

Arcus Research Data Management

REDCap Data Dictionaries

2020 June 24

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Data dictionaries in REDCap serve two major purposes: they document the data you are collecting and the instruments you are using to do so, *and* they function as a mechanism to modify your data collection instruments without utilizing the online designer. This overview provides a little more information on both purposes

REDCap Data Dictionaries as Documentation

REDCap data dictionaries are powerful pieces of documentation that describe your data and your data collection instrument robustly. We are lucky that REDCap creates these data dictionaries for us - in many other areas researchers create these from scratch!

Data dictionaries provide contextual documentation that allows better understanding and reuse of data (including reuse by the original research effort). For example, an analyst may notice a larger than normal number of procedures done on January 1 of a particular year. Without context, they may be unable to explain this discrepancy. However, by consulting the data dictionary they would notice a field note instructing the data entry person to enter a date of “1/1/[year]” for any cases where the year of a procedure is known but the month and day are unknown.

In this way (and many others) data dictionaries are crucial to appropriate and accurate use of data. Any time data collected in REDCap is exported for deposit in a repository or storage in an archives, or in any other type of long-term or persistent storage, it *must* be accompanied by a copy of its data dictionary. Data dictionaries can be exported from within a REDCap project by selecting “dictionary” on the left side-bar menu and then selecting “download data the current dictionary”

Logged in as calkinsh | Log out

My Projects
REDCap Messenger

Project Home and Design

Project Home | Project Setup
Designer | **Dictionary** | Codebook
Project status: Production 1

Data Collection

Record Status Dashboard
Add / Edit Records
Show data collection instruments

Applications

Alerts & Notifications
Calendar
Data Exports, Reports, and Stats
Data Import Tool
Data Comparison Tool
Logging
Field Comment Log
File Repository
User Rights and DAGs
Data Quality
REDCap Mobile App
External Modules
18 HIPAA Identifiers
Sample calc field formulas (U. of Iowa)
ARCUS articles: Data Education for the CHOP Researcher
Race & ethnicity data standards (NIH Collaboratory)

Project Home | Project Setup | Online Designer | **Data Dictionary** | Codebook

Since this project is currently in PRODUCTION, changes will not be made in real time. [Tell me more](#)

Submit Changes for Review

Fields to be added: 0 / Total resulting field count: 119
Fields to be deleted: 0 / Existing field count: 119

[Remove all drafted changes](#) [View detailed summary of all drafted changes](#)

[VIDEO: How to use this page](#)

This module will allow you to create new data collection instruments/surveys or edit existing ones. Changes may be made by either using the **Online Designer** or **Upload Data Dictionary** (see tabs above), in which you may use either method or both. The Online Designer may help you get some initial fields/forms built quickly or to make quick edits, but using the Data Dictionary file may be more helpful if you will be adding a large number of fields for this project.

This module may be used for making changes to the project, such as adding new fields or modifying existing fields, by using an offline method called the Data Dictionary. The Data Dictionary is a specifically formatted CSV (comma delimited) file within which you may construct your project fields and afterward upload the file here to commit the changes to your project.

Click the 'Browse' or 'Choose File' button below to select the file on your computer, and upload it by clicking the 'Upload File' button. Once your file has been uploaded, changes will NOT immediately be made but will be displayed and checked for errors to ensure that all the formatting in your Data Dictionary is correct before official changes are made to the project. **Snapshot note:** A snapshot of your project's current Data Dictionary will be created automatically during the Data Dictionary upload process before committing the new Data Dictionary. The snapshot can later be accessed and downloaded from the Project Revision History page.

Need some help?
If you wish to view an example of how your Data Dictionary may be formatted, you may download the [Data Dictionary demonstration file](#), or you may view the [Data Dictionary Tutorial Video \(10 min\)](#). For help setting up your Data Dictionary, you may also see the instructions listed on the [Help & FAQ](#).

Steps for making project changes:

1. [Download the current Data Dictionary](#) OR [Download Data Dictionary with drafted changes](#)
2. Edit the Data Dictionary (see the [Help & FAQ](#) for help)
3. Upload the Data Dictionary using the form below
4. The changes will be made to the project after the Data Dictionary has been checked for errors

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REDCap Data Dictionaries as Editing Tools

REDCap data dictionaries can be used as tools to edit your data capture instrument. When you download the data dictionary for an existing instrument, you will see various fields with values that describe the individual items on your instrument. By modifying the values in these fields and/or adding new rows & values to your dictionary, and then uploading it via the REDCap instructions, you can easily modify your data collection instrument.

Editing REDCap instruments via the data dictionary is an effective way to modify many fields at once. You can also use this method to “transport” a data collection instrument from one project to another (or one instance of REDCap to another!) by downloading the data dictionary from the original project, making any desired modifications, and then uploading it into the new project. However, be aware that this method may be more prone to error as typos or formatting mistakes may cause expected changes to fail. To edit your instrument in this way, follow these instructions under the “data dictionary” tab of your project:

Steps for making project changes:

- 1.) [Download the current Data Dictionary](#)  OR [Download Data Dictionary with drafted changes](#) 
- 2.) Edit the Data Dictionary (see the [Help & FAQ](#) for help)
- 3.) Upload the Data Dictionary using the form below
- 4.) The changes will be made to the project after the Data Dictionary has been checked for errors

Upload your Data Dictionary file (CSV file format only)

Format for min/max validation values for date and datetime fields:

No file chosen

More information can be found about REDCap data dictionaries in the FAQ section:

<https://redcap.chop.edu/index.php?action=help#ss49> (note: you will need to log into the CHOP REDCap in order to access this page!)