Expression of interest re Open Government Forum

Dr Fiona Tweedie ███████████████████████████████████████

I am writing to express my interest in joining the Open Government Forum as a civil society representative. I have a longstanding connection with and enthusiasm for the Open Government movement. My interest was initially sparked in 2010, when I worked at the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) and was involved in responding to several of the recommendations of the Government 2.0 taskforce. I came to believe there that a more open and collaborative relationship between government and citizens could only benefit both parties. I became actively involved with Open Knowledge Australia in 2013 and in 2014 I was invited to attend the Asia Pacific meeting of the Open Government Partnership in Indonesia and to speak there on the work that Open Knowledge was doing building better connections between government and civil society in the open data context. I learned a huge amount at this meeting and was inspired by the commitment and drive of the community.

My primary area of expertise in relation to the first action plan lies in open data and access to government information. At the OAIC, I ran a consultation on access to data and led the development of their Principles on Open Public Sector Information. I put theory into practice in my subsequent role at the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), where I oversaw the publication of the charities register as open data and ran GovHack in Melbourne in 2013 and 2014. I have first-hand experience in publishing data as open data and strong connections to the data reuse community. Open Government, however, is a much bigger than open data and access to government is a critical pillar in the action plan. If there is to be a healthy relationship between government and civil society, I believe strongly that trust and respect on both sides is essential. Reassuring the community that government is not a black box and making it easy for them to engage is important work. There has been a significant loss of trust in government, and especially in its fitness to handle the community's data, following episodes such as the 2016 census and Centrelink Robodebt campaign. The Australian Government has much work to do, and engaging with openness and good faith will be essential to building a more positive relationship. Given my background in managing consultations, I believe I could contribute positively to this stream of work.

I have extensive experience in community engagement and am confident working with groups in forums ranging from formal presentations to informal discussions. Between 2013 and 2016, I was an organiser of Open Knowledge Melbourne, and ran weekly meetups which ranged from guest speakers to workshops to major hackathons. Thanks to this work, I have extensive connections with the open data community in Melbourne and nationally. In 2014 and 2015, I worked as a community engagement manager at the University of Melbourne. There, I was responsible for working with researchers to identify their technology needs and provide trainings. I was fortunate to join the Software Carpentry community as an instructor and from there meet many of the passionate individuals and groups who work in open source technology and advocate for open and reproducible research. I maintain links with the Open Science, Digital Humanities, and Libraries and Archives communities in Melbourne and beyond.

I have worked both in and with government and have had practice in negotiating and building consensus. As mentioned above, I have worked at both the ACNC and OAIC. In my current role as a consultant with Deloitte, I work with public sector organsiations to develop and implement better practices in information management. In my roles with Open Knowledge Australia and the University of Melbourne, I also have experience of working with government as a funding partner and designing activities that will further the strategic aims of both parties.

I am excited to put forward this expression of interest as I believe that there is a real and pressing need to reformulate the relationship between government and the community so as to enhance public trust and confidence but also to encourage government to take a more collaborative approach to their dealings with the community.