

FACT SHEET – Open data: where’s the benefit?

This fact sheet provides information about the value and benefits of open data, to inform agencies implementing the WA Whole of Government Open Data Policy.

Government agencies collect and manage a vast array of data. It covers almost all aspects of life in Western Australia including the economy, performance of police, hospitals and schools, climate, location of Government services and facilities, land zoning and use, native flora and fauna and local history.

Who benefits from opening up Government data?

Opening up public sector data benefits both the Government and the community. The initial investment in adopting new platforms and processes has considerable value for the public sector, assisting knowledge-sharing between agencies and reducing duplication of work.

However, it also benefits the State’s businesses, individuals, and not-for-profit organisations, cutting through red tape and creating opportunities for new businesses and services.

What are the benefits?

Current estimates of the potential value of open government data in Australia range into the tens of billions of dollars per annum. For example, in 2013, it was estimated that the transport and education sectors alone could see over \$30 billion in increased economic value each year as a consequence of open data, with a further \$30 billion increase across the consumer products, energy, health, and finance sectors.¹

But where does this value come from? Much of it has to do with improving the way Government services are designed and delivered, and in general, having the data and tools to make better decisions. The examples in this fact sheet illustrate just a few of the potential applications of open public sector data.

Case studies

Transport for NSW: reducing the cost of delivering Government services²

The New South Wales Government has equipped Sydney buses, trains, and ferries with GPS technology that provide an open, real-time data stream. To promote the release and increase public engagement, Transport for NSW ran a competition to develop an app that used the stream. To-date, developers have created a range of mobile apps that inform users about the availability and timeliness of transport services.

¹ N. Gruen, *Open for Business: How Open Data Can Help Achieve the G20 Growth Target*, Melbourne, Lateral Economics commissioned by the Omidyar Network, 2014.

² NSW Office of Finance and Statistics, *Open Government in NSW: ICT Board Report*, Sydney, Government of New South Wales, 2014.

These community-driven services were developed at minimal cost to the Government, greatly improve customer service, and are able to rapidly change and develop in response to consumer needs.

The UK Open Source Innovation Lab and GovHack Perth: new and creative uses of data

The UK's Open Source Innovation Lab used the Ordnance Survey (the UK's national mapping authority) open data to build a detailed map of Great Britain in the world-building game, Minecraft. The map is freely available to the game's 33 million users – many of whom are primary and secondary students – and can be used in schools as a teaching tool. With easy access to open data, the developers were able to create the map in only two weeks.³

In the same way, participants at last year's GovHack Perth event delivered innovative, working projects in a very short timeframe. In just two days, open Government data allowed teams to map, model and analyse Perth's crime and traffic, create educational games and tools and even invent a new approach to combining and sharing datasets across different agencies.

theyvoteforyou.org: a not-for-profit uses Parliamentary data to drive transparency⁴

The website theyvoteforyou.org, built by the OpenAustralia Foundation, uses open data from Federal Parliament to give Australians real-time information about how their Members of Parliament vote on various issues. Citizens can search by their postcode or a MP's name and see how the MP voted on each issue before Parliament. More informatively, it also bundles similar issues to let users assess an MP's general stance, reports their attendance, and shows how often (and on what issues) an MP votes against their party's policy.

Sense-T: cross-sector collaboration, innovation, and better decision-making⁵

The Sense-T resource management initiative in Tasmania brings together government, the University of Tasmania, CSIRO, and IBM to develop tools for the agriculture sector. Together, they have established a state-wide sensor network that collects real-time information data on crops, livestock, water, weather, and even farm equipment. This information allows consumers, farmers, and Government to make more informed choices about food, water management, and resource planning.

³ Ordnance Survey, <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/blog/2013/09/minecraft-creating-a-map-of-great-britain/>, 'Minecraft: Creating a map of Great Britain', 2014, (accessed 16 March 2015).

⁴ OpenAustralia Foundation, <https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/> (accessed 16 March 2015).

⁵ University of Tasmania, <http://www.sense-t.org.au/foundation-report>, 'Sense-T 2012-2014', 2014, (accessed 16 March 2015).



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Along with forecasts, the real-time information will be released with an API (Application Programming Interface) that allows entrepreneurs to develop tools and apps using Sense-T's platform.

Public sector efficiency: making it easier for public servants to do their jobs well

Every day, Western Australian Government employees spend time transcribing data from PDF documents, recalculating and reformatting information, and trying to track down the right people in another agency to make a data request. Often basic data is hard to find, or in the wrong format. Opening up this data, making it easier to find, and releasing it in an accessible format allows for better decision-making, smarter (and easier) analysis, and more efficient service delivery. Even better, publishing data with a common structure makes it quick and easy to link and compare data from a variety of agencies, and combine it to draw more informed conclusions (and so, make better decisions).