

Research Data Storage, Retention, and Transfer

According to the Auburn University Research Data Policy ([AU Research Data Policy](#)), Auburn University owns and maintains control over all research data created with the support of its resources. The Office of the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development (OSVPRED) oversees implementation of the AU Research Data Policy. Researchers are the primary stewards of and decision makers for the research data they collect. This document provides guidance on the storage, retention, and transfer of research data. Researchers and their colleges are directly responsible for retaining and storing research data and materials in accordance with this guidance, as well as managing research data and materials when a researcher leaves Auburn University.

Data Storage

When data collection is complete, original records of research data collection and retention (including raw data and data documentation/codebooks) should be stored by the Principal Investigator (PI) in the department or unit where they originated using a college-provided storage location or other location specified by the Office of Information Technology when needed. The appropriate data storage location and format will depend on the nature of the data as well as any sponsor requirements (See the Data Storage Matrix ([Information Technology - Data Storage Matrix](#)) and the Data Classification Policy ([Data Classification Policy - Data Classification Policy](#))). If the researcher is storing any personally identifiable information, such information should be stored and managed in accordance with the protocol approved by the institutional review board. Hardcopy data should be scanned and digitally stored whenever feasible. Storage of controlled unclassified information (CUI) should be coordinated through the Office of Research Security Compliance. If encryption is used to secure electronic records of research data, the PI and a designated administrator identified by the college should also maintain the encryption keys and recovery procedures to ensure the data can be decrypted into a readable format. The designated administrator must complete all required responsible conduct of research and research security training.

Steps for organizing and storing data

- Ensure data are well-organized and documented. Include metadata to describe the data comprehensively.
- Use open, non-proprietary formats to ensure long-term accessibility.
- Specify who can access the data, especially if it includes sensitive information.
- Store data in approved secure locations to protect against unauthorized access and ensure data are backed up regularly See the Data Storage Matrix ([Information Technology - Data Storage Matrix](#)).
- Ensure uploaded data and documentation are properly indexed and accessible.

Data Retention

Adequate retention of research data supports needed documentation for meeting scholarly and legal requirements, including (a) justifying the use of research funds; (b) supporting and substantiating published research findings; (c) ensuring public access requirements; (d) ensuring compliance with federal regulations and sponsor requirements; and (e) serving as background and evidence to support intellectual property filings resulting from research and the defense of validity of those filings. Overall, it is good practice to retain research data to preserve the acquired

scientific knowledge and until there is no reasonable possibility that there would be a need to defend against an allegation of scientific misconduct.

Retention of research records is governed by federal and state regulations, university policies, disciplinary standards, sponsor requirements, and other directives specific to each project. Auburn University's Research Data Policy specifies *"Research data must be retained by the PI for five years after publication of the results or submission of the final report on the project for which the data were collected. If the retention requirements specified in other statutes or external agency regulations are longer, those requirements will apply."* Auburn University's policy covers a timeframe supportive of both federally sponsored research and non-federally sponsored projects. U.S. regulations mandate for federally sponsored research, data must be retained for a minimum of three years after the financial report for the project period has been submitted (consistent with the [Department of Health and Human Services regulations](#), 45 CFR 46.115 [b] and 21 CFR 56.115 [b]). Other federal sponsors and regulations that apply may require a longer retention period (e.g., HIPAA, DoD, FDA requirements). For non-federally sponsored projects, data must be retained for at least five years after the project's conclusion, unless otherwise specified by contract. When making decisions about research data collected using external funds, please refer to the contract between Auburn University and the funding sponsor for detailed record retention requirements.

Data Transfer

PIs, co-PIs, co-investigators, postdoctoral fellows, or students involved in research projects at Auburn University who leave the university are permitted to take copies of research data for projects they have worked on, subject to relevant confidentiality and any other third party restrictions. The transfer and use of such data (e.g., for additional analyses; publications/presentations) is based on agreements established among the PI and members of the research team. The PI should ensure all individuals who have access to research data are aware of any sponsor required agreements or restrictions. The original data or an exact copy of the original data and accompanying documentation/codebook must be retained by Auburn University. In consultation with the associate dean for research (ADR) from a departing PI's college, data stewardship can be transferred to another co-PI on the project, to the department head/chair, or to a person designated by the department head/chair. The transfer of stewardship should be communicated by the ADR to the OSVPRED.

Unless prohibited by specific terms of an award, other agreements, or university policy, a Principal Investigator (PI) may request written approval to transfer data that originated at Auburn University prior to departure. If the project is to be moved to another institution, ownership of the original data may be transferred from Auburn University to the PI's new institution upon request from the PI, subject to: (a) the prior written approval of the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development; (b) written agreement from the PI's new institution that guarantees (1) its acceptance of ongoing custodial responsibilities for the data; (2) Auburn University having access to the original data, should such access become necessary for any reason; and (3) relevant confidentiality restrictions, where appropriate. [IPX](#) should be contacted to coordinate the transfer of data to another institution.