A web application for data management planning

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Introduction

There is a growing call for researchers to prepare data management plans (DMPs) for their research projects. DMPs describe how research data will be handled throughout all stages of the research lifecycle, including data collection, analysis, dissemination, and preservation.

Having a DMP can help predict and mitigate potential data management problems that may arise throughout the course of a research project. It also outlines how data will be handled after a research project has concluded.

It is becoming more common for funding agencies to ask for DMPs as part of grant applications, especially in the U.S. and the U.K. DMPs are also useful at an organizational level (e.g. to address institutional or departmental needs for research data management).

About the application:

To meet the needs of researchers in Alberta and Canada, the University of Alberta Libraries is launching a web-based application to help researchers with the data management planning process.

This tool has been adapted from an open source Ruby on Rails application developed by the Digital Curation Centre in the U.K (https://dmponline.dcc.ac.uk), and it will be hosted on local servers at the University of Alberta. The tool will be open to anyone to use.

The tool guides users through a customized set of questions based on institutional or funding requirements. Initially, the tool will include generic data management planning questions, but new question templates can be added or adapted as needed.

Using the DMP Tool

After creating an account and logging in, users will be able to create a new plan. They choose a funding agency and institution (if applicable), and then are presented with a customized question form based on their choices.

Questions are grouped into sections (e.g. Documentation and Metadata, Storage and Backup). Each question may have a suggested answer or additional guidance on how to answer it effectively. Users save their work after each question.

After completing a DMP, users can export it to a PDF or text file, so it can be attached to grant applications or included with other project documentation. There is also an option to share DMPs with collaborators, so they can view or edit it.

Conclusion:

This DMP tool will allow researchers to quickly and efficiently create DMPs that address specific funding and institutional requirements. These DMPs can be easily shared and edited by collaborators and teams. They can also be stored and adapted for use with subsequent projects.

The DMP tool also allows administrators to create customized template forms to help implement data management policies. This flexibility is important in an ever changing research landscape.

The U of A DMP Tool is set to launch in early summer 2014. If you are interested in providing feedback on our existing DMP template, or collaborating with us to develop customized templates, please contact us at data@ualberta.ca.