Democratizing Data Management: Academia's Responsibility to Community Partners

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Community-based, not-for-profit organizations are critical partners in public interest research across disciplines. This presentation explores how community engaged researchers, data stewards, and librarians can embed data management training for community partners into existing workflows by leveraging data curation as a source of knowledge about training needs.

While it is well-known that the re-use value of data is greatly enhanced by management practices that begin as early as possible in the lifecycle of a project, many public service organizations have limited resources available for data management. The ad hoc processes they develop over time can create barriers to current and future use of their data. This disenfranchises the workforce who depend on timely and reliable recordkeeping for the delivery of community services and slows the progress of research partnerships. Rather than accepting this as an inherent limitation of community engaged scholarship, academia has a responsibility to make data management education more accessible to the organizations they partner with. Equitable and inclusive access to data management education benefits all stakeholders by promoting data stewardship practices that lessen the need for post-hoc curation.

Data Curation in the Public Interest is a project that addresses this gap in the modern workforce through a partnership between The Ohio State University (Ohio State) and the Erikson Institute Early Childhood Project (EC Project). The EC Project has operated for over 25 years under a government contract with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, a state-level social services agency in the United States. Every year, their team of 45 clinical and administrative staff collect developmental assessment data for thousands of young children who have experienced abuse or neglect, providing a unique source of historical information on a priority population for researchers.

A librarian-led team of data professionals at Ohio State are curating the EC Project data, delivering datasets that are well-structured, documented, and analysis-ready. Curating this data makes usable a valuable and at-risk data source, but it does not address the root challenges to data management that are likely to continue without additional training and resources. To better meet the ongoing needs of the EC Project, Ohio State is bringing together two sources of information necessary for customized data management education. First, the curation process itself has been re-envisioned as an opportunity to understand the data management practices that should be addressed based on the actual state of the data. Second, focus groups with EC Project staff have been used to understand the impact of administrative record-keeping on different job roles and how this leads to specific data management practices. These activities provide two different types of "ground truth" information: what is happening with the data and why. This work will culminate in a capacity-building workshop customized to the needs of the EC Project staff, focused on developing a bottom-up data culture in the organization and facilitating dialogue about the interaction between clinical expertise and recordkeeping.

Many research studies with community partners involve curation of administrative data sources as preparatory work before analysis. This presentation will provide recommendations for how this work can be repurposed to provide direct benefit to partner organizations. Attendees will learn about the successes and challenges of the EC Project case study that can be used as a foundation for customizing data management training with their own community partners.

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