Data Help Desk Planning Tips

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This document outlines tips and lessons learned from planning and executing Data Help Desks in conjunction with multiple scientific association meetings for others who wish to host similar events. Emphasis is placed on in-person events, though much of this information is useful for planning virtual Data Help Desks as well.

Data Help Desk - What is it?
The Data Help Desk will provide researchers with opportunities to engage with informatics experts familiar with their scientific domain and learn about skills and techniques that will help further their research and make their data and software open and FAIR.

The Data Help Desk will offer a number of relevant activities during the week, and attendees will be able to ask data related questions, see demonstrations of relevant tools and platforms, as well as learning about key data related issues such as citation of data and software, creating a data management plan or how to find a suitable repository for you research data.

Components of a Data Help Desk
Reference Desk staffed with experts (1-2 at a time) to answer questions
- Large monitor/area where experts can give demos of tools and resources on-demand
- 'Workshops' in the same demo space (or elsewhere) about key topics, like data citation, creating data management plan, repository lightning talks.
  - Heaviest lift to plan and execute
- Space for handouts/flyers & small monitor with rotating slidedeck that includes useful prompts like:
  - Ask us how you can Cite Your Data Like a Pro
  - Ask us about data management plans
  - What makes data #FAIR? And what is FAIR anyway?

Some Past or Planned Data Help Desks
- http://bit.ly/DataHelpEGU20 (*Virtual* 2020 EGU General Assembly)
- http://bit.ly/2020DataFAIRatOSM (2020 Ocean Sciences Meeting)
- http://bit.ly/2019DataFAIRatAGU (2017, 2018, 2019 AGU Fall Meetings)
- https://www.idigbio.org/wiki/index.php/ESA_2019_Data_Help_Desk (2018, 2019, 2020 Ecological Society of America Meetings)
- Planned: Geological Society of America & AGU Fall Meeting 2020

Observations of What Makes Data Help Desks Successful
- Dedication of a core group of organizers

- Diversity of volunteers to staff the Help Desk, both in terms of organizations and topics represented (also volunteer satisfaction)
- Solid communication plan both prior to and during the event with specific schedule
  - Presence on meeting website (clear deadlines)
  - Find other advocates – section chairs, scientific session presenters, etc.
  - Mention of the event in scientific sessions
  - Twitter
- Central location in the exhibit hall with clear and attractive signage
- Fast & reliable internet for demos
- Find commonalities with researchers – sharing science expertise of volunteers is important for establishing trust and starting conversations.
- Solicit and share asynchronous content, such as recorded demos and tutorials that can be accessed at any time. Researchers are often busiest around scientific meetings, so recordings can enhance potential impact and access.
- Plan a special meetup with food if possible (Special Guest+Cheese=Crowd)

Most Popular Questions (from past Help Desks)
- Where can I put my data?
- Where can I find data?
- What is X (where X is one of the organizations listed on the signage)?

How to Solicit Volunteers
- Organizers decide on key topics and specific resources (from their own orgs even) that they would like to see featured.
- You can also share a general form (e.g., Google Form) with relevant mailing lists to solicit volunteers. Primary organizers should agree whether the call for volunteers should be open in this way.

Key Tasks/Roles (these do not all have to be different people)
- Booth Logistics - arranging furniture, shipping, etc.
- Scheduler for Data Help Desk
- Scheduler for any workshops (more involved featured events at the Help Desk)
- Virtual presence manager - coordinate website, getting info into meeting program if possible.
- Twitter Champion (before and during event)
- Onsite Coordinator - booth setup, breakdown, catch volunteers and explain what to do, deal with spur of the moment issues, answer data questions

What is the Data Fair?
- Data Fair is the larger umbrella over the Data Help Desk that encompasses other events, like Town Halls and other Workshops around the general topic of FAIR and open data and software. For some meetings, the Data Help Desk is the only event, but you may choose to also host these other events if the resources exist to make them happen.

Other things to consider

- What are the possible levels of involvement? Will you ask all major participating organizations to split the cost or will one fund? What does one have to do to get their name on the signage?
- Language is important - the 'Data Help Desk at AGU' implies something different than 'AGU Data Help Desk.'
- Volunteer satisfaction is important - we want volunteers to feel like their time was well spent and that they would like to participate in subsequent years. You can survey volunteers post-event to get their thoughts.
- Include a way to track participation (lead retrieval or sign up form) and follow-up subsequently.

Additional Resources

- Carter, Megan; Robinson, Erin (2020): Insights from Engaging with Scientists at Data Help Desks during Scientific Meetings. ESIP. Presentation. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.12827582.v1
- Recording of Megan Carter giving the above presentation at the 2020 ESIP Summer Meeting Session on Connecting Informatics to Science Communities: https://youtu.be/B7Nn_cO1dkQ?t=1780