



## Open data quick wins — getting the most out of agency publications

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Releasing government data in open and reusable formats advances the objects of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) and the *Principles on open public sector information* (PSI Principles) published by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC). A core theme in both documents is that government information should be managed as a national resource that is made available for public reuse.

This resource outlines steps your agency can take to ensure that information it publishes is converted to an open data format that supports reuse by others.

### □ Understand what open data is

Put briefly, open data is data that is freely-available, easily-discoverable, accessible and published in formats and under licences that allow reuse. Open data may be available in other forms that do not meet those standards. For example, data published in a PDF file with all rights reserved is less open than data in a spread sheet file published under a Creative Commons BY licence on [data.gov.au](http://data.gov.au), the Australian Government's whole-of-government data platform. See [data.gov.au](http://data.gov.au) for more advice about open data.

### □ Assess upcoming agency publications, websites, mobile apps and other agency information resources to identify datasets suitable for release as open data

Consider whether upcoming publications contain information that is suitable for release in an open data format. Many government reports include agency data about financial, economic, social or regulatory activity or trends, or present data in formats unsuited to reuse (such as publishing tabular data in a PDF file rather than a reusable spread sheet format). Often the underlying raw data could be released alongside the report in a reusable open data format.

For example, as part of the budget process the Government now publishes [financial data from the portfolio budget statements](#) in a reusable format on [data.gov.au](http://data.gov.au) in addition to the statements themselves which are available on departmental websites.

This approach can also work for agency websites and mobile apps that present information to the public. For example, the Department of Human Services' (DHS) [Service Locator](#) tool allows people to find their nearest Centrelink, Medicare or Child Support location. DHS released the [raw Service Locator geospatial data](#) on [data.gov.au](http://data.gov.au). This makes the data available to the public to build their own apps using the data. Another example is the Department of Finance's release of [historical government contract data](#) from the [AusTender](#) website on [data.gov.au](http://data.gov.au).

Agencies can also assess whether any material they have already published online in publications, websites or apps is suitable for release as open data. This could include material published as part of the FOI Act Information Publication Scheme or in an agency disclosure log.

## □ Ensure you will have access to the raw data and the right to publish it

Effective information governance (PSI Principle 3) will help you ensure that your agency has access to the raw data that was used to create existing publications or apps.

When commissioning research, collecting data or establishing a new ICT system, adopt information management and procurement practices that ensure you have access to associated raw data in an open format and the right to publish that data online under an open licence. This is important if a service provider is contracted to collect the data or to develop a website or mobile app built on an agency data source.

## □ Prepare, publish and refine

As noted in the Australian Government [Web Guide](#), once the data is ready to publish in an open format, the agency should:

- prepare appropriate metadata to accompany the dataset, to ensure the data is discoverable and meaningful to the public
- publish the data in an appropriate place, such as the agency website, data.gov.au, or an existing domain-specific collection or catalogue repository.

You should also consider how to refine your approach so that the data (or subsequent releases of equivalent data) remains relevant and useful in future. This could include engaging with stakeholders, assessing how the data was reused and considering whether the data should be presented in a different format or made accessible in different ways (for example, through an application programming interface or API that allows programmers to easily reuse the data).

## □ Next steps: releasing unpublished data

Consider whether your agency has unpublished data that could be released as open data.

Agencies wishing to convert or release previously unpublished data should first consider legislative and policy requirements that may prevent publication or require modification of the data before release.

In particular, you should consider obligations under the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) in the *Privacy Act 1988*. Guidance about the Privacy Act is available in the OAIC's [APP Guidelines](#). In addition, the OAIC's [Information Policy Agency Resource 1 — De-identification of data and information](#) discusses de-identification as a technique that allows agencies to balance privacy and transparency objectives when publishing open data.

**The information provided in this resource is of a general nature. It is not a substitute for legal advice.**

## For further information

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**Information policy agency resource 2: Open data quick wins — getting the most out of agency publications**