

LTER Data Access Policy
Request for Comments (RFC) - 2017 March 7

To: LTER Exec group, Site Information Managers

From: Environmental Data Initiative (EDI), LTER Network Communications Office (LTER NCO)

Background

The “LTER Data Access Policy,” adopted in 2005, has recently been criticized as being too restrictive and deemed unacceptable by the NSF Arctic Natural Sciences Program Director (Marc Stieglitz) and at least one journal (PLoS ONE). Hence, we feel it is time to revisit the document and update it as needed. The process for updating the policy is described therein, with any changes requiring approval by the EB (formerly by the CC). The current LTER Data Access Policy can be found at <https://lternet.edu/policies/data-access>, and is also referenced from the LTER Network Data Portal (<https://portal.lternet.edu>). The Access Policy text includes basic statements of data types and release, pertinent information to be collected from a user upon download, and terms and restrictions on further usage.

The EDI hosts a repository which supports the LTER Network Data Portal as well as its own data portal. As EDI formulates its own policies, we have examined the 2005 LTER policy and discussed issues with the LTER NCO. This RFC is a result of that process. After careful consideration of the current landscape, EDI and NCO both recommend release of LTER-sponsored data under the Creative Commons License CC0 (pronounced “C-C-zero”) or CC-BY (see below), except under special circumstances (human-subjects data, privacy concerns, etc.).

Our common metadata specification (Ecological Metadata Language, EML) provides an element for statement of Intellectual Rights, which is submitted with other metadata by most LTER sites. The submitted statement is visible in metadata web views (HTML), included with package downloads, and travels with the dataset during federation (e.g., in DataONE).

Recommendations

Ideally, we should strive for alignment with other NSF-sponsored scientific archiving solutions with regards to high level data access policy statements included with dataset metadata, and the behavior of the repository. To further this goal we have the following recommendations:

1. The section of the LTER Data Access Policy entitled “LTER Network Data Access Requirements” on this page <https://lternet.edu/policies/data-access> should be revised. The changes are necessary because (a) the PASTA data repository does not provide for collection of user information unless the user self identifies using their LTER credentials, and (b) the “Conditions of Use” are considered too restrictive. Note that the LTER data policy is referenced from the LTER Network Data Portal home page (<https://portal.lternet.edu>).
2. For datasets released to the general public, LTER Sites should formulate their own statements of “Intellectual Rights” for data, based on frequently used licenses developed and maintained by the Creative Commons (<https://creativecommons.org/>), and should include appropriate disclaimers. This text should be inserted into each metadata record

under 'Intellectual Rights.' EDI will contact LTER sites having a significant proportion of datasets without an Intellectual Rights statement.

EDI's planned implementation

If datasets are submitted without Intellectual Rights sections, the EDI and LTER repository will automatically insert a default data release policy statement (see below). Currently-held datasets without Intellectual Rights sections are NOT affected.

CC0 - No Rights Reserved (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>)

CC0 states that data are placed in the public domain, so that others may freely build upon, enhance and reuse the works for any purposes without restriction under copyright or database law. It is usual practice for major databases to make data freely available.

CC BY - Attribution (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

This license lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work (even commercially), as long as you are credited for the original creation. This is the most accommodating of licenses offered, and is recommended for maximum dissemination and use of licensed materials.

EDI default text for dataset Intellectual Rights, based on CC0:

This information is released to the public domain under the Creative Commons license CC0 1.0 "No Rights Reserved" (see: <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>). It is considered professional conduct to appropriately cite the dataset if used in publications. The consumer of these data ("Data User" herein) should realize that these data may be actively used by others for ongoing research and that coordination may be necessary to prevent duplicate publication. The Data User is urged to contact the authors of these data if any questions about methodology or results occur. Where appropriate, the Data User is encouraged to consider collaboration or co-authorship with the authors. The Data User should realize that misinterpretation of data may occur if used out of context of the original study. While substantial efforts are made to ensure the accuracy of data and associated documentation, complete accuracy of data sets cannot be guaranteed. All data are made available "as is." The Data User should be aware, however, that data are updated periodically and it is the responsibility of the Data User to check for new versions of the data. The data authors and the repository where these data were obtained shall not be liable for damages resulting from any use or misinterpretation of the data. Thank you.

For more information on CC0 and data release, see:

https://wiki.creativecommons.org/wiki/CC0_use_for_data

<http://sciencecommons.org/projects/publishing/open-access-data-protocol/>

RFC Process

Please send comments to: Corinna Gries (cgries@wisc.edu) or discuss on this list before April 15th. Collated comments and recommendations will be submitted to the LTER Executive Board before the Science Council meeting. For more information, contact EDI at info@environmentaldatainitiative.org, or LTER NCO at nco@lternet.edu.