

Data communities do amazing Things

Karen Visser and Gerry Ryder on the success of 23 (research data) Things

23 (research data) Things is a treasure trove of activities, ideas, examples and thought provoking questions for anyone who cares for, and about, research data.

The 23 topics include quirky and serious explorations of what research data is and why it is such a global hot topic: finding it, reusing it, managing it, describing it, how and why to publish it, tools and apps for value adding and visualising it, data literacy, citation, data management plans and more.

Starting in March 2016, some 1,500 participants tackled 23 (research data) Things in their own way. They have chosen from three levels of activities for each 'Thing', delving deep into some Things and skimming over others.

Whether through one of the 49 local groups set up across Australia or as an individual participant, everybody soon became part of the '23T' community.



Cake has played a big role in 23T! (Credit: Sonja Barfoed)

The origin of Things

The concept stems from the original 23 Things program designed by Helene Blowers in 2006, and more specifically *23 Things: Libraries for Research Data* developed by Michael Witt in 2015 as part of the Research Data Alliance Libraries for Research Data Interest Group, and made available as an RD-A Supporting Output.

The 2016 research data version, managed by ANDS, was a genuine community effort. Over 70 topics, activities and examples were suggested by participants, which were then massaged into 23 topics, each with three levels of complexity: 'Getting started', 'Learn more' and 'Challenge me'. All resources used in the program are free to use, share and repurpose through a Creative Commons licence.

The people involved in the program are from universities, libraries,

Hannah Shelley

Information Services Librarian, Australian Catholic University

I'm an early career librarian working in the university sector, so I'm keen on professional development and looking ahead at what I think will be important in my field for years and decades to come.

Research data management is an interesting area that is gaining a lot of momentum in university libraries, so I wanted to learn more. 23 (research data) Things was a great way to develop my knowledge and pick up some practical tools and resources to add to my professional 'grab bag'.



Hannah Shelley (supplied)

There were some topics where just an introduction was enough, and some where I wanted to delve a little deeper, so I enjoyed the self-directed nature of the program and being able to choose which activities I did.

It was also incredibly valuable to be part of a community going through the program and hearing other people's thoughts, concerns,

insights and tips – especially those more developed in their career and experienced in working with data.

I work in a team that supports researchers and academics, and the program has equipped me with knowledge, ideas and tools that I can apply at work. I've become excited about research data and hope to incorporate it into my long-term career.

eResearch agencies, business, government, health, museums, not for profits and other educational sectors. Whilst mostly within library and client services roles, the professional diversity was astonishing, from archivists to web developers and everything in between.

The program has resulted in a step change in the broader community engagement with the research data sector. Participants tell ANDS they have been "alerted to new aspects of research data", opening up new possibilities and bringing wider benefits to their institutions.

"I thought I was 'into' data management but now my thinking and learning has broadened so much I have more questions than answers," says Julie Toohey, Health Librarian at Griffith University and co-coordinator of the 23 Things health data virtual community group.

Or as another 23T enthusiast put it: "The more I put into it, the



University of South Australia City West 23T Group (supplied)

more I get out of it. The more I engage with and explore the ideas presented, the more I discover."

What's next?

The next phase will involve repurposing the materials for contextualised use, such as the '10 medical and health research data Things' already released – an adaptation of the program for those working with sensitive health and medical data.



University of Queensland 23T Group (supplied)

All materials from the program, including activities, resources and workshop materials, have been wrapped up in a reusable format to create a toolkit anyone can adopt and adapt. The content can be used to help build research data management capability in Australia, in turn further strengthening our research data communities.

It's never too late to begin 23 (research data) Things! All resources will remain online at ands.org.au/23-things.

Vladimir Bubalo

23T Group leader at Macquarie University

Having been involved in four ANDS funded research data management (RDM) projects at Macquarie University and working with various stakeholders during these projects, I realised there was a gap in knowledge and understanding about issues related to research data management. It was affecting both our researchers and our support staff.

The interest [in 23T] has been substantial, with the initial webinar attended by close to 90 staff and students across the university. We promoted the program as wide as possible to our researchers and support staff resulting in elevated awareness of issues related to RDM.

The program was helpful on many levels, not only as a tool to help understand the issues better or expand skills, but also to provide a good check list for issues our researchers are facing. It had lots of resources all in one place, with easily reusable content.

We had quite a few passionate discussions about various aspects

of RDM, and we all learned something.

Our librarians are now a lot more confident in answering RDM related questions from researchers and more equipped to recognise the needs and issues they face.

We are now investigating further avenues of development, expanding this to the wider eResearch space. We are looking at Software Carpentry, Data Carpentry and Library Carpentry as the next step. We are also looking at Author Carpentry, which is currently in development.



Macquarie University 23T group – Vladimir is on the right (Credit: Vladimir Bubalo)