

# ICPSR and the Data Seal of Approval: Accreditation Experiences and Opportunities

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**Summary.** The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), a domain repository with a 50-year track record of archiving social and behavioural science data, applied for and acquired the Data Seal of Approval (DSA) in 2010. The DSA was a non-intrusive, straightforward approach to assessing organizational, technical, and operational infrastructure. The DSA assessment helped ICPSR improve transparency, monitor high-level archival processes, and raise awareness within the organization and beyond.

**Keywords.** Assessment, certification, data repository, trusted repository, Data Seal of Approval.

## 1. Introduction

As data repositories and dissemination platforms proliferate, assessment of repository quality and trustworthiness grows in importance. Assessment promotes trust that the data will be available for the long term, provides a transparent view into the workings of the repository, and improves processes and procedures through measurement against a community standard.

Common elements of assessment include review of the organizational framework (e.g., governance, staffing, policies, finances), technical infrastructure (e.g., system design, security), and treatment of data (e.g., access, integrity, process, preservation).

## 2. The Data Seal of Approval

The Data Seal of Approval (DSA) was initiated by the Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS) in 2009 'to safeguard data, to ensure high quality and to guide reliable management of research data for the future without requiring the implementation of new standards, regulations or high costs' [1]. There are 16 guidelines to the DSA—three target the data producer, three the data consumer, and ten the data repository.

Self-assessments are completed online with ratings and then peer-reviewed by a DSA Board member. Approximately 20 repositories have been granted the DSA since 2011.

The DSA has minimal requirements in comparison to other assessments, such as the Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification (TRAC) [2], the Trusted Digital Repository Checklist (ISO/DIS 16363) [3], and the Digital Repository Audit Method Based on Risk Assessment [4].

## 3. DSA Experience of Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research

The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) applied for and acquired the DSA in 2010. ICPSR found the DSA to be a non-intrusive, straightforward approach to assessing high-level organizational, technical, and operational infrastructure. The DSA is less labour- and time-intensive than other assessments; completion of documentation took a few days rather than months.

The DSA assessment process helped ICPSR improve transparency, monitor high-level archival processes, and raise awareness within the

organization. For instance, in documenting the DSA guidelines, ICPSR staff recognized the need to make policies more public, including posting past versions of Terms of Use agreements. Displaying the DSA logo is also a visible sign to ICPSR website visitors that the repository has achieved trusted status.

Since ICPSR previously had undertaken a TRAC self-audit, the DSA did not uncover significant flaws in the system, but it did help the organization continue to sharpen its processes and procedures.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The Data Seal of Approval provided an inexpensive, relatively quick, and straightforward accreditation process. The results of the DSA process helped ICPSR to continue to refine processes and procedures. The DSA provides a low barrier of entry for repositories to certify that

they are trustworthy, while helping them to improve their own systems. The Seal carries meaning that is easily recognized, especially as more repositories complete the assessment and as more producers and consumers recognize the value added.

#### **References**

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