

What is open government data?

Open government data is:

- data produced or commissioned by government
- that anyone can freely access, use, modify, and share for any purpose (see the Open Definition).

“Open data is data that anyone can access, use or share. Simple as that. When big companies or governments release non-personal data, it enables small businesses, citizens and ... researchers to develop resources which make crucial improvements to their communities.” – Open Data Institute

Open Data Principles

A number of organisations have developed open data principles to help governments and other organisations publish their data. These principles have been evolving since the mid-2000s. For researchers interested in a detailed examination of the various open data principles, we have linked to our sources below. However, for those seeking a summary, here are the common features of the various principles:

Open data is ...

Accessible in a downloadable format that is easily machine-readable (For example .csv files are preferred over .pdf). It should be possible to process the data using free or open source software.

In the **public domain** or **licensed** in a way that allows it to be reused, shared, modified and mixed with other datasets.

Available to everyone and is not restricted to certain groups or certain purposes. For example, data should be available equally for commercial and non-commercial use.

Other good practices include:

Releasing complete data

This doesn't mean the data must be perfect. Instead, this is about releasing raw data where possible (e.g. where the data doesn't relate to personal information).

Having a standard structure with metadata

This will help ensure the data is described properly so it can be easily identified and analysed correctly.

Making provision for updates (automated where possible)

Automated updates not only save time for government. They also ensure the data remains as current and useful as possible.

Open Data Charter

In July 2013, G8 leaders signed the G8 Open Data Charter, which outlined a set of five core open data principles. The Charter was developed within a broad participatory process which actively engaged governments and civil society from around the world.

The Charter has recently been refreshed in consultation with open data experts from governments, multilateral organisations and the private sector. The end result is the new 2015 Charter containing the following six principles:

- Open by Default;
- Timely and Comprehensive;
- Accessible and Useable;
- Comparable and Interoperable;
- For Improved Governance and Citizen Engagement; and
- For Inclusive Development and Innovation.

The Charter will be substantively reviewed after two years. It is intended as a living document.

Open Data and Local Government

So far, the release of open data by Victorian councils has tended to focus on geospatial data. However, open data can also encompass areas such as cultural heritage, research and statistics, budgetary and environmental information, some of which may not have a clear geospatial component. The open council data toolkit will help local councils to progressively branch out into some of these areas.