

IASSIST REGIONAL REPORT FOR CANADA, 2023-2024

Prepared by Jane Fry (Canadian Regional Secretary)

May 2024

Membership:

As of May 2, 2024, there are 89 active Canadian IASSIST members. This represents almost a 25% increase over the last year, a possible reflection of holding the IASSIST conference in Canada this year.

Overview:

The excitement and challenge of ‘doing data’ continues with the fast pace of constant changes and updates in the field. While some researchers are on the cutting edge, there are many researchers that still want and require the traditional methods of ‘doing data’. AI has become more prominent, requiring more knowledge exchange on our part to remain current. And research data management continues to explode, with more detail being needed for all of the various parts of the data life cycle. An interesting result of the pandemic is the number of researchers that prefer to consult with us virtually, when possible. This allows us to stretch our limited resources.

There were many new developments with the various collaborators in the Canadian data world. As well, more of us participated in ‘Love Data Week’, helping to spread the data word. The bottom line is that it continues to be an exciting time to be a data professional!

Detailed Information:

Data Liberation Initiative (DLI):

The [Data Liberation Initiative](#) (DLI) is a membership-based partnership between Canadian postsecondary institutions and Statistics Canada (STC). Various secondary data providers repackage STC data in their own research data repositories, including Abacus, Odesi and CHASS. Select files are also available free of charge from the STC website.

The RDS ([Rich Data Services](#)) analytical platform was launched in July 2022 to replace the decommissioned Nesstar platform. STC continues to add more data products to the RDS platform and this number has now reached 300. Since its inception, more than 6000 tabulations have been generated by users from the 83 member institutions.

In 2023, with the hard work of its members, the DLI migrated its training repository to [Borealis](#), [The Canadian Dataverse Repository](#), replacing CUDO. With more than 2500 products, the training repository is a valuable resource for all DLI contacts. It contains training sessions and workshop presentations from the DLI, and from other national and international conferences over the years.

In May 2024, the Professional Development Committee organized its first in-person training session since 2019, to be held concurrently with the IASSIST conference..

Digital Research Alliance of Canada (the Alliance):

Under the Alliance, support for [RDM](#) is composed of a national coordination and service delivery team working in conjunction with our community partners to deliver training and outreach; support for RDM policies and best practices; and services, tools, and infrastructure platforms. As a core activity, the Alliance coordinates the RDM Network of Experts: a grassroots community of information and data professionals comprising over 150 experts across 70 plus Canadian academic and research institutions.

A suite of national RDM services and programs is delivered in coordination with service provider partners. Selected activities from the past year include:

- Launching [Lunaris](#) (a Canadian national discovery service for multidisciplinary data from Canadian research institutions) and awarding \$164 thousand to McMaster University for the Expansion of the Lunaris initiative.
- Launching a call for proposals and collaborating with 29 partner organizations in the Controlled Access Management (CAM) for Research Data initiative.
- Signing a memorandum of understanding with the Korea Institute of Science and Technology to advance global DRI.
- Awarding \$237 thousand to the University of Alberta for the DMP Assistant Stabilization initiative.

DMP Assistant:

Through 2023 and early 2024, the [DMP Assistant](#) has benefited from investment in the stabilization of the platform, including two new roles on the service team - an additional developer and a DMP Specialist role. These positions have enabled the DMP Assistant service team to achieve parity with the platform's common codebase with international partners, as well as beginning projects that will significantly enhance the user experience on DMP Assistant, such as single sign-on. The service team continues to engage its stakeholder community through the establishment of the DMP Assistant Administrators Group, which meets bimonthly.

The DMP Expert Group (DMPEG) has continued to support the development of DMP-related resources, notably with the support from the DMP Specialist. Resources developed in the past year include a range of DMP Examples to help guide researchers and other stakeholders with the development of their own DMPs, as well as a new and simplified DMP template for supporting researchers in meeting DMP requirements at the funding opportunity (pre-funding) stage.

DMPEG is now focusing upon the development of a DMP assessment rubric to complement the new template. DMPEG members have also participated in a range of information sharing and learning opportunities, including webinars and workshops.

Borealis: the Canadian Dataverse Repository

The team at [Borealis](#) continues to actively participate in RDM software development to support and respond to the needs of Canadian researchers. The latest upgrade was done May 23, 2024, to version 6.2. Some of the new features included contributions from the Borealis team and suggestions from our users. These included: geospatial file and metadata improvements; improvements to review workflow and file access requests; and more support for user browsing.

There are [currently 71 institutions](#) using Borealis across Canada (COPPUL, OCUL, CAAL, PBUQ, OCLS, Fédération des cégeps). In February 2024, we hosted the [Love data week: Electoral democracy data for all](#), with speakers from Queen’s University, the Canadian Opinion Research Archive (CORA), CDEM, Borealis, and Odesi.

[Odesi](#) officially migrated to Borealis (due to the sunset of Nesstar) and re-launched in October 2023 with a new user interface search. New Odesi tools and integrations are in development and planned for release later this year.

Regional Information:

Western Region:

The University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Northern British Columbia and the University of Victoria continue their partnership to make open and licensed datasets available in [Abacus](#), a shared data repository hosted by UBC. This growing repository contains more than 2,400 datasets, with notable collections of public use microdata, geospatial data, and linguistics data. Recent collection development highlights include the release of 1996 Census reference maps from Statistics Canada (hundreds of maps not previously available online) and restoring access to 1972 and 1974 Canadian general election results by riding (converted from EBCDIC files). The Abacus collaboration is also a focal point for data-related advocacy and events, including annual programming for ‘Love Data Week’.

Ontario Data Community:

The Ontario Data Community (ODC), under the umbrella of [OCUL](#) (Ontario Consortium of University Libraries) facilitates the exchange of ideas and fosters discussion amongst data professionals to encourage collaborative initiatives, the development of new ideas, increased access, and more efficient use of resources. The members meet bi-monthly to exchange updates. The recent addition to the agenda of a knowledge sharing component, where one of the members discusses their data services, continues to be quite popular. Networking with colleagues is an important component of this group.

Compute Ontario:

[Compute Ontario](#), a regional Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) coordination and support organization, has been fulfilling its mandate, including RDM, through: hiring a new Training Coordinator; funding 6 DRI-aligned training initiatives; partnering on a [Compute Ontario Summer School](#), including 9 RDM-aligned sessions; partnering on delivery of weekly DRI [Colloquia](#); seeking community feedback through Training Advisory and RDM Advisory [Committees](#); convening a successful pan-Canadian DRI Training Summit; and developing draft Training Principles.

Atlantic Data Contacts group:

The Atlantic Data Contacts group met 7 times in the 2023-2024 academic year. They discussed various topics of regional interest, held a debrief after the DLI’s virtual National Training Event, hosted an ocean research scientist who shared some of her knowledge about ocean data with the group, and teamed up to offer region-wide online webinars for ICPSR’s “Love Data Week”.

IASSIST Membership:

Many Canadian IASSIST members continue to be deeply involved in local, provincial, national, and international organizations on a regular basis. This engagement continues to be of benefit to all involved, as knowledge and expertise are developed and shared.

While Canadian members appreciate hosting the IASSIST annual conference in person this year, there is still a desire to have some IASSIST conferences to be held virtually: virtual attendance is more affordable than attending in person as funding continues to be an issue. For example, in Ontario, provincial government funds accounted for just 24% of total Ontario university revenue in 2021-2022; down from 36% in 2001.

IASSIST Bonus information:

This year, the IASSIST conference is being held concurrently with CARTO in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As well, the National DLI Training event and the Alliance's Spring Connect are both being held in the same week. We are quite excited to be welcoming fellow IASSISTers (and others) from all over the world to see our beautiful East coast.

I just want to mention the [Local Arrangements Committee](#) here. We wanted this conference to be the best IASSIST ever, so we started meeting every second week last July. The membership of the LAC was made up of 9 members from 6 different universities, from both IASSIST and CARTO, and from Nova Scotia and Ontario. We had a great time fulfilling all our tasks successfully under the leadership of Dylanne Dearborn and Amber Leahey.

Other IASSIST Officials:

Canadian Members at Large: Dylanne Dearborn, Amber Leahey



Early morning Springtime in the heart of Muskoka, ON (Photo credit: Jane Fry)