

# Data Trusts



How do we unlock the value of data while preventing harmful impacts?

## What is a data trust?

A data trust is a legal structure that provides independent stewardship of data.

The organisations that collect and hold data permit an independent institution to make decisions about how that data is used and shared for an agreed purpose.

The data trust becomes a steward of the data, taking responsibility to make decisions about the data and ensure they support the data trust's purpose.

## Why set up a data trust?

There are different potential benefits that setting up a data trust could help to bring.

A data trust is an independent institution, so it could help balance conflicting views and incentives about how data should be shared and who can access it.

A data trust could help organisations deliver some of the many benefits that better data access can bring – from enabling collaboration on common challenges to creating new products, services or insights.

A data trust could be used to reduce costs and skills needed to steward and share data, or be designed to generate revenue.

A data trust could create new opportunities for startups and other businesses to access and innovate with data, and enable new technologies, such as AI, that help people make more informed decisions, create jobs and stimulate growth.

A data trust could make control more representative over how data is used and shared, so people and organisations have a say who otherwise wouldn't have, especially when the data is about them or its use affects them.

A data trust could ensure data's benefits are distributed more widely, ethically and equitably.

## Who can be involved?

Many different types of people or groups might be involved in creating, using or advocating for a data trust.

Data holders from the private, public and third sectors could increase access to the data they hold, while reducing the costs and skills they need to do so.

Groups working with data holders could help them scope, design and operate a data trust, or independently assess it so that other people know whether to trust it.

Citizens and consumers might advocate for a data trust to be created because they want the decisions about how data about them, or whose use affects them, is shared or used to be more open, participatory and deliberative.

Data users might engage in data trusts because they want access to data held by organisations, which might be granted to them if a data trust has control over how the data is used and shared.

Governments might mandate a data trust, for example because data holders are unfairly restricting access. In other cases they might support people to create data trusts themselves through funding and sharing research on how to do it.

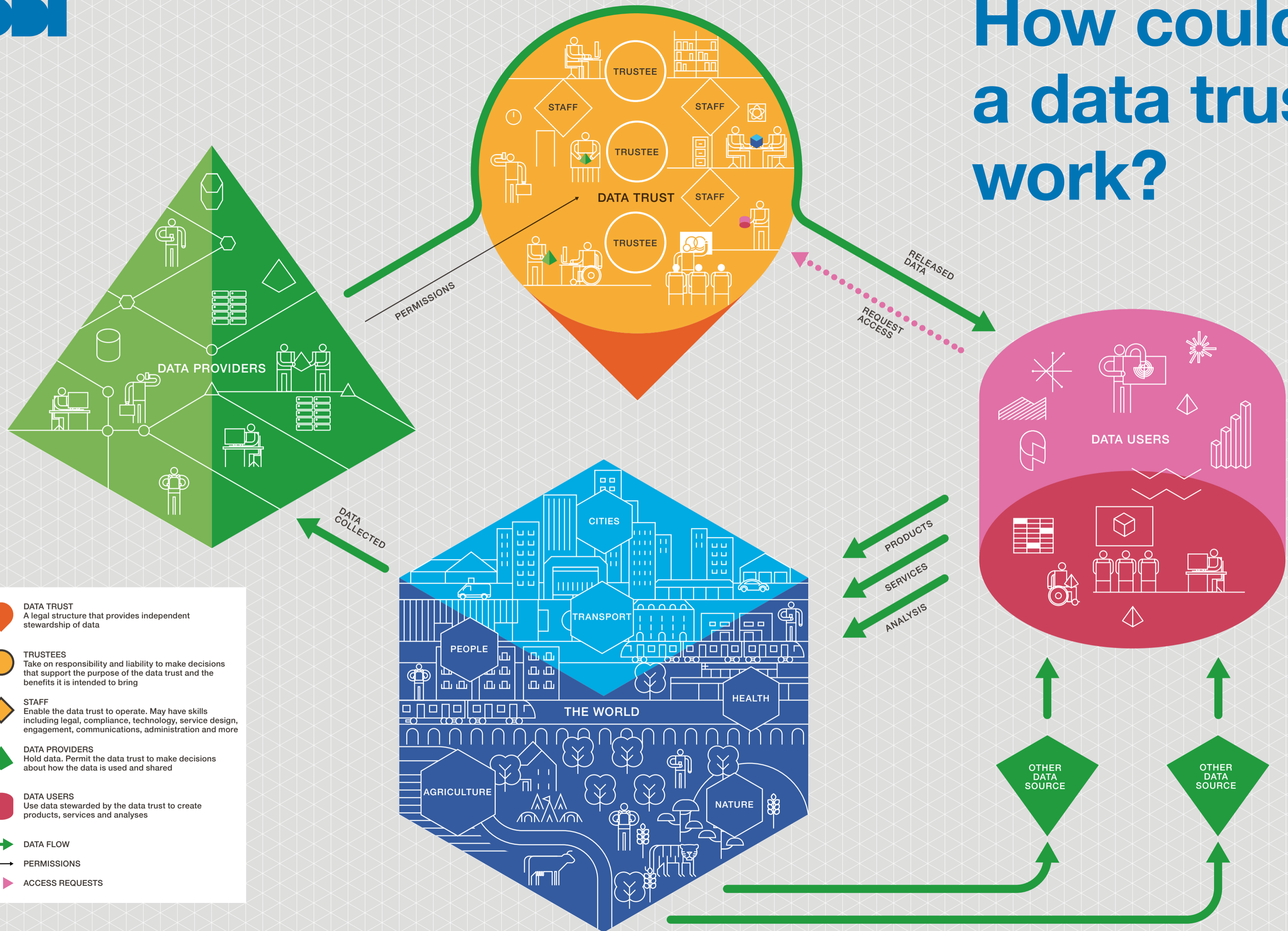
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

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The views are those of the authors.

Find out more, contribute to our research and discuss data trusts with us at [theodi.org/data-trusts](https://theodi.org/data-trusts).

# How could a data trust work?



-  **DATA TRUST**  
A legal structure that provides independent stewardship of data
-  **TRUSTEES**  
Take on responsibility and liability to make decisions that support the purpose of the data trust and the benefits it is intended to bring
-  **STAFF**  
Enable the data trust to operate. May have skills including legal, compliance, technology, service design, engagement, communications, administration and more
-  **DATA PROVIDERS**  
Hold data. Permit the data trust to make decisions about how the data is used and shared
-  **DATA USERS**  
Use data stewarded by the data trust to create products, services and analyses
-  **DATA FLOW**
-  **PERMISSIONS**
-  **ACCESS REQUESTS**