

Open Government Partnership National Action Plan - Australia

Submission to Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

This submission was prepared by Amanda Lawrence, on behalf of APO apo.org.au and the APO Advisory Group

18 November 2016

The submission may be published online.

Introduction

Australian Policy Online (APO) is award-winning, multidisciplinary, research infrastructure specialising in policy and practice grey literature and data from Australia, New Zealand and around the world. APO currently addresses some of the research infrastructure needs for collecting and analysing policy and practice related research resources but is severely limited by the limited scale of its operations and an insecure funding model.

APO currently hosts 38,000 records including commissioned reports, discussion papers, working papers, briefings, conference papers, evaluations, case studies, data sets, infographics, audio and video, and links to websites and other databases and research tools. APO features the work of over 4,000 organisations and 16,000 authors. It is able to mint DOIs for documents and data, integrates with Orcid and Datacite, is interoperable with Trove and other databases via OAIPMH and APIs, and by early 2017 will include a CKAN datastore, linked data relationships and visualisations and some capacity for automated indexing using text mining tools.

APO is a not-for-profit organisation that has been sustained by a variety of institutional supporters, grants, partnerships and advertising since it was established by Swinburne Institute for Social Research in 2002. APO has been awarded multiple ARC Linkage Infrastructure and Equipment Grants (LIEF) grants, most recently in 2016, and two ANDS grants. Partner organisations include: Swinburne University of Technology, the University of South Australia, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Henry Halloran Trust, University of Sydney, University of Canberra, University of Melbourne, RMIT University, Victoria University of Wellington, the Internet Archive and the National Library of Australia.

This submission is made with the support of the APO Advisory Group:

- Mr Glenn Campbell, Business Manager, ANZSOG
- Prof Jago Dodson, Director, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University
- Prof Gerard Goggin, Director, Department of Media and Communications, University of Sydney
- Prof Denise Meredyth, Pro Vice Chancellor, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, University of South Australia
- Prof Peter Phibbs, Director, Henry Halloran Trust, University of Sydney
- Assoc Prof Ellie Rennie, Deputy Director, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology
- Prof Julian Thomas (Chair), Director, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology
- Assoc. Prof Jerry Watkins, Director, News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra
- Mr Derek Whitehead, Chair of the Australian Digital Alliance

The OGP Australian National Action Plan

APO strongly supports the OGP process and commends the Australian Government for joining the initiative. Amanda Lawrence is a member of the Australian OGP Civil Society Network and has participated in various public forums, the wiki suggestion process and the workshop in Canberra earlier this year.

APO welcomes the publication of the draft National Action Plan and the opportunity to suggest areas for improvement. We also endorse the submission made by the Steering Committee of the OGP Network.

Draft Plan overall

Overall we endorse the five main areas being addressed, understanding that this is just the first round of measures and that further projects and more ambitious goals will be part of future plans.

- Transparency and accountability in business
- Open data and digital transformation
- Access to government information
- Integrity in the public sector
- Public Participation and Engagement

We are concerned that the justification for undertaking the OGP process may seem pointless with too much emphasis on how well we are already doing. There is no doubt that there are very many areas for improvement in Australia's public administration and governance - which is not to deny the hard work and commitment of all those already engaged in this work.

It is essential that the necessity for the OGP process and the aim to improve transparency and public management is strongly endorsed and promoted to the Australian people to help them understand the importance of this initiative and to engage with.

We endorse the position of the Steering Group of the Civil Society network in their submission that "The plan should clearly and confidently state that open government is pursued by Australia because it is in our national economic, environmental and social interests."

Open data and digital transformation

The Government will advance our commitments to make government data open by default and to digitally transform government services.

- Release high-value datasets and enable data-driven innovation
- Build and maintain public trust to address concerns about data sharing
- Digitally transform the delivery of government services

Comments

It would be useful to have a definition of data and to also consider that ways in which data and other types of information - documents, records, images etc - produced by government also need to be made public and properly managed. An integrated approach to information management should be the aim.

'High value' is poorly defined and an unsuitable criteria for decisions on open data release.

It would be sensible to redefine this commitment around meeting the Public Data Policy Statement, with government agencies required to undertake a data inventory and publicly publish a list of all their non-sensitive data sets, together with a release timetable, centrally through data.gov.au (as suggested in the detail of the commitment). This would present members of the public, interest groups, companies and other agencies with the opportunity to specifically request changes in the release timeframes based on their perceptions of 'high value'.

The final form of this commitment should be informed by the observations in the Draft Report issued by the Productivity Commission about impediments to release of datasets.

Access to government information

The Government will improve and modernise the way in which the public accesses government information.

- Information Management and access laws for the 21st century
- Understand the use of freedom of information
- Improve the discoverability and accessibility of government data and information

Comments

This should also take into account the need for fair use principles in intellectual property laws and the findings of the Productivity Commission draft report on IP reform and the final report yet to be released publicly. Copyright is a key issue preventing effective management of public information including data, documents and other resources.

The concept of what is information needs to include all forms of documents and data produced by government not only data. Access and management of government documents is a huge issue for many inside and outside of government with poor practices and lack of systems and infrastructure. 'Government by google' is not an effective way to provide discoverability and accessibility to government data and information given a great deal of material is removed from online access over time.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute and we look forward to supporting the plans and actions over the next two years.

Amanda Lawrence
APO.org.au