

Data Sharing Champion: How the Data Jamboree Turned Datasets into Discovery Engines

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**Beyond Archival: How the Data Jamboree Turned
Datasets into Discovery Engines**



Introduction: *The following interview captures the insights of Dr. Emily Boja, Chief of Branch B of the Office of Data Sharing (ODS), lead organizer of the recent "[ODS Data Jamboree 2025](#)" – an event demonstrating the power of data sharing, use and reuse, and interdisciplinary collaboration.*

Emily Boja, Branch Chief, NCI ODS

Question 1: The Catalyst

Interviewer: *Scientific discovery is often viewed as a marathon, yet the Data Jamboree operated as a sprint. What motivated you to condense this process into a 1.5-day event, and what does this format reveal about the current state of data sharing?*

Emily: Secondary use and analysis of existing data shortened the lead times scientific discovery. The 1.5-day jamboree aimed to serve as a catalyst of that to advance research and ensure rigor and reproducibility. By bringing together 23 multidisciplinary teams that otherwise may not have found each other, it facilitated problem-solving in a small group setting from ongoing research or a new project. The motivation was simple: data from pediatric and Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) cancer, a rare disease, is too valuable to stay dormant. The "sprint" proved that when you remove the barrier of data access and align diverse expertise—clinicians, data scientists, biologists, and repository resources, collaboration becomes an accelerator. It demonstrated that the barrier isn't usually the data or tools themselves, but the silos we have inadvertently built around it.

Question 2: The Collaborative Dynamic

Interviewer: *You mentioned the multidisciplinary nature of the teams. In your observation, how did the intersection of these distinct fields—computational biology, oncology, and data science, repository—drive the "novel biological insights" you described?*

Emily: It was about the speed of translation. Usually, a clinician or translational scientist has an idea or question in mind, a data scientist might find a signal, and weeks later, a data scientist locates datasets to be analyzed, or new data need to be collected to answer the question; when data is available, a biologist-data scientist team interprets it. At the Jamboree, this happened in real time. We saw teams where an idea turned into dataset queries to build cohorts, data access request submissions, or a computational expert figured out a way to visualize a pattern in the genomic data, or a pediatric oncologist sitting next to them would immediately contextualize it within a clinical framework. That immediate feedback loop allowed these teams to chase viable targets instantly. The "magic" wasn't just in the data (the foundation); it was in the free, rapid exchange of language across these disciplines.

Question 3: The Value of Reuse

Interviewer: *There is often a push for generating new data, sometimes at the expense of analyzing what we already have. How did the outcomes of this event validate the importance of data reuse?*

Emily: The accomplishments of these teams serve as proof-of-concept for the "reuse" economy in science. In merely 36 hours, participants derived hypotheses and insights that were entirely new, yet the primary data were not. It highlights the importance of leveraging what we already have and maximize the return of investment: we can drive discovery without the high cost and time burden of constantly generating new data, and by building trust in using other researcher-generated data when assessed to be high-quality. The Jamboree demonstrated that our existing repositories are not just glacial archives; they are active engines for discovery when we build the right ecosystem and consistently engage the community around it.

Question 4: Sustaining the Momentum

Interviewer: *Looking ahead to the [webinar series](#) that was kicked off in January 2026, how will ODS ensure that the energy from the Jamboree translates into long-term impact for the research community?*

Emily: The Jamboree was the spark; the webinar series is adding the fuel. Starting in January, we aren't just reporting back—we are showcasing the roadmap of how these projects evolved from a prototype to rigorous scientific inquiry. We want the community to see the full life cycle of a "reuse or secondary analysis" project. By highlighting these specific success stories, we hope to normalize this mode of research, encouraging more scientists to view public datasets as a primary playground for innovation rather than a secondary resource.

Question 5: The Strategic Vision

Interviewer: *Looking forward in 2026, the potential to scale this model seems immense. How do you envision the next iteration of the Data Jamboree evolving? Specifically, are there any plans to expand collaborations with key NCI initiatives—such as the Cancer Research Data Commons (CRDC) or HTAN—to turn these "sprints" into a perpetual pipeline for high-impact discovery?*

Emily: Absolutely. The 2025 jamboree was a proof-of-concept; 2026 is about scalability and integration. My vision is to move beyond a standalone event. Imagine a Jamboree where we aren't just downloading static datasets but actively computing on the cloud within the NCI environment, for example, using real-time cancer research data streams provided by board stakeholders! ODS has collaborated with NCI programs (e.g., HTAN, ITCR) to launch another event in 2026. Mark your calendar for November 16-18: NCI Data Jamboree invites you to bring a novel hypothesis, apply a new computational tool, or simply a drive to solve the hardest problems in cancer, your expertise and curiosity is what we are after!

We'd love to hear from you! Contact the ODS team at: nciofficeofdatasharing@mail.nih.gov

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