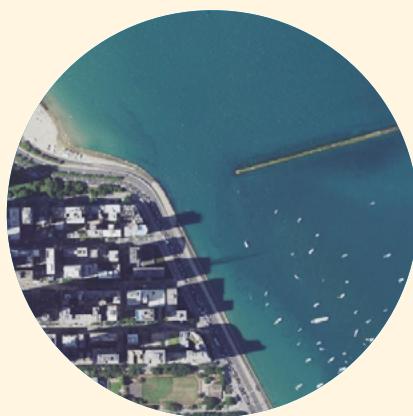


# OUR DATA, OUR RULES



A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL DATA CO-OWNERSHIP

MAXIMIZING  
BENEFIT AND  
STRENGTHENING  
DATA PROTECTION  
IN COLLABORATIVE  
SPACES



# INTRODUCTION

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With the growing availability of environmental data, there has also been an increase in collaboration between organizations to efficiently collect, use, and manage the data to inform their programs. These collaborations typically involve joint ownership over the data collected by the partnering organizations. [Data co-ownership](#) refers to multiple organizations sharing the responsibility of managing a set of data, meaning ownership is divided between the organizations or individuals involved. To set the expectations and guidelines on the management and use of the data, these organizations can create a data co-ownership agreement. This how-to guide aims to help you and your partnering organizations understand how to navigate data co-ownership and begin drafting a [data co-ownership agreement](#) to outline the goals and expectations for your data.

## HERE ARE THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW OF CREATING AND USING DATA CO-OWNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

**What?** Data co-ownership agreements are typically needed for projects where more than one organization is contributing to the collection, analysis, and usage of a dataset. This type of collaboration requires all organizations involved to share the responsibility of managing the data and outlining the procedures needed to allow for accuracy, security, and ethical use of the data. Data co-ownership agreements typically encompass the entire data lifecycle, including the technical, legal, and relational aspects. Some examples of data co-ownership include:

- [Shorebird Science and Conservation Collective](#)  
[↗](#) is a partnership of scientists and practitioners working to use existing and contributed data sources to help shorebird conservation efforts. The Collective only uses the contributed data as described in the data sharing agreement set by the data contributor and the Collective.
- The [Florida Commercial Watermen's Conservation](#) [↗](#) collects water quality data from commercial fishermen to help inform efforts to address water quality issues and red tide events in collaboration with NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

### NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this zine, we will use the word “organization,” but this simply refers to the data managers or stewards of particular data sets or a database. This could be a formal organization like a non-profit, a specific project team, community-based group, or collective of data users.

**Why?** Developing a data co-ownership agreement can support shared decision-making and distribution of power when there are multiple owners of a piece of data or dataset. This is essential to empowering organizations and local communities to participate in environmental monitoring and evaluation because it foregrounds effective strategy and decision making with an eye towards climate and environmental action. Data co-ownership ensures that no single party holds complete control over the data, promoting a more participatory way to manage data since all parties involved have a direct say in how the data is collected, used, analyzed, and shared.

**How?** Data co-ownership is a collaborative process that requires all parties involved to set expectations for how their data will be managed, accessed, and shared. To facilitate such conversations, it is important to lay out the goals of the collaboration and define the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved to ensure joint decision making is clear at all points of the data lifecycle. To maintain accountability throughout the process, there needs to be clear communication between all those involved and transparency around the expectations set forth. In this how-to guide, we will outline how to facilitate conversations between your organization and the collaborating organization(s).

# FACILITATING A WORKSHOP TO DISCUSS DATA CO-OWNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

## GOAL OF THE WORKSHOP

The goal of this workshop is to establish the expectations of a data collaboration in order to build a data co-ownership agreement that helps guide the use, management, and sharing of data.

## TO START, YOU'LL NEED:

**Your team:** At a baseline, you'll want your project team as well as your collaborative partner(s) in the conversation. This should include anyone that uses the data in any capacity. Different users will be able to provide varied perspectives and can speak to data at different points in its lifecycle, and different use cases. You could also involve critical community members.

### Materials:

- For an in-person setting, you'll need: Markers, flipcharts, sticky notes
- For a virtual setting, you'll need: A collaborative note-taking space (e.g., Etherpad or Riseup Pad, Google Docs, Miro, Mural)

## PREPARATION

20 MINUTES

### Before the workshop...

Prepare separate notes spaces (i.e., flip chart pages or digital sections) with headers that address what kinds of agreements you'd like to make with partnering organizations about co-ownership of the data:

- How can they access the data?
- For how long can they access the data?
- What are the conditions for deletion of data?

- What are the allowed usages of the data?
- What needs to happen when the data is shared with a new party?

Depending on the group size, determine if you'd prefer to have this discussion as a whole group, or split up into breakout groups with report-outs. If your team is larger than 12 people, we advise that you split into smaller groups to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

## WORKSHOP FLOW

2 HOURS

*Note: This will be written as if this workshop is being conducted in-person. Substitute virtual tools for in-person tools as needed.*

### Provide context for the workshop.

Use the “why” of this how-to guide to set the stage for why creating a data co-ownership agreement will benefit your and your collaborating organization’s goals for the data. The “why” should examine why the data co-ownership agreement is being drafted at this time: Is this a new partnership? Is it being created as a response to a previous incident? Are there new data collection efforts being started?

**Internally:** Discussions on the agreements for data co-ownership will align the team on the technical workflows of the data process and provide regulations for what can be done with the data. It will help facilitate relationship building between the partnering organizations to ensure expectations are being met, as documented in the agreement.

**Externally:** A data co-ownership agreement works as a social contract to set the terms of engagement between the partnering organizations and the shared data. It helps establish accountability and provides guidance on how to navigate the data collaboration for better relationship building.

## **Begin the conversation by establishing the purpose and goals of the agreement.**

Discuss and outline the purpose of the data co-ownership agreement with all parties involved to ensure everyone is on the same page.

You can offer to give them 1-2 minutes to jot down on sticky notes their expectations and the outcomes they would like to see from the agreement, or, if participants have immediate input, ask them to speak their thoughts aloud.

### **Facilitation tips:**

Ask the group:

- What are your expectations for this conversation and agreement building?
- What concerns do you hope to address during this conversation?
- What are the agreements you'd like to make with the partnering organization(s) as co-owners of their data?

Allow for “awkward” silence and gaps in the conversation—depending on the group, there may be differing views, expectations, and concerns for what the data co-ownership agreement should accomplish.

During the discussion, [take notes on stickies](#) on the flipchart; at the natural end of the discussion, ask participants to verbalize any notes on stickies and place them on the flipchart. This will later be used to draft an agreement for all parties to review and revise before finalizing and signing off on a final agreement. Legal counsel should be consulted during the drafting process, if possible.

## **Dive deeper into the expectations of managing and sharing the data.**

Depending on how in-depth the first discussion went, participants might have started to ask

and answer new questions. To continue the conversation have them reflect on the following questions:

- How can the collaborating organization access the data?
- For how long can they access the data?
- What are the conditions for deleting data?
- What are the allowed usages of the data?
- What needs to happen if the data needs to be shared with a new party?

You can offer to give participants 1-2 minutes to jot down values on sticky notes, or, if participants have immediate input, ask them to speak their thoughts aloud.

### **Facilitation tips:**

Allow for supplemental questions as they come up. This will encourage participants to continue thinking about what will be needed to successfully co-own data.

During the discussion, [take notes on stickies](#) on the flipchart, and at the natural end of the discussion, ask participants to verbalize any notes on stickies and place them on the flipchart.

## **Reflect and establish next steps.**

To wrap up the discussion, ask participants to reflect on the common values and expectations for the collaboration to identify the ones that most resonate with the team's needs.

Ask participants to reflect on these questions:

- What are you looking forward to continuing working on in this collaboration?
- Are there any questions you still have about the collaboration?

Allow for time to think about the common themes and expectations of the collaboration. Have

participants verbally share their thoughts. This will give you a good starting point for drafting an outline for the agreement.

Thank the participants and give appropriate next steps for creating and finalizing the data co-ownership agreement (e.g., review opportunities, timeline, or implementation).



# USING A DATA CO-OWNERSHIP AGREEMENT

To the right is a template for a Data Co-Ownership Agreement, which can be adapted to the needs of your project. After conducting a workshop similar to the one outlined in this zine, you can work with your partnering organizations (and legal counsel) to create an agreement that reflects the goals and expectations discussed in the workshop.

*Note that this is not a template for a legal document, but designed to be used more like a memorandum of understanding.*

## Example cases for a data co-ownership agreement:

- An organization collects property-level data; the individual participants who contributed their information to that dataset co-own their respective pieces of data.
- A research organization co-owns data submitted by citizen scientists who collect environmental data (e.g., air pollution levels, water quality data, etc.) and submit their findings to a designated platform created by the research organization.



[SCAN TO VIEW ON  
GOOGLE DOCS](#)

## Data Co-Ownership Document

→ Start with a statement that declares who owns the data, and if that is dependent on who collects it.

Example: Data collected by Self-Help Enterprises remains the property of Self-Help Enterprises and the program participant.

→ The following categories can be incorporated into the agreement based on what the data owner's prioritize in their partnership.

### How can I access data collected?

Example: Participants will have access to their data through a portal, linked here. Participants can see data linked to their property but no other data from other properties. You can access the data for as long as we are using the data service, or for as long as the grant period lasts.

### What are the ways it will be used?

Example: This is what we intend to do with the data: [list specific activities]. The data will not and can not be used to monitor individual properties or survey well levels. We will not monetize or sell your data under any circumstances.

### What happens if the data needs to be shared with a new party?

Example: In the future, we may pursue new projects that will require sharing with new partners. We pursue partnerships that support our mission and goals, which you can read more about here. We will always notify you of potential changes and ask for consent, and if you choose not to share with this new partner, we will omit your data. If you do not respond to the consent request, after 60 days, we will continue with the proposed sharing with new parties.

### What information has to be shared?

Example: We are required to share certain information with the California State Water Resources Control Board. We are required to share if a probe has been installed at a property and aggregate information about water levels at a regional scale.

### What are the conditions of deletion?

Example: If the participant would like to discontinue working with Self-Help Enterprises well monitoring program in the future, they may notify Self-Help Enterprises in writing (by email or letter) or by calling the office [add phone number here] to revoke any permissions previously granted. Self-Help Enterprises will uninstall the probe and there will be no further tracking. Participants' personal identifiable information (e.g. contact information) will be retained due to grant reporting needs.

→ Include space for both data co-owners to sign and date.



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## FURTHER RESOURCES

To learn more about other data co-ownership initiatives see [Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network \(CoCoRaHS\)](#), a project in which communities monitor precipitation data in their local communities. All members have access to the collective data submitted for analysis of weather patterns.

To read about the history, application, and challenges of collaborative data models, read [Collective Data Ownership](#) from the Sustainability Directory.

## IMAGE KEY

SATELLITE IMAGES VIA [CALTPOPO.COM](#)

### FRONT COVER

**Chicago, Illinois** — The Center for Neighborhood Technology worked with community members to collect photographic data of local stormwater flooding to support the creation of a mapping tool called the [Urban Flooding Baseline Tool](#).

### PAGE 2

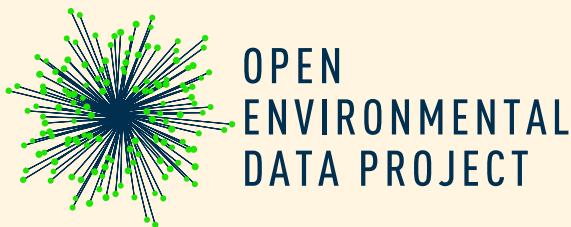
**Tonawanda, New York** — [Community scientists partnered with university researchers](#) to hold the Tonawanda Coke Plant accountable for decades-long industrial pollution in the air and soil by collecting quantitative and qualitative information.

### PAGE 11

**New Orleans, Louisiana** — Coastal communities [flew balloons](#) with cameras to photograph the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

### PAGE 12

**Utqiāġvik, Alaska** — Community members worked with academic partners to [research the impacts](#) of existing community infrastructure on surrounding environments and the impacts of the changing environment on the design and future planning of community buildings.



If you are interested in learning more about  
Open Environmental Data Project, please scan the codes below  
or email us at [info@openenvironmentaldata.org](mailto:info@openenvironmentaldata.org).



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