Data Partnerships

An Introduction
Intended audience

- Any person or organization who wants to learn about data partnerships.
- Anyone who wants to know what circumstances make a data partnership worthwhile.
- Project owners who want to learn how to create data partnerships.

Limit of liability

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Introduction

Why do data partnerships matter?

More and more organizations face complex issues and problems that they need to solve using data. In such situations, organizations rely on data that is in their possession (internal data) or readily available (open data). However, these data sources may be insufficient. For example, data may reflect only one aspect of the problem or its quality may be unsatisfactory.

That’s why organizations sometimes need to access data that is neither internal nor open. This is restricted data which may, for example, be held by other organizations or entities (see Open Data Institute data spectrum). So it’s useful to set up data partnerships with these entities (citizens, public institutions, other organizations) in order to share data, control access, and strictly limit use of that data to resolution of the initial problem.

In other words, data partnerships translate into a well-known concept in the intangible world of social economics: pooling (FR).

The scale of data partnerships depends highly on objectives being pursued. For example, there’s a big difference between a working relationship that two organizations would like to deepen and a structuring project that would transform transportation throughout a city.

But in all cases, proponents must assess and overcome the same challenges: “privacy, informed consent, responsible and ethical use, privatization, and access of data, biased or discriminatory algorithmic decision-making, and citizen participation in decision-making.”

A responsible and ethical partnership requires thoughtful and consistent decision-making by everyone involved to meet these challenges. And that’s the main theme of data governance, a theme that runs through all data partnerships and social utility trust tools that Open North and TIESS provide for you.

Happy reading!

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Part 1

Data partnerships: 8 questions

1. **What is data?**
   
   Data are representations of reality that can take many forms: text, numbers, images, sound, and video.

   Data exists when the following two elements are present:

   - A reality to be observed (e.g., people visiting a museum);
   - A form that represents this reality (e.g., a number, list of names).

   Raw data only becomes meaningful through **analysis and decision-making work that begins as soon as it is collected** (what is collected, how, how often, etc.). This data must be sorted, filtered, and cross-referenced according to the type of information the organization wants to extract from it.

2. **What is a data partnership?**

   A data partnership is any **collaborative initiative between two or more individuals or organizations that requires the sharing and use of data** for a common goal.

   Data partnerships are used to address real-world problems that require a collaborative approach. They can result in data pooling or sharing in order to create new knowledge and a better understanding of various problems or situations. Data governance in a partnership meets a number of criteria, such as being collaborative.
What is data governance?
Data governance encompasses all factors that influence data-related decisions. Some of these decisions emerge while planning a data partnership, so it’s important to think very early about who makes decisions, how, and towards what end.

- See Digital Data Partnerships: Building the Foundations for Collaborative Data Governance in the Public Interest (Open North).

What is the difference between data sharing and data pooling?
Data sharing refers to an exchange of data between actors for a particular purpose.

Data pooling refers to the pooling of several data sources in order to cross-reference data and extract useful, relevant information based on the partnership objective. It is also possible to pool the means (financial, technical, and human resources) and methods necessary to analyze these combined data.

Are there any data partnerships in Québec?
Data partnerships have been created in a wide variety of settings and fields.

Culturepedia (FR), established by the nonprofit Culture pour tous and five of its partners, measures the socioeconomic impact of arts and culture on the overall health of communities. How? By cross-referencing and analyzing a wide range of data in unprecedented ways. This partnership was the first-ever data social utility trust in Québec. In February 2023, five trustees were appointed, and the creation of Culturepedia was approved.

PULSAR, an interdisciplinary partnership in the healthcare field, cross-references data from several research projects in order to provide a comprehensive longitudinal picture of the determinants of physical, mental, and social well-being. PULSAR serves as a collaborative space for scientific projects that aim to contribute to sustainable health and better address societal health and wellness issues.

Finally, the nonprofit rental register Vivre en Ville asks Québec tenants to enter data on their rent in order to create an overall picture of the rental market.

Note: Organizations may need to combine multiple databases on their own.
### Part 1  
Data partnerships: 8 questions

**6 How are data partnerships actually created?**

There are many different ways to implement a data partnership, each of which can be tailored to the partnership’s objective and context. While there is no one-size-fits-all model, the most frequently mentioned ones are:

- **A** a trusted intermediary who serves as a liaison between persons (natural and legal) who provide data and those who wish to access it
- **B** a shared data pool that enables the combination of different data sources so they can be analyzed as one source
- **C** one-off contractual agreements between several organizations

These approaches can take various forms depending on the specific goal and context of your partnership.

**7 Can I share data without setting up a partnership?**

Yes! Unless you have other people’s personal information, you can share data using a Creative Commons licence. These licences enable you to set permissions and restrictions for those who use the databank. This is known as open data.

For example, Wikipedia data is made available under the [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) licence. This means that users can:

- **share** – copy, distribute, and communicate materials by any means and in any format
- **adapt** – remix, transform, and create source material for any use, including commercial

**provided that they:**

- **acknowledge** – credit the work’s author and include a link to the licence
- **share under the same conditions** – subsequent sharing of the work, even if modified, must use the same licence.

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*For more information, visit the [Creative Commons website](https://creativecommons.org/).*

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- See [Découvrir 4 modèles d’affaires possibles pour mieux circonscrire son choix](https://www.opennorth.ca/web/dossiers/2018/12/07/découvrir-4-modèles-daffaires-possibles-pour-mieux-circonscrire-son-choix/) (FR - Discover 4 business models to narrow down your choice)
- See [Montréal in Common: Data Governance Workstream](https://www.opennorth.ca/web/dossiers/2019/10/10/montreal-in-common-data-governance-workstream/) (Open North)
- See [Gouvernance des données: la fiducie d’utilité sociale, un outil à fort potentiel](https://www.tiess.ca/en/processes/data-governance/) (FR - Data governance: the potential of social utility trusts) (TIESS)
Are there other ways to share data in the public interest?

Another avenue is data altruism, a term introduced by the European Union that we hear more and more often. It refers to the sharing of a natural or legal person’s data with an independent nonprofit organization on a free and voluntary basis, without quid pro quo and exclusively for the purpose of serving a cause in the public interest. The cause can be related to health, action against climate change, improving mobility, or any area of scientific research.


Part 2

Create a data partnership in 7 steps (and several iterations)

1. Identify the problem or opportunity
2. Understand the data and its context
3. Bring stakeholders together to create a common vision
4. Test and learn together
5. Record decisions
6. Stay the course or change course?
7. Develop and validate the data partnership document

Research
Design

Iterative process
Iterative process

1. Identify the problem or opportunity
2. Understand the data and its context
3. Create an implementation plan
4. Test and tweak the implementation plan
5. Create an implementation plan
6. Test and tweak the implementation plan
7. Manage day-to-day operations and assess the partnership

Do another iteration or roll out the component as is?

Develop a partnership component

Record decisions

Test and learn together

Develop the document
### Create a data partnership in 7 steps (and several iterations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Things to review</th>
<th>What’s involved?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify the problem or opportunity</td>
<td>Purpose, Stakeholders</td>
<td>This step helps to identify the problem to solve or the opportunity to seize. You start with the big questions, like why pool our data? Do our goals align or complement one another? Etc. It’s essential to first understand the needs of potential stakeholders in depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understand the data and its context</td>
<td>Data characteristics, Technology infrastructure, Legal framework, Stakeholders, Skills and experience</td>
<td>This involves understanding the data (nature, source, format, quality, limitations, etc.) that could help you solve a problem or seize an opportunity. You also need to identify stakeholders at this stage who could join the partnership or be involved in the initiative. This must be done early in the process, since the success of a partnership depends primarily on the ability to bring the right stakeholders together. For example, if the data describes the movements of certain populations (sensitive personal data), these populations will be the first to experience risk if the partnership is mismanaged. It’s best to include the parties in project governance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steps</td>
<td>Things to review</td>
<td>What’s involved?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>This step involves building a shared vision of what the data partnership could be, based on stakeholder thoughts and ideas as well as the results of steps 1 and 2. This vision includes common objectives, the scope of data to be pooled or shared, etc. It also entails developing a shared understanding of how shared data can help partners solve a problem or seize an opportunity.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose</td>
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<td>Benefits</td>
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<td>Transparency</td>
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<td>Ethical principles</td>
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<td>Scale</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>This step enables stakeholders to turn their shared vision into concrete ideas. An initial ideation phase results in a preliminary document that outlines what the partnership (prototype) might look like. The document is then submitted to stakeholders. You may need several iterations before you have a document that meets the expectations and needs identified in Step 1. Iterations are necessary when creating a formal document that frames a partnership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data quality</td>
<td>Tip</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>For archiving and learning purposes (and in the interest of transparency), you should track changes made to each version and the reasons for said changes. Feel free to take small steps and test the usefulness of some data on sub-issues. You can run these tests in the next step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision-making processes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Business model</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ethical principles</td>
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<td>Transparency</td>
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<td>Risk management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Data use cases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steps</td>
<td>Things to review</td>
<td>What’s involved?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Create an implementation plan</td>
<td>Technology infrastructure, Stakeholders, Skills and experience, Data quality, Access conditions, Decision-making processes, Ethical principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Test and tweak the implementation plan</td>
<td>Transparency, Risk management, Benefits, Day-to-day operations, Assessment strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Manage day-to-day operations and assess the partnership</td>
<td>Things to review are similar to those in the previous step. Adapt them based on the partnership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3

Various legal arrangements or vehicles for creating a data partnership

Data partnerships take many forms, including legal ones. Let’s zoom in on four of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social utility trust</th>
<th>Nonprofit organization</th>
<th>Cooperative</th>
<th>Contractual agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a social utility trust (SUT), natural persons hold and administer assets in the public interest.</td>
<td>A nonprofit is a group of people who pursue ethical or altruistic goals and who have no intention of making money to share among its members.</td>
<td>A cooperative is a group of people who come together to operate a business based on rules of cooperative action, including collective and democratic control.</td>
<td>A contractual agreement is a contract between two or more partners that sets out the parameters of their partnership. This agreement contains terms and conditions, as well as each partner’s rights and obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social utility trust</td>
<td>Nonprofit organization</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Contractual agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who owns the assets (data)?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Defined by contract</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administers other people’s property</strong></td>
<td><strong>Owns the assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>Owns the assets</strong></td>
<td>The contractual agreement must stipulate who owns data and intellectual property. There are no common rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one owns the assets in the trust. Trustees <strong>administer</strong> assets in the trust in the public interest. They must hew to the purpose assigned to the assets.</td>
<td>A nonprofit organization <strong>owns</strong> its assets.</td>
<td>The cooperative <strong>owns</strong> its assets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>A nonprofit’s goals are those of the legal person that operates it. These may be of a social, educational, religious, philanthropic, sporting, or other nature and must not be to procure profit or any economic benefit for its members.</td>
<td>A cooperative is about meeting the common economic, social, or cultural needs of its members who join together to run a business for that purpose.</td>
<td>Parties to the contract determine the partnership’s goals, which may be in any order.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part 3
Various legal arrangements or vehicles for creating a data partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key takeaways</th>
<th>Social utility trust</th>
<th>Nonprofit organization</th>
<th>Cooperative</th>
<th>Contractual agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Is there a new legal entity?</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUTs are not legal persons.</td>
<td>Nonprofits are legal persons, which are distinct from their members.</td>
<td>Cooperatives are legal persons, which are distinct from their members.</td>
<td>Each party to the contract remains a stand-alone entity. Each party has rights and obligations under the contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legally, trustees are the ones who act, in their capacity as trustees.</td>
<td>They can act legally (rent, sell, contract, borrow) through their board of directors, which legally represents them.</td>
<td>They can act legally (rent, sell, contract, borrow) through their board of directors, which legally represents them.</td>
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<td>Social utility trust</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Legal framework for governance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Legal framework for governance</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal information laws, if applicable.</td>
<td>The Companies Act.</td>
<td>The Cooperatives Act.</td>
<td>Personal information laws, if applicable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The trust deed that created the social utility trust.</td>
<td>Personal information laws, if applicable.</td>
<td>Personal information laws, if applicable.</td>
<td>The contract.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal policies and regulations.</td>
<td>General regulations.</td>
<td>General regulations.</td>
<td>Internal policies and regulations.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Ready to continue your research?

A selection of resources is available to help you better understand certain concepts in this tool, to help you think through the matter, and to provide concrete suggestions that meet your needs.

**Research**  **Design**  **Implement**

Documents to read (as applicable) during a project’s ideation stage

1. Data Partnerships: An Introduction
2. Business Models for Data Partnerships
3. The Social Utility Trust: A Path to Data Partnerships
5. Trustees: the Heart of Social Utility Trusts

**Research**  **Design**  **Implement**

Useful tools to help you create a [data social utility trust](#) (FR) or a [social utility trust](#) (FR)

1. Brainstorming Tool: 7 Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Create a Data Social Utility Trust
2. Decision Support Tool: Questions and Exercises to Help You Design Your Data Social Utility Trust Deed Together
3. Trust Deed Template: Creating a Social Utility Trust for Sharing and Pooling Data
4. Brainstorming Tool: 9 Questions to Ask Before Creating a Social Utility Trust

**Research**  **Design**  **Implement**

These documents will all still be useful after the social utility trust (SUT) has been created. After all, the SUT is a flexible and evolving tool. You may need to review its business model, certain ways of doing things, or the level of community involvement, when possible.
Acknowledgements

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About

Open North
Open North, a nonprofit founded in 2011, is dedicated to advancing the common good. We work alongside governments, civic organizations and social purpose enterprises to create and implement practical solutions through transformative digital strategies and data governance frameworks.

TIESS
Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (TIESS) is a social innovation liaison and transfer body recognized by Ministère de l’Économie, de l’Innovation et de l’Énergie (MEIE). It unites numerous stakeholders in the social and solidarity economy and territorial development, as well as research centres, universities, and colleges. TIESS contributes to territorial development by equipping social and solidarity economy organizations so that they can transform their practices and face social challenges in innovative ways. Discover our other resources: tiess.ca