **Use stable, shared storage**
 - Institutional servers
 - Shared drives
 - Adequate back-up
- **Document Decisions and Workflows**
 - README files
 - Lab wikis
 - Github and Gitlab
 - Scanning lab notebooks/ELNs
- **Improving Education for PhD Students**
 - RDM and OS courses
 - Well structured working environments
 - Clear support and feedback
- **Organize Data Consistently**
 - Clear folder and file structures
 - Naming conventions
 - Version control
 - Managed read and write access
- **Sending Published Data to Repositories**
 - Repository match-making
 - Licensing
- **Increase Engagement with Services**
 - Consult with Data Stewards
 - Raise questions early
 - Encourage interaction

Mapping the Route

Question 2: How Do We Make an Impact?



- **Removing Structural Barriers**
 - Streamline internal communication
 - Balance cross-departmental needs
 - Turn “no” into workable solutions
- **Focusing on Reasonable Improvement**
 - How committed are researchers?
 - What are their goals?
 - What resources are available to them?
- **Incorporating Change Management**
 - View requests as a change initiatives
 - Develop an operationalized strategy
 - Gather data and refine the approach
- **Providing Rapid Support**
 - Respond quickly
 - Chart a path forward
 - Give realistic timelines
 - Maintain communication
- **Actively Building Engagement**
 - Provide training
 - Be visible
 - Be helpful, not huffy.
- **Treating Requests as Projects**
 - Less than two emails = a request
 - More than two emails = a project
 - Embrace project management

Detours and Speed Bumps

What Has Been the Most Challenging?

- Finding solutions that match resource constraints.
- Closing the gap between urgent needs and slower roll-out.
- Balancing multiple commitments and projects.
- Driving engagement in a crowded attention environment.
- But there's one more thing...

“We’ve got a long way to go... and short time to get there.” –Jerry Reed

If...

I can provide significant assistance
to 3 research groups at once

And it takes approximately 6
months to complete a project with
a group.

It will take me 16.5 years to work
with every lab in my faculty.

Let the Good Times Roll

What Are We Proud Of?



- **Our PhD Candidates**

- Their willingness to learn.
- Their openness to new ideas.

- **Our Data Steward Team**

- Demand for Data Stewards is growing.
- We must be doing something right.

- **De-Mystifying the Mysterious**

- Translate policies and requirements into practical steps.
- Provide concrete steps to reach goals.

- **Calming the Chaos**

- Empower researchers to regain control.
- Reduce data-related stress.



Fuel for the Journey Ahead

Sustaining Momentum in a High Demand Role

- **Clarify And Define Key Goals and Priorities**

- What do we want our researchers to do this year?
- How do we define success?

- **Adequately Resource Goals**

- Time
- Software
- Hardware
- Expertise



- **Consider Pacing**

- This is a marathon, not a sprint.
- Stewardship pulls mental, emotional, and social energy

- **Help Data Stewards Upskill**

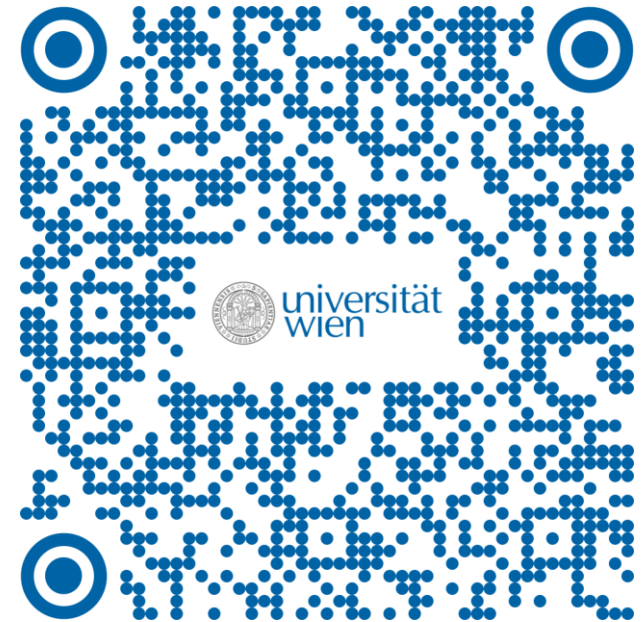
- The Open Science landscape is changing rapidly
- Missing skills will be identified.
- New skills will be needed.



Pitstop

The UNIVIE Data Steward Certificate Program

- Part-time further education program
- **Goal:** Upskilling of existing staff and preparing new hires for the challenging role of data stewards
- **Academic degree:** Certificate of the University of Vienna
- **Language:** English
- **Duration and scope:** 2 semesters/15 ECTS credits
- **Target groups:** Researchers and research support staff
- **Costs:** 3200 €
- Next information event and admission period in April 2026



Eyes on the Horizon

What Are Working On Next?

- Goal till end of 2026: two coordinators + 13 data stewards
- Piloting a thematic data steward (Urban studies)
- Computational core facilities
- Research software engineers
- Fellowship of the Data 2026 (September 21-22)
- Launching an Austrian Data Steward Community



Send Us a Postcard



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