Australian Government
Department of Finance

Data sharing for data requesters

Factsheet

Overview

The Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) commits all jurisdictions to share public sector data as a default position, where it can be done securely, safely, lawfully and ethically.

This factsheet provides guidance for the agency, policy officer or data practitioner requesting data from another government agency. It provides suggestions on what to consider before making a request for data. It outlines a typical approach – where your data project relates to highly sensitive data, further steps may be required.

As a data requester, the IGA specifies that any decision by a data custodian to decline access to data should be communicated clearly to you as soon as practicable.

For data requests sent to any or many Australian Government Data Custodians the Dataplace platform can be used to make and manage data requests.

Dataplace is available to connect organisations seeking government data with Commonwealth agencies. Organisations using Dataplace can submit a data request and manage data sharing agreements with Commonwealth agencies, as well as obtain accreditation from the Office of the National Data Commissioner to support safer and more transparent data sharing practices using the DATA Scheme.

Before Requesting Data From a Data Custodian

1 Define the problem your data project is trying to address

Describe the question you want to answer, the outcome you want to achieve, and what types of data may inform the project. There may be data that can inform your research from sources you initially did not consider or know existed.

It is important to demonstrate that your data project will deliver a benefit to the public. Providing upfront information on how you intend to use data (via a use case) will assist the data custodian to understand the problem, potential data sources, and whether they are suitable to inform your project. The use case can include which data variables are most useful to your project (for example, data about geography or cohort). It should also include the period that the data needs to cover, the frequency required, and what analysis you propose to do to derive meaning from the data.

2 Check whether relevant data is already publicly available

Is the data you need available from an open data portal or government agency website? In addition to open published data, government agencies are increasingly publishing information about their data holdings on their websites.

Data requesters may conduct a systemic literature review of similar research to identify analogous datasets and the types of data necessary and agencies that might already hold this data.

Open data resources include:

- Commonwealth - https://data.gov.au/
- NSW - https://www.data.nsw.gov.au/
- Victoria - https://www.data.vic.gov.au/
- Queensland - https://www.data.qld.gov.au/
- Western Australia - https://data.wa.gov.au/
- South Australia - https://data.sa.gov.au/
- Tasmania - https://www.thelist.tas.gov.au/app/content/data
- ACT - https://www.data.act.gov.au/
- Northern Territory - https://data.nt.gov.au/

3 Check for an agency-specific data 'front door'

Identifying the data you need may require investigating government websites or contacting agencies through their data entry points. Some agencies require data requesters to provide structured information (e.g. through a web form) to help assess the request, other agencies may accept a general request. The more project information you can provide up-front, the easier it will be for a data custodian to assess your request.

4 Check for data held by statistics agencies

Another way of searching for relevant data is through statistics agencies. Some agencies provide open access to some data, with other data can be made available following an approved application and appropriate controls being put in place.

For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) contains health, education, government payments, income and taxation, and employment data. To access this data, the requesting agency needs to have a Responsible Officer Undertaking in place, along with individual employee approval to access.

Here are a few data sources to consider:

- ABS Stat Data Explorer (BETA)
- ABS Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA)
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data collections

5 Check data transfer mechanism, security, storage and access requirements

Where possible, contemporary methods of data transfer and access will be made available in real time through automated processes, such as Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and secure data access environments.

APIs are used to build services across government that talk to each other and provide access to data or functionality in ways that are secure and efficient.

6 Check data archiving and disposal requirements

At the end of the data life cycle, when shared data that is no longer required needs to be archived or destroyed, you will need to check the Data Sharing Agreement for any requirements on you as the data recipient. This may include giving notice to the data custodian that all copies of data have been destroyed following completion of a data project.

More information

The IGA is available online at https://federation.gov.au/about/agreements/intergovernmental-agreement-data-sharing.

If you have any questions about the Intergovernmental Agreement on Data Sharing, please contact the Department of Finance at ddmm@finance.gov.au.

NOTE: The information in this fact sheet is to be used as a guide only. Advice should be sought in relation to individual circumstances.