

Building a Comprehensive Federated Network of RDM Helpdesks

Wednesday, October 1, 2025 11:00 AM (20 minutes)

RDM helpdesks are the primary point of contact for researchers with questions about research data management (RDM). In RDM helpdesks, data stewards provide support in various formats, ranging from a first-level-support hotline to long-term complex consultancy. Data stewards are working at a wide range of institutions: universities (including clusters of excellence and collaborative research centres), non-university research institutions, data competence centres, RDM federal state initiatives, and national and international infrastructure initiatives (National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI), European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)).

RDM helpdesks are often specialised non-specific disciplines, topics, data types and / or target groups. This results in a diverse landscape of RDM helpdesks across Germany, causing significant challenges to researchers and data stewards. Researchers struggle to find the right helpdesk for their needs, which leads to missed opportunities in research and funding as well as data that is less fit for re-use. Data stewards face huge workloads because they constantly have to acquire new knowledge beyond their key subjects on a wide range of topics and don't have resources to compensate for a higher workload during peak periods.

To meet these challenges, the RDM Helpdesk Network was initiated in 2023 in a two-day Community Workshop [1] by 50 representatives of RDM helpdesks. The vision of the RDM Helpdesk Network is to connect all RDM helpdesks to a comprehensive federated network. This will allow researchers to easily identify the helpdesk that is best suited to answer their questions, and enable RDM helpdesks to efficiently cooperate and dynamically allocate resources. To bring about this vision, the RDM helpdesk Network is working to

- connect RDM helpdesks so they can learn and benefit from each other's experience;
- create a central signpost service that refers researchers to the helpdesk best suited for their needs;
- connect the existing ticketing systems of RDM helpdesks to enable referring joined consultations;
- establish a ticketing service that can be used by helpdesks without an own ticketing infrastructure;
- create a comprehensive catalogue of RDM helpdesk, allowing users to search and find the helpdesk that best meets their requirements.

The RDM Helpdesk Network is a joint initiative of the German National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI), RDM Federal State Initiatives, and institutional RDM support helpdesks. It was initiated in November 2023 in a community workshop constituted as a working group of the NFDI Section Training & Education [2]. We published a charter [3] that outlines the motivation and objectives of our working group. This document serves as a guide for our collaborative efforts. Additional workshops online and at conferences (BiblioCon 2024; 1st Base4NFDI User Conference; e-Science-Tage 2025) were conducted, and we created a mailing list [4] that has already attracted 175 subscribers. In order to implement the strategy for a comprehensive federated Helpdesk Network in a concrete and sustainable manner, we submitted the proposal Support4RDM to the NFDI basic service initiative Base4NFDI [5] in April 2025.

In our talk, we will present the RDM Helpdesk Network, give an overview of its activities and plans, and invite participants to join the working group. We are particularly looking forward to a dynamic and engaging dialogue with the data stewardship community, and we strongly encourage data stewards to actively contribute to our working group's discussions and activities.

[1] https://www.forschungsdaten.org/index.php/2023-11-20_Workshop_Vernetzung_der_FDM-Helpdesks

[2] <https://www.nfdi.de/section-edutrain>

[3] <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14035822>

[4] <https://www.listserv.dfn.de/sympa/info/fdm-helpdesks>

[5] <https://base4nfdi.de/>

Abstract

Talk

Authors: WILJES, Cord (Nationale Forschungsdateninfrastruktur (NFDI) e.V.); ENGEL, Judith (Universität Bremen); WEIMER, Lukas (Universität Göttingen); SCHMIDT, Marcus (ZALF e.V.); LEMAIRE, Marina (Universität

Trier); STELLMACHER, Martha (SLUB Dresden); MÜLLER-PFEFFERKORN, Ralph (TU Dresden)

Presenters: WILJES, Cord (Nationale Forschungsdateninfrastruktur (NFDI) e.V.); ENGEL, Judith (Universität Bremen); WEIMER, Lukas (Universität Göttingen); SCHMIDT, Marcus (ZALF e.V.); LEMAIRE, Marina (Universität Trier); STELLMACHER, Martha (SLUB Dresden); MÜLLER-PFEFFERKORN, Ralph (TU Dresden)

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