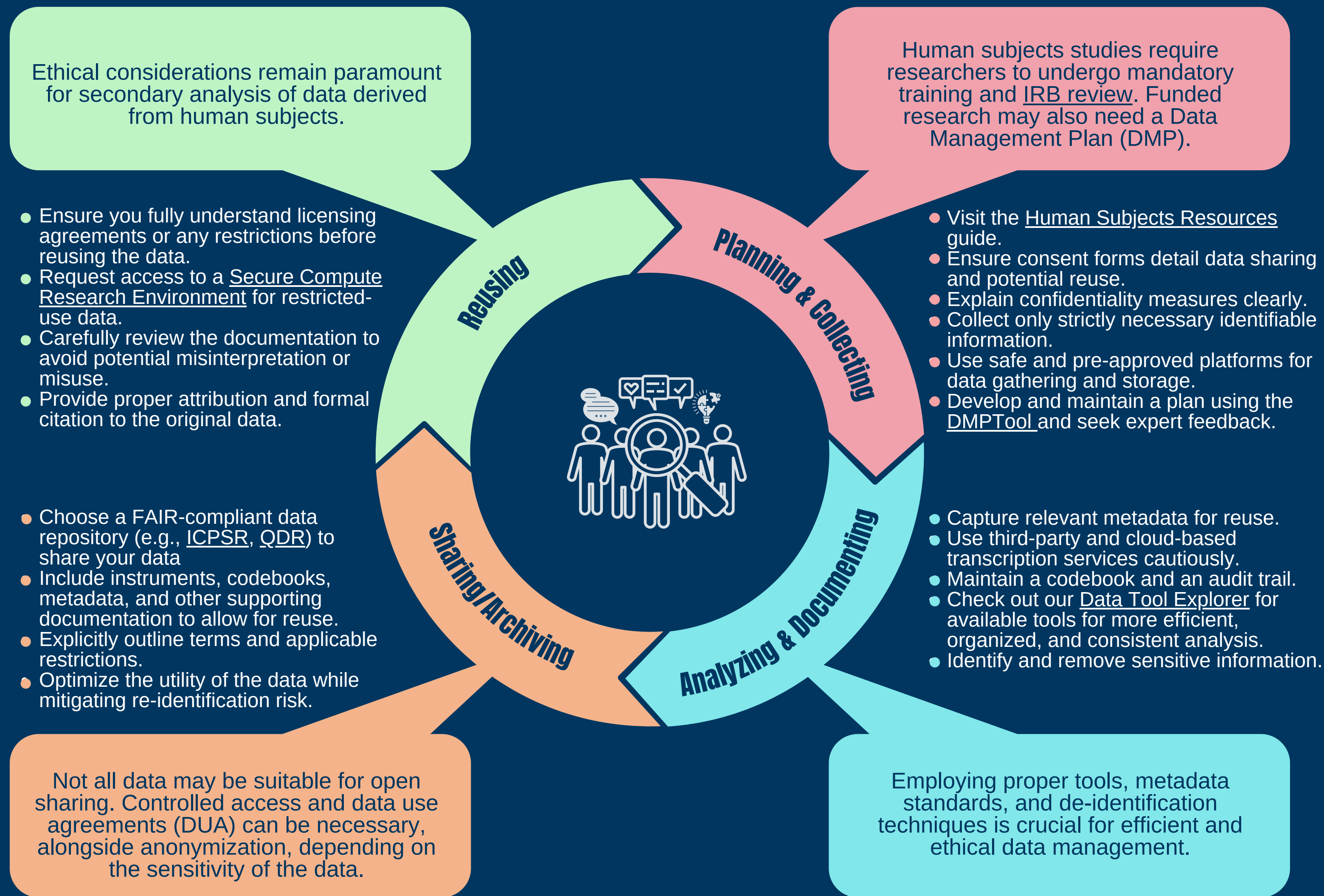# The Intricacies of Managing Qualitative Data from Human Subject Research

Qualitative data is inherently nuanced and deeply contextual. While it offers rich interpretive possibilities, its analysis and presentation often demand considerable resources. Moreover, due to its sensitivity, managing qualitative research data obtained from human subjects—such as interviews and observations—poses distinct ethical challenges. This handout delineates key considerations, practical tips, and available resources for effectively handling this data type across its lifecycle.

Reusing

Ethical considerations remain paramount for secondary analysis of data derived from human subjects.

- Ensure you fully understand licensing agreements or any restrictions before reusing the data.
- Request access to a Secure Compute Research Environment for restricted-use data.
- Carefully review the documentation to avoid potential misinterpretation or misuse.
- Provide proper attribution and formal citation to the original data.

Planning & Collecting

Human subjects studies require researchers to undergo mandatory training and IRB review. Funded research may also need a Data Management Plan (DMP).

- Visit the Human Subjects Resources guide.
- Ensure consent forms detail data sharing and potential reuse.
- Explain confidentiality measures clearly.
- Collect only strictly necessary identifiable information.
- Use safe and pre-approved platforms for data gathering and storage.
- Develop and maintain a plan using the DMPTool and seek expert feedback.

Sharing/Archiving

- Choose a FAIR-compliant data repository (e.g., ICPSR, QDR) to share your data
- Include instruments, codebooks, metadata, and other supporting documentation to allow for reuse.
- Explicitly outline terms and applicable restrictions.
- Optimize the utility of the data while mitigating re-identification risk.

Not all data may be suitable for open sharing. Controlled access and data use agreements (DUA) can be necessary, alongside anonymization, depending on the sensitivity of the data.

Analyzing & Documenting

- Capture relevant metadata for reuse.
- Use third-party and cloud-based transcription services cautiously.
- Maintain a codebook and an audit trail.
- Check out our Data Tool Explorer for available tools for more efficient, organized, and consistent analysis.
- Identify and remove sensitive information.

Employing proper tools, metadata standards, and de-identification techniques is crucial for efficient and ethical data management.

Our team can help you navigate all the stages within this lifecycle. Schedule a consultation with us: rds@library.ucsb.edu

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