

Research Data and Research Materials Management, Sharing, and Retention Policy FAQs and Case Studies

Can you elaborate on the definition of research data?

According to the Policy, research data are “the recorded factual information associated with the research, including, but not limited to, all records necessary for the reconstruction and evaluation of the results of research, regardless of the form or medium on which the material is recorded (such as lab notebooks, photos, digital images, data files, data processing or computer programs [software], statistical records, etc.).”

In other words, research data are the concrete data/information (not ideas, hypotheses, nor physical lab samples) another researcher would need to reproduce or evaluate your results. The policy definition was adapted from the Office of Management and Budget.

Why does Brown own my research data and research materials?

As the recipient of research funds awarded to the University (not to an individual), the institution is the owner of research data and research materials that originate from sponsored research. In addition, the institution must ensure that its community complies with laws, regulations, and institutional policy, including, for example, assessing allegations of research misconduct. Ownership concerns the rights and title to the research data and research materials, not physical possession nor direct responsibility.

Can a department have a policy about data ownership that overrides this policy?

No, Brown is the owner of all research data and research materials for projects conducted at the University, under the auspices of the University, or with University resources (monetary or otherwise). Exceptions are only made when Brown ownership is precluded by the specific terms of sponsorship or other agreement.

Who is responsible for the storage of research data?

The Principal Investigator is responsible for developing and overseeing a research data storage plan that is in accordance with the appropriate [OIT Data Risk Classification level](#).

Who should I contact if I have questions about research data or research material sharing between Brown and an external entity?

In some instances, sharing research data external to Brown may require a Data Use Agreement. Similarly, sharing research materials outside of Brown may require a Material Transfer

Agreement. For Data Use Agreement or Material Transfer Agreement assistance, email ResearchContracts@brown.edu.

In all cases, if research data are being shared under an IRB or HRPP-approved human subjects research protocol, the Principal Investigator should adhere to the data sharing procedures outlined in the approved protocol and contact the Brown HRPP with any questions at IRB@brown.edu.

Can I bring my laboratory notebook with me when I leave Brown?

There are two forms of laboratory notebooks – physical lab notebooks and electronic lab notebooks (ELNs).

Original physical lab notebooks must remain at Brown when researchers depart the University. Researchers may, with permissions detailed in the policy, take **copies** of physical lab notebooks when they leave. The Library can assist with making high-quality copies for departing researchers.

For ELNs, researchers must transfer ownership of the ELN to their Principal Investigator before leaving Brown. Researchers are allowed to make a digital or physical copy of the ELN before departing.

Students and postdocs need to get permission from their PIs to make copies of research data. What if the PI refuses?

If such an instance arises, please contact ResearchData@brown.edu.

Where do research data, including lab notebooks, go when a lab closes down because a PI leaves or retires?

Research data, including physical laboratory notebooks and materials, must continue to be maintained by the department if they are within the retention period set forth in the policy.

If the data/materials are beyond the required retention period(s), the PI should proactively reach out to the University Records Manager/ Archivist in advance of the PI's departure. The Archivist will work with PIs to determine the most appropriate disposal solutions for data that have met and/or exceed the periods outlined in the policy, assess the need and determine any storage solutions for data that should be retained beyond the minimum established retention periods, and appraise and select data and materials with enduring historical value for the University and society.

I have a Data Use Agreement that requires I destroy the data I received before the retention period required by my sponsor. What do I do?

Data collected from an external party under a Data Use Agreement is considered Source Data (see the policy for a full definition). Source Data must be destroyed in accordance to the terms of the Data Use Agreement; this is permissible under the approved policy.

I am writing a textbook. Does this policy mean Brown owns the copyright to my book?

No, this policy only applies to research data and research materials.

I still have a question. Who should I contact?

You can contact the Research Data Team at ResearchData@brown.edu.