



Smart Energy Research Lab (SERL)

Data Governance Board (DGB)

Terms of reference

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Document Purpose: This document summarises the Terms of Reference of the SERL Data Governance Board.

Document information

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Summary of latest changes:

Updated to reflect changes since v13

Associated documents: See table below

Key Associated Documents

Associated Documents	Authors
SERL DGB Operating Procedures	
SERL Data Governance Framework	
SERL UCL Research Ethics application	
SERL Participant Management Processes (which includes compliance with SEC Privacy Controls Framework)	

Introduction

The Smart Energy Research Lab (SERL) delivers a unique energy data resource that provides secure access to high resolution energy data from smart meters, linked to relevant contextual data, for research in the public interest. SERL enables a broad range of multi-disciplinary, socio-technical research relating to energy consumption in residential buildings. SERL-enabled research informs government policy, stimulates innovation in the transition to a net zero energy system, and helps provide solutions to the energy trilemma (security, affordability and environmental sustainability). University College London (UCL) is the **data controller** for the SERL programme. All personal data processed as part of the SERL project relies on **public task** as its lawful basis for processing under GDPR.

SERL processes personal data, which is regulated by the **General Data Protection Regulation** (GDPR) and **UK Data Protection Act 2018** (DPA 2018). Some of the personal data that SERL processes is smart meter data, which is additionally regulated by the **Smart Energy Code** (SEC).

SERL is a UK University research project led by UCL that involves human participants and so requires ethical approval by UCL's Research Ethics Committee (UCL REC) before any data can be collected or used for research. SERL received approval from UCL REC on 30 January 2019.

SERL has established the Data Governance Board (DGB) to oversee and review research project applications for the access of SERL data. This document describes the Terms of Reference for this board. Note that SERL has purposefully aligned its research application procedures with those of the UK Statistics Authority relating to access to data under the Digital Economy Act.

Roles and responsibilities

The primary purpose of the DGB is to ensure that the process for approving access to SERL data is transparent, independent, and consistent.

The secondary purpose of the DGB is to provide advice to the SERL management team on wider privacy and related issues, where the management team retain ultimate responsibility e.g. SERL Data Governance Framework.

All researchers wishing to access SERL data must be ONS/DEA Accredited Researchers.

Under exceptional circumstances and where there is a compelling reason, the SERL PI may make decisions on approving research projects independently of the DGB. Such cases will be documented, information about them will be made publicly available, and the decision will be reviewed by the DGB at the next possible occasion.

It is the responsibility of the DGB to:

- Review all applications for research projects for the use of SERL data
- Assess whether applications for research projects meet the approval criteria
- Approve or reject research projects applications
- Ensure the process for decision-making is transparent and independent
- Ensure that their decisions are impartial and credible

The SERL website will display information on all projects approved by the DGB.

Principles and criteria

In reviewing applications for research projects, the DGB shall ensure that the process adheres to the following principles:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Independence
- Credibility

The DGB shall adhere to these principles through its membership and meeting arrangements.

Applications for research projects shall be required to demonstrate they meet the following criteria:

- Is there public benefit?
- Is there demonstrable analytical merit?
- Is the project feasible?
- Are any relevant privacy implications sufficiently mitigated?
- Has the project successfully completed a formal ethical review?

The DGB shall be required to consider projects against these criteria and assess the balance of any wider negative impacts, including the risk of disclosure of personal information, against the potential benefits of the project.

Project application procedures are further documented in the DGB Operating Procedures.

Membership

The DGB shall be formed of:

- An independent Chair (appointed by SERL Principal Investigator)
- Regular members (number to be determined by Chair)

Members shall be selected such that the DGB shall demonstrate:

- A level of knowledge and ability to consistently interpret the level of adherence to the criteria used to assess applications for research projects
- a reasonable level of trust from the perspective of data subjects and data users
- That any conflicts of interest are declared and made explicit
- That a list of DGB members with their affiliations will be made publicly available via the SERL website

The terms of office for the Chair will be 3 years. The terms of office for the regular members of the board will be 3 years. Terms of office are renewable, except in cases where members decide to resign, or their position is terminated.

Members of the DGB will be reimbursed for their travel and accommodation expenses incurred as part of their role. Administration of expenses will be undertaken by the Secretariat (see below).

The Chair of the DGB is nominated by the Secretariat in consultation with the SERL Independent Advisory Board and appointed by SERL PI.

The regular members of the DGB are nominated by the Chair in consultation with the Secretariat.

Membership

DGB membership (as of 04/06/2020)

- **Chair:** Independent consultant – Maxine Frerk
- Citizen's Advice - Colin Griffiths

- DESNZ - Andrew Charlesworth
- Energy Systems Catapult – Richard Dobson
- Oxford University – Sarah Darby
- UK Data Service – Joanne Webb

Meeting arrangements

- The DGB will aim to meet 3-4 times per year which may be in person or virtually. Additional meetings may be called as required.
- Projects can be approved or rejected by correspondence.
- Decisions by the DGB may set precedents that can be used when assessing new project applications.
- The SERL Secretariat and UKDS will validate each application against the approval criteria and make summary recommendations for the DGB to consider when reviewing applications.
- Members who are aware they will be unable to attend a meeting should notify the Chair as soon as practicable.
- If members fail to attend 4 or more out of 6 meetings the Chair has the right to cancel their membership and seek alternative members.

Secretariat

Secretariat for the DGB will be provided by SERL and consist of:

- SERL Director
- SERL Lead – data governance
- SERL Consortium Manager
- Other persons as appropriate

Secretariat membership roles (as of May 2024)

- UCL – Simon Elam
- UCL – Clare Hanmer
- UCL – James O’Toole
- Oxford – Tina Fawcett

Currency

To maintain maximum efficiencies in the use of infrastructure, projects will be time-limited, and the DGB approval will thus be time-limited. Extensions to any project will require researchers to re-assert the status on certain items on their application form to ensure that they are current. Researchers shall not use the data for any other purposes than those given on the approved project application form.

Appeals

- Researchers will have a right to appeal DGB decisions. Appeals will be to SERL Principal Investigator who will consider the decision afresh.
- Appeals must be submitted to the SERL Secretariat within 28 working days of the Panel’s initial decision.
- SERL PI’s decision is final and there can be no appeal of this.
- SERL Secretariat will inform the appellant of the conclusion of the appeal process.

Review

The DGB shall review the effectiveness of its meetings and its Terms of Reference annually.