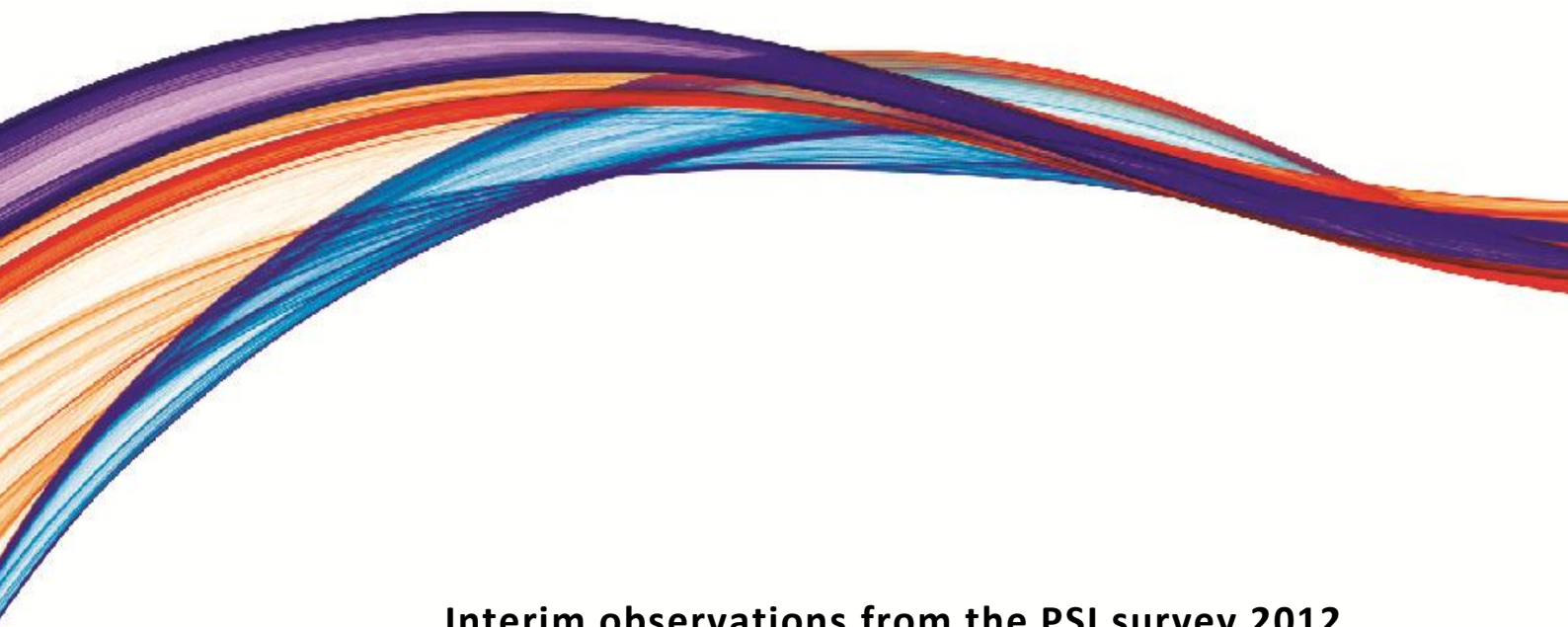**Australian Government**

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Open public sector information: government in transition
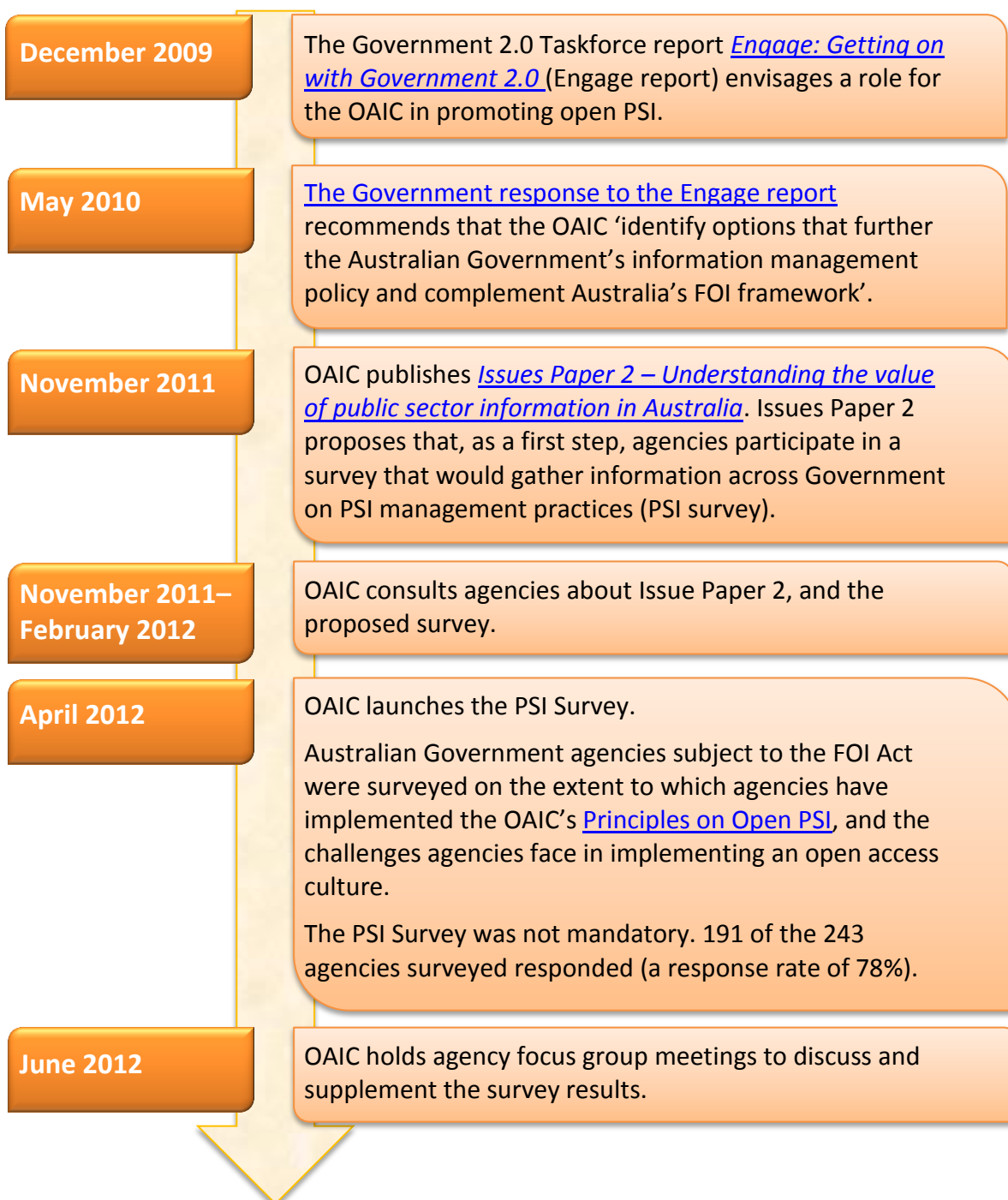
August 2012

Interim observations from the PSI survey 2012

Open public sector information: government in transition

The OAIC is currently examining how Australian Government agencies manage public sector information (PSI).

Background

December 2009	The Government 2.0 Taskforce report *Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0* (Engage report) envisages a role for the OAIC in promoting open PSI.
May 2010	[The Government response to the Engage report](#) recommends that the OAIC 'identify options that further the Australian Government's information management policy and complement Australia's FOI framework'.
November 2011	OAIC publishes *Issues Paper 2 – Understanding the value of public sector information in Australia*. Issues Paper 2 proposes that, as a first step, agencies participate in a survey that would gather information across Government on PSI management practices (PSI survey).
November 2011–February 2012	OAIC consults agencies about Issue Paper 2, and the proposed survey.
April 2012	OAIC launches the PSI Survey. Australian Government agencies subject to the FOI Act were surveyed on the extent to which agencies have implemented the OAIC's [Principles on Open PSI](#), and the challenges agencies face in implementing an open access culture. The PSI Survey was not mandatory. 191 of the 243 agencies surveyed responded (a response rate of 78%).
June 2012	OAIC holds agency focus group meetings to discuss and supplement the survey results.

Open PSI – what are agencies doing well?

The preliminary PSI survey results confirm that Australian Government agencies are embracing an open access and proactive disclosure culture. Work is underway in most agencies to make a greater amount of information easily discoverable and available via the web.

The transition to an open information culture is most successful when built on three elements – agency leadership, officer innovation and community engagement.

Some things are in place. Having said that though, compared to a year ago, there's a lot of buy-in and drive, but we're not quite there yet. We're on our way.

1/2 agencies reported that they have mechanisms for consulting with the community about what information to publish

top down -- active leadership to promote open PSI

2/5 agencies reported that they use social media to publish public sector information

community input on how to improve agency information practices
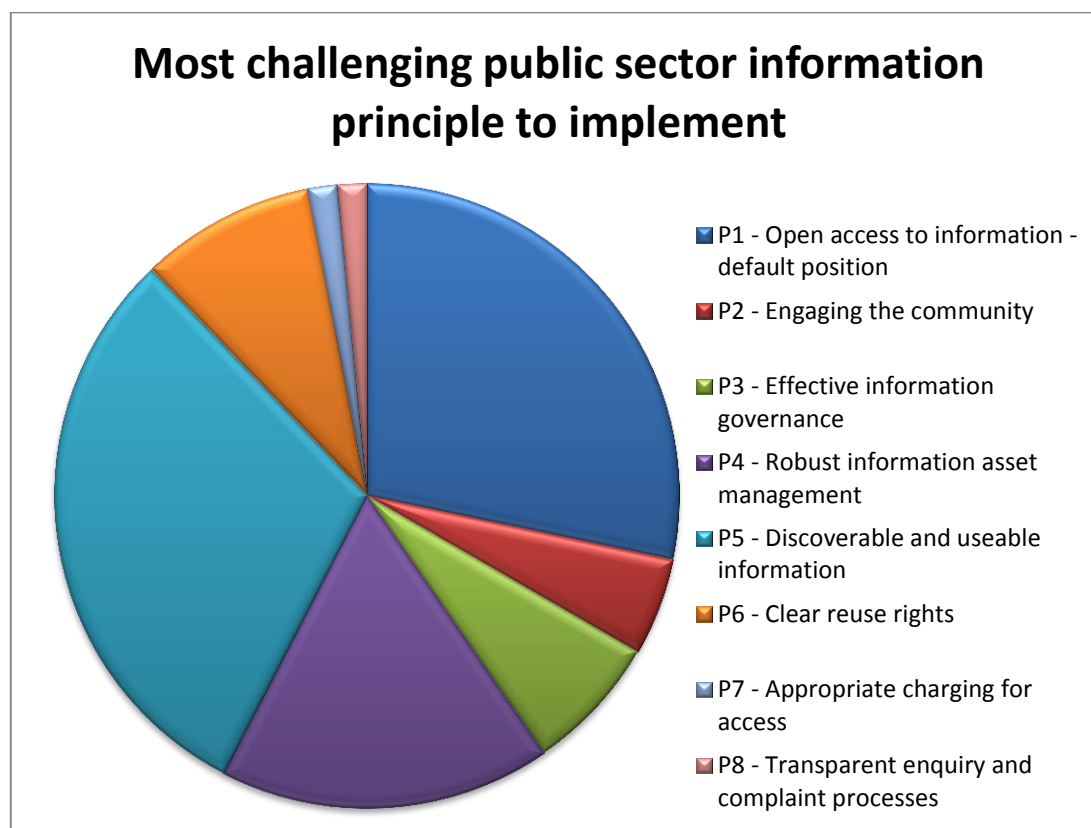
Agencies that are experiencing success

… the PSI Survey was fantastic for starting the conversation. Since the survey we have put together a committee to look at issues including appointment of an information champion

bottom up -- agency staff drive innovation for open PSI

We need to work collectively—[open government] is an agency wide issue. We cannot pass it all to one section of the department.

… the top down push is vital to ensure that change occurs

Open PSI – what challenges do agencies face?

Most challenging public sector information principle to implement

Agencies were asked which public sector information principle was the most challenging to implement:

- 30 per cent of agencies identified that the most challenging principle was Principle 5: Discoverable and useable information.

- 28 per cent of agencies identified Principle 1: Open access to information – a default position and

- 17 per cent identified Principle 4: Robust information asset management.

The OAIC invited agencies to provide detail about why these particular principles were challenging to implement. Agencies advised that there were number of interrelated reasons:

- existing systems for record keeping and information release are not designed for the new era of open PSI

- open PSI systems don't apply across the agency; information is held and managed differently across branches and locations

- transitioning to open access and proactive publication requires cultural change, including more active sponsorship of this philosophy by agency leaders

- much of the information held by agencies is in legacy documents that must be reformatted for digital publication

- agencies lack the technical specialisation and capacity to implement open PSI

- agencies have identified information that is *required* to be published under the Information Publication Scheme, but have not been as successful in identifying other information that can be published

- budgetary restrictions limit the capacity of agencies to implement an open PSI culture.

Open PSI – what assistance do agencies need?

Making information more discoverable and applying metadata

Two out of five agencies do not routinely apply metadata to the information they publish. Lack of technical capacity in the agency may be a big factor.

Complying with WCAG 2.0

Almost a quarter of respondents find compliance with WCAG 2.0 a challenging issue. A major area of difficulty is in converting special categories of information into an accessible text format (e.g. images, maps, dynamic content such as radar captures). Lack of technical expertise and the inherent difficulty in translating images to text are also contributing factors.

Adopting open licensing

Fewer than 1 in 10 agencies have a default position of releasing data under open licensing terms that facilitate public reuse. Agencies question the adequacy of the Creative Commons licence.

I know we should be doing better but I don't know what exactly we should be doing.

What next?

The OAIC will continue to analyse the PSI survey results and feedback obtained from the focus groups.

The OAIC will release a full report on the PSI Survey and focus group discussions in **November 2012.** The full report will make recommendations about how to address the specific problems and impediments identified by agencies.