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"

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REDCap Data Dictionaries
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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: MM/DD/YYYY or YYYY-MM-DD ⬍

Choose File | No file chosen

Upload File

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!)