

Cadasta Data Guidelines

A Framework for Responsible, Transparent, and Accountable Data Practices

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These guidelines are designed to support responsible data management across Cadasta's programs and partnerships. They do not constitute a legal agreement and may be updated periodically to reflect evolving standards, technologies, and partner needs.

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Introduction

About Cadasta

Cadasta Foundation is dedicated to providing land technology, training, and services that advance equity by enabling partners to document, map, secure, and sustain inclusive land and resource rights. By placing control of data in the hands of partners, Cadasta supports stronger governance, legal recognition, and long-term stewardship of land and resources, laying the foundation for justice, resilience, and sustainability.

What are ‘Data Protocols’ and Why are they Important?

Data protocols are simple rules or agreements that explain how data should be collected, stored, used, shared, and protected. They facilitate project stakeholders’ understanding of what can and cannot be done with the data. For example, data protocols may note:

- Who owns the data
- Who is allowed to see or use the data
- How data may or may not be shared
- What to do if the owner of the data asks that it be deleted
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure data stays safe and private

Data protocols help ensure that everyone involved in a project, including partner communities, organizations, or institutions, a nonprofit partner such as Cadasta, or a donor, understands and agrees on how data is collected, managed, and shared. This helps protect sensitive information, reduce the risk of misuse, and promote transparency and accountability.

For Cadasta and its partners, data protocols are especially important because they reinforce trust and support data sovereignty. They ensure that partners remain in control of their data and that any sharing is done in a responsible manner. By following strong data protocols, Cadasta helps partners safeguard their data, make informed decisions, and use technology in ways that align with their values and priorities.

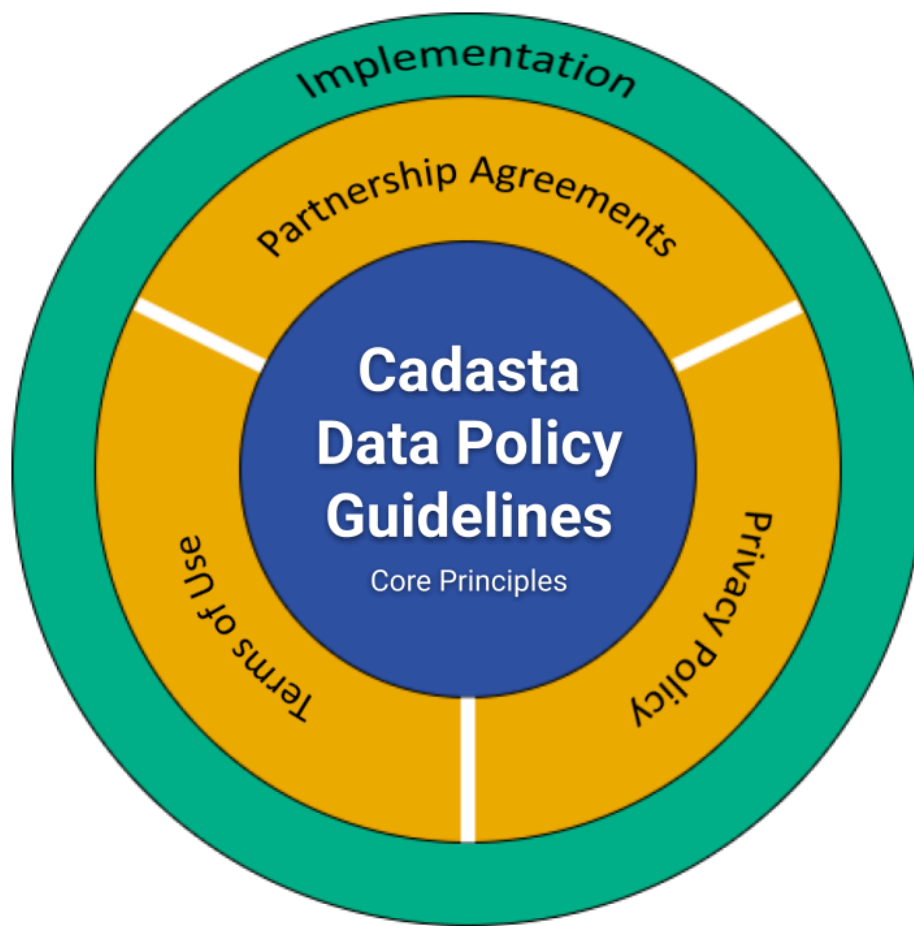
Purpose of these Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide Cadasta and its partners with clear, practical guidance for ethical and responsible data management, especially when working with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs). The guidelines:

- Reflect current best practices in data sovereignty and governance, and acknowledge the diverse types of data involved in our work, including land rights, natural resources, ecosystems, demographic data, and cultural information.

- Walk users through the full data journey, from collection and storage to management, visualization, and responsible sharing.
- Outline roles and responsibilities, data safeguards, and terms of use included in partner agreements.
- Establish standards for file formats, metadata, attribution, and retention practices, while also addressing long-term sustainability to ensure data remains secure and under partner control over time.

These Data Guidelines serve as the core framework that informs all of Cadasta’s policies and agreements related to data. They outline the principles that guide how data is collected, managed, shared, and protected across the organization. The Privacy Policy translates these principles into public commitments about how personal and project-related information is handled. The Terms of Use establish the rules and responsibilities for anyone accessing or using the Cadasta Platform and its tools. The Partnership Agreement applies the guidelines in project-specific contexts, defining data ownership, access rights, consent requirements, and conditions for sharing or visibility. Together, these documents lay out protections and expectations that ensure partners retain control over their data.



Cadasta's Approach to Data Ownership, Sovereignty and Governance

Cadasta's approach to data ownership, sovereignty and governance is guided by international frameworks and standards, including the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#), [Free, Prior, and Informed Consent \(FPIC\)](#), the [CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance](#), and the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#), among others. These frameworks help ensure ethical data use, transparency, and community-led decision-making while protecting against exploitation and misuse.

While data ownership, data sovereignty, and data governance are closely related, they each address different aspects of how data is controlled and managed. Cadasta recognizes the importance of all three and takes a rights-based, community-centered approach in its partnerships.

Data Ownership

Data ownership refers to who has the legal and moral rights to access, control, and decide how data is used. For Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, as well as other traditional communities who hold land collectively, this often means collective ownership, where data belongs to the community as a whole rather than to individuals or organizations.

Cadasta affirms that data generated through its partnerships belongs to the partner and/or the communities they represent. We do not claim ownership over partner data. Instead, we work to ensure that partners retain full control over how their data is collected, stored, shared, and used. Ownership also means that partners have the right to decide who can access their data and under what conditions.

Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty refers to the rights of partners and the communities they represent, to govern data according to their own laws, customs, and values. It includes the authority to make decisions about how data is collected, managed, and used.

Cadasta supports data sovereignty by respecting and upholding the rights of partners to control their data. This includes aligning with the CARE principles (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, and Ethics), ensuring that data use supports local priorities and aspirations. We view data sovereignty as a key part of self-determination, enabling partners to protect cultural knowledge, assert territorial rights, and steward their lands on their own terms.

Data Governance

Data governance refers to the system of policies, practices, and processes that guide how data is handled - how it is collected, stored, managed, shared, and used responsibly. It provides a structure for managing data that is transparent, accountable, and aligned with community goals.

At Cadasta, we embed strong data governance practices into every project. Our approach is built on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) – meaning that communities must be fully informed and give consent before our partners collect any data. As the key actors in our projects, partners are responsible for managing FPIC processes. That consent should be ongoing and can be withdrawn at any time. We also support community-led governance structures, helping our partners establish their own rules and protocols for managing data, ensuring long-term stewardship and trust.

Cadasta's Data Commitments

At Cadasta, we believe that data should serve the people it represents. As a global organization, we are committed to ensuring that the data our partners collect, manage, and visualize is treated with integrity, respect, and care.

Our five data commitments¹ are the foundation of our approach to responsible data ownership, sovereignty, and governance, reflecting our values and our obligations to uphold the rights, dignity, and sovereignty of the partners with whom we work. They guide how we engage with partners, configure tools and services, and support long-term, community-led stewardship of land and resource information.

If data is to be shared through third parties, it is done only with the clear, informed consent of the partner and in accordance with Cadasta's data protocols. All third-party partners are required to uphold these commitments through formal data-sharing agreements that align with the principles outlined within this document.

Commitment #1: You retain full ownership and control of your data at all times

Cadasta is committed to recognizing and upholding partners' rights to full ownership and sovereignty over their data. Cadasta never claims ownership over data; our role instead is to support our partners in collecting, managing, and using their data through tools, training, and technical assistance.

We clearly define data ownership and governance rights in our agreements with implementing partners to ensure partners retain control. Cadasta operates with full transparency regarding data collection, storage, use, and access, and supports informed consent processes before any data is collected or shared.

Partners are empowered to access, transfer, or delete their data at any time. We also develop clear partnership agreements, aligned with international standards like GDPR and the CARE Principles, to protect against misuse and ensure long-term accountability.

Commitment #2: Your data is used to advance your goals, not anyone else's

At Cadasta, data is used first and foremost to support the goals of our partners and the well-being of the communities that they represent. While projects are often funded by donors who may have reporting requirements, we ensure that any use of data within those frameworks remains consistent with and subordinate to the priorities of our partners. We do not use data for private gain or commercial profit. Any use of data is guided by the consent of our partners and is

¹ A special thanks to Tech Matters' A Better Deal for Data (<https://bd4d.org/>) data governance initiative, which served as the foundation for these commitments.

intended to strengthen the land and resource rights of the communities and people they represent. We align our work with principles of equity, justice, and transparency, ensuring data is never exploited or used in ways that conflict with our partners' interests.

Commitment #3: You decide if, when, and how you want to transfer or delete your data

At any time, partners may request that their data be deleted or transferred off the Cadasta Platform. Cadasta is committed to ensuring partners retain full control over their data, including the right to access it, update it, move it to another platform, or delete it entirely. These rights are central to our approach and are built into our systems and agreements.

Commitment #4: We take strong steps to protect your data and promote responsible stewardship

Cadasta safeguards your data through strong privacy protections, secure storage, and responsible data management. We use access controls and regular audits designed to prevent unauthorized use. Our systems are designed to meet or exceed international privacy standards and comply with applicable data protection laws.

We also recognize that protecting data is a shared responsibility. Cadasta supports partners in adopting responsible data practices and offering guidance on privacy risks and safeguards.

Commitment #5: We do not share your data without your consent

Cadasta never shares partner data unless it has been clearly agreed to in advance through our partnership agreements or on a case by case basis for storytelling or impact reporting. In cases where limited data must be shared, such as with donors, it is never raw data. We only share simplified, generalized summaries for reporting purposes.

We may also publish high-level metrics on our global impact dashboard (e.g., by country and year), but these figures are generalized and contain no identifying metadata or attribution. Our approach ensures that data use remains transparent, respectful, and always under your control.

Cadasta's Data Approach and Methodology

The following outlines the general methodology used to support projects. However, Cadasta recognizes that certain national or regional laws and regulations may impose specific requirements. Accordingly, Cadasta may adapt its methodology as needed to ensure compliance with applicable legal and regulatory frameworks. In jurisdictions with specific data protection, sovereignty, or storage requirements that apply to Cadasta in its role as a data processor, Cadasta will ensure compliance with those requirements while maintaining consistency with the core principles and commitments set out within these guidelines.

To understand how Cadasta supports partners with data collection, management, and visualization, it is important to first understand the Cadasta Platform - what it is, and how it works.

The Cadasta Platform

The Cadasta Platform is a cloud-based geospatial application that enables partners to document, manage, and analyze information about land and resource rights. It allows partners to:

- Collect data through mobile devices (on or offline)
- Visualize data on interactive maps and dashboards
- Generate reports for advocacy, planning, and decision-making
- Access a wide variety of publicly available data layers, satellite imagery, and storytelling tools

The Cadasta Platform is based on Esri technology. Through a Nonprofit Enterprise Agreement with Esri, Cadasta is able to offer the full suite of Esri tools to our partners at a very low cost. Through this agreement, partners working with Cadasta can access powerful, state-of-the-art mapping and analysis tools that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive for many nonprofits and community organizations. Use of these tools is subject to a few simple conditions: data must be used for non-commercial purposes, access is provided in partnership with Cadasta, and partners agree to basic terms of use outlined in a partnership agreement. These conditions help ensure responsible, ethical, and secure use of the technology while maximizing its benefits for community-driven projects.

1. Dialogue and Consent

Cadasta's approach to data is designed to respect the rights of our partners and those they work with, and to prioritize transparency, consent, security, and sustainability. Every project with Cadasta begins with an open dialogue that is critical to ensuring partners understand and shape the path their data will take, from its initial collection, storage, use, and long-term sustainability. During these discussions, Cadasta and the partner collaboratively define the types of data to be collected, the intended purposes for its use, and any sensitivities or restrictions that must be respected.

This stage is also where expectations around data ownership, access, sharing, and control are discussed. Partners have the opportunity to share relevant protocols, customs, and local contexts, while Cadasta will provide partners with an overview of the complete data journey, including tools that will be used, privacy and security measures that will be in place, and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

The importance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is discussed during this phase to ensure that partners are aware of their obligations and that data collection must only proceed with the full and informed agreement of communities and individuals involved. While Cadasta recognizes FPIC as a foundational principle, it is the responsibility of our partners to lead engagement and secure consent. Cadasta will seek to verify the presence of collective FPIC, through partner attestations and supporting documentation, before data collection and sharing.

Agreed upon parameters are then documented within a partnership agreement, which is reviewed and signed before moving to the next step.

2. Data Collection

Cadasta does not collect data. All data collection is managed by the partner. Cadasta offers a suite of tools to support data collection, including mobile applications and customizable digital forms. These tools can be configured to collect various types of information, including land use, traditional knowledge, demographic, socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural data.

Cadasta provides support, guidance, and training to help ensure the tools are used effectively in a way that aligns with community values and priorities.

3. Data Upload and Storage

All collected data is stored on the Cadasta Platform, which is powered by Esri's ArcGIS technology. The Cadasta Platform is a cloud-based geospatial application. That means it is accessible online via the internet rather than installed on a local computer or server. This allows users to document, manage, analyze, and visualize spatial data on interactive maps and dashboards, and generate reports for advocacy, planning, and decision-making. Partners retain full ownership of their data while it is stored on the Cadasta Platform.

Data uploaded to the Cadasta Platform is private by default. It is accessible only by the partner and authorized Cadasta technical staff. Partners maintain full control over who can view or edit data within their project group. Cadasta does not access or use partner data without explicit consent. Where required, Cadasta can assist partners in transitioning to ArcGIS Enterprise. This solution can be deployed as an on-premise system, allowing partners to fully manage their own infrastructure, or as a self-hosted system on a partner's public or private cloud. Both options provide greater control over data storage, security, and server location.

For certain projects, Cadasta utilizes Amazon Web Services (AWS) to host ArcGIS Enterprise solutions on behalf of partners. In these cases, Cadasta is responsible for configuring, managing, and maintaining the server infrastructure, ensuring that it meets security, performance, and availability standards. This includes managing user access, applying software updates, monitoring system performance, and implementing data backup and recovery procedures. AWS has no access to the data, and it is hosted and handled in accordance with Cadasta's data guidelines and partner agreements, with access restricted to authorized users. AWS provides the underlying secure cloud infrastructure, while Cadasta ensures responsible day-to-day administration and protection of partner data within that environment.

4. Data Management

As data is collected, Cadasta works with partners to support their data validation, accuracy checks, and spatial analysis. Cadasta does not review or analyze sensitive data unless consent is provided by the partner.

Metadata is structured information that describes the dataset's content, quality, origin, and other characteristics. To support responsible data management and the usability of data, Cadasta encourages all partners to include metadata for any datasets collected or stored on the Cadasta Platform. It helps users understand what the data represents, how and when it was collected or updated, who created it, and how it can be used.

Typically metadata elements include the dataset's title and description, a date of creation or last update, geographic extent, ownership details, and contact information. It may also specify any restriction of conditions of use. When working with community data, metadata should reflect collective ownership, and acknowledge the communities to whom the data belongs—not just individuals or organizations. Including metadata ensures transparency, supports informed use, and helps safeguard the rights of data contributors.

5. Document Management

While Cadasta encourages partners to use the Cadasta Platform for data collection and storage, we recognize that partners may occasionally want to share existing datasets with us for support, troubleshooting, or integration into ongoing initiatives. In such cases, Cadasta may accept and temporarily store this partner-provided data outside of the Cadasta Platform on our access-controlled Shared Drive, which is hosted on the Google platform.

These files may include documents such as data templates, reports, maps, agreements, and other materials relevant to the partnership. Cadasta is committed to protecting the confidentiality and integrity of all stored files and limits access to authorized team members only. All data is handled with the same level of confidentiality and care as data hosted on the Cadasta Platform. This storage is used only for the duration needed to provide the needed support or agreed-upon tasks, the data may not be used for any purpose beyond the specified request, and access is

limited to relevant Cadasta team members only. Where possible, partners should provide accompanying metadata or documentation to ensure proper handling. Furthermore, any transfer or storage of community-owned data must uphold Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and reflect principles of data sovereignty.

6. Safeguards and Risk Management

Cadasta employs a range of safeguards designed to protect partner data and manage risk.

- **Data Security:** All data stored on the Cadasta Platform is encrypted both in transit and at rest. Access is controlled through role-based permissions that limit access to authorized users only. Each project has its own secure environment, with access granted and managed by the partner. Backups of partner data are created both by Esri and by Cadasta.
- **Infrastructure Standards:** Cadasta's hosting partners - Esri, AWS, and Google, comply with industry data protection standards including SOC 2, ISO 27001, and FedRAMP.
- **Confidentiality and Consent:** Cadasta does not access, analyze, or share partner data without explicit consent. When data is shared externally or used for reporting, it is aggregated or anonymized unless otherwise agreed with the partner.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Cadasta provides partners with training in secure data practices, responsible use of tools, and risk mitigation techniques, including privacy-conscious workflows and data classification.

7. Data Sharing

Cadasta does not share partner data without the explicit consent of the partner. Cadasta may request permission to share high-level, aggregated project metrics (such as number of parcels mapped per country/year) for donor reporting or global dashboards. However, original data is never shared without prior partner review and approval.

Partners determine whether and how data is shared, whether with individual stakeholders, broader groups, or the public. When partners choose to share data, it can be included within interactive web maps, dashboards, storyMaps, printed maps or reports, or any other format determined by the partner.

8. Post-Project Data Management and Transition Support

Once a project is completed, Cadasta works with partners to define their long-term needs and determine what level of ongoing platform access they will continue to need. Partners have a range of options for accessing and managing their data. Some partners may complete shorter-term projects and no longer require access to the Cadasta Platform, while others plan to build and expand their systems over time, requiring extended access. Some partners may also choose to migrate their data to other software platforms as their needs evolve.

To support this transition, Cadasta provides all partners a one-year continued access period at no additional cost, allowing continued use of the Cadasta Platform. During this period, partners receive ongoing access and technical support. After this one-year period, partners may choose to:

- Continue working with Cadasta by selecting a maintenance package;
- Transition to their own ArcGIS Online or Enterprise license; or
- Export their data for use outside the Esri ecosystem, with Cadasta providing assistance upon request.

If no action is taken by the end of the no-cost continued access period, Cadasta will archive the data for one year. After that, if there is no response from the partner, the data may be deleted. Cadasta has never deleted partner data without their knowledge or consent, unless the partner has remained unresponsive throughout the archival period.

Cadasta has outlined these options in greater detail within their Continued Platform Access Modalities, which is available upon request.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Definitions

Attribution	<p>Attribution is the description information associated with spatial features within a Geographic Information System (GIS). It provides details about a feature, such as names, categories, or measurements - and is typically stored within a table that is linked to spatial features.</p>
Data	<p>Data refers to any information collected, created, or used by Cadasta and its partners to document, manage, or support land, resource, and community rights initiatives. This can include maps and spatial data (e.g. boundaries, GPS points, routes), survey responses, photos, videos, audio, community knowledge about land, culture, and governance, demographic information, and environmental data. Data may be digital or non-digital, and can come from a variety of sources, including community members, partner representatives, or government records.</p>
Data Sovereignty	<p>Data sovereignty refers to the rights and control that communities, groups, or nations have over the collection, management, and use of data related to their lands, cultures, and communities. It emphasizes cultural protection, local control, and ethical data sharing based on free, prior, and informed consent. While data sovereignty is supported by frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), it is increasingly recognized as a universal concern. Broader frameworks such as the General Data Protection regulation (GDPR) and the proposed commitments under the Better Deal for Data (BD4D) initiative highlight the importance of ensuring all individuals and communities have authority over their data, including how and where it is stored, accessed, and shared. As digital technologies evolve, data sovereignty helps ensure that data practices reflect local values, protect collective and individual rights, and support self-determination in a rapidly changing world.</p>
Data Governance	<p>Data governance involves the frameworks, policies, and processes for managing data throughout its lifecycle (collection, storage, use, sharing, and archiving). It focuses on defining who has the rights and responsibilities for data at each stage of its lifecycle. For partners, this could mean assigning specific roles for data stewardship, management, and decision-making, while respecting the legal or ethical ownership of data by individuals or communities.</p>

Cadasta Platform	Built on Esri technology, the Cadasta Platform is a cloud-based geospatial application that enables partners to document, manage, and analyze information about land and resource rights. It allows users to collect data through mobile devices (on or offline), visualize it on interactive maps and dashboards, and generate reports for advocacy, planning, and decision-making. The Cadasta Platform also provides partners with access to a wide variety of publicly-available data layers, satellite imagery, and storytelling tools.
Geographic Information System (GIS)	A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a tool that is used for capturing, storing, managing, analyzing, and visualizing spatial data. It combines maps with data to help users understand patterns, relationships, and trends across space and time.
Metadata	Metadata is structured information that describes the content, quality, condition, origin, and other characteristics of a GIS dataset. Metadata helps users understand how, when, and by whom data was collected, processed, and maintained, as well as how it can be used.
Partners	Partners are local, national, or international organizations or institutions that work with Cadasta to document, manage, or protect land, resource, and cultural rights. This includes Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities' (IP and LCs) organizations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, community-based groups, and other stakeholders who collaborate with Cadasta to use data and technology in support of their goals.

Appendix 2: Esri and Google Data Privacy and Security Protocols

Esri

- Esri Privacy Policies: <https://www.esri.com/en-us/privacy/overview>

Google

- Google Privacy Policy: <https://policies.google.com/privacy>

Amazon Web Services

- Data Protection & Privacy at AWS: <https://aws.amazon.com/compliance/data-protection/>

Appendix 3: Frequently Asked Questions

Who owns the data we collect and store with Cadasta?

You, the partner, retain full ownership and control over all data collected and stored through the Cadasta Platform. Cadasta does not claim ownership and will never access, analyze, or share your data without your explicit consent. Ownership also includes the right to request edits, exports, or deletion of your data at any time.

What happens if we want to remove our data from the Cadasta Platform?

You may request that your data be deleted or transferred at any time. Cadasta will respond promptly and ensure the safe return or removal of your data. If no action is taken after the project concludes and the one-year transition period ends, Cadasta will archive the data for one more year. If the partner remains unresponsive, the data may be deleted thereafter.

Will our data be shared publicly or with donors?

No. Cadasta does not share your data without your explicit, documented consent. In certain cases, Cadasta may request to share high-level, aggregated, and non-identifiable metrics (e.g. number of hectares mapped per project/year) for donor reporting or global dashboards, but only with your prior approval.

Where is the data stored and how is it protected?

Data is stored securely on the Cadasta Platform, built on Esri's ArcGIS Online and, in some cases, hosted via Amazon Web Services (AWS) or managed on Google's cloud infrastructure. All data is encrypted in transit and at rest, access is restricted to authorized users, and backups are created both by Esri and Cadasta. These systems comply with international standards such as SOC 2, ISO 27001, and FedRAMP.

How long will our data be kept after a project ends?

After a project concludes, Cadasta provides continued access to the platform for one year at no cost. After that, partners may choose to extend services, transition to an independent hosting solution, or export their data. If no action is taken, Cadasta will archive the data for one more year. If there is no response during this period, the data may be deleted, but never without reasonable efforts to contact the partner.

What are our responsibilities regarding consent and privacy?

You are responsible for obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from community members before collecting any data. This includes ensuring that consent is voluntary, informed, culturally appropriate, and can be withdrawn at any time. Cadasta supports you in meeting these responsibilities by providing tools, training, and guidance, and will seek to verify the presence of collective FPIC, through partner attestations and supporting documentation, before data collection and sharing.

Can we use our own data protocols and standards?

Yes. Cadasta encourages partners to apply their own governance protocols and community-defined standards, especially when working with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. All partner agreements are tailored to reflect your specific needs, values, and legal frameworks, while aligning with CARE and FPIC principles.

What kind of training and support will be received?

Cadasta provides partners with hands-on training, user-friendly tools, and ongoing technical support. This includes guidance on ethical data collection, use of digital tools (e.g, Survey123, Field Maps), workflows, metadata standards, risk mitigation strategies, and sustainable data stewardship.