National Action Plan

Australia’s National Action Plan

The Open Government

Partnership

2016-18

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**Foreword by the Australian Government**

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**Introduction**

Australia has a long and proud history of open government. Now, as a digitally literate nation in a rapidly advancing technological environment, it must grasp the opportunity to build on its past efforts. Joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) is an important step in this direction.

The four key pillars of the OGP – transparency, accountability, participatory democracy and technological innovation – are well-aligned with the principles articulated in Australia’s 2010 Declaration of Open Government:

* **Informing**: strengthening citizen’s rights of access to information, establishing a pro-disclosure culture across Australian Government agencies including through online innovation, and making government information more accessible and usable;
* **Engaging**: collaborating with citizens on policy and service delivery to enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought; and
* **Participating**: making government more consultative and participative.

***Why does Open Government matter?***

Making government data, information and processes openly available improves public trust, stimulates economic growth, and holds government to account. Additionally, open government can foster fruitful collaboration between the public sector, private organisations and civil society. This kind of engagement facilitates resilience and responsiveness in the face of change, allowing the government to leverage community expertise in pursuit of better outcomes.

***What is Australia’s vision for Open Government?***

Australia’s National Action Plan will predominantly focus on two of the OGP’s Grand Challenges: “Improving public services” and “More effectively managing public resources.” Australia already has a strong tradition of accountability and public safety, and whilst there is always more work to be done, the opportunities for greatest impact lie in empowering the citizen by streamlining services and managing public resources, particularly through efficient data access.

In accordance with OGP principles, the commitments outlined in the following pages build on our solid foundation of transparency, accountability, participatory democracy and technological innovation. They have been developed alongside key civil society and public stakeholders to ensure their relevance beyond government. Drafted through a process of online and in-person collaboration, this National Action Plan reflects Australia’s ambitious open government agenda for the next two years and beyond.

***Overseeing the delivery of the National Action Plan***

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will design a mechanism for overseeing the delivery of the 2016 National Action Plan. This will be established with the cooperation of the civil society organisations and members who participated in the drafting process, along with representatives from Government Agencies involved in the delivery of commitments, and the States/Territories as identified.

Once this group is established, its leadership’s responsibilities will include

* Clearly defining further roles and responsibilities, participation and define schedules for meeting and reporting;
* Publicising progress on commitments, including all reporting to OGP as necessary;
* Co-ordinating the self-assessment process, any Government involvement in the Independent Reporting Mechanism, encouraging participation in Working Groups and developing peer to peer learning opportunities though the OGP;
* Designing, executing and reviewing input from future consultation and collaboration processes;
* Developing and implementing future National Action Plans, building on the work completed through the 2016 National Action Plan process; and
* Promoting the development of Open Government Activities in Australia.

**Efforts to date**

Australia has a proud history of open government, and has already taken significant strides towards government transparency and civic participation.

***Declaration of Open Government***

The Australian Government launched a Declaration of Open Government in 2010. It also fully adopted the recommendations of *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration*, a report which emphasised the need to create a more open government.

***Open reporting***

All Australian Government entities are required to produce and publish their annual reports, budgets, contracts and a variety of other reporting requirements for the purposes of oversight and transparency. The mandate for this is under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

Similarly, reporting on federal budgets, bills and legislation is published, alongside all Parliamentary transcripts, tabled documents, Committee work, and more.

***Freedom of information***

The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) was established in 2010 under the new *Australian Information Commissioner Act 2010*. Over the course of the next four years, the *Freedom of Information Act (1982)* was updated. These reforms make it easier for the public to request access to information and require agencies to proactively publish information.

The 2010 reforms to *the Freedom of Information Act* included the introduction of the Information Publication Scheme (IPS) which requires Australian Government agencies subject to the FOI Act to provide a broad range of information on their websites.

Decisions made under the Archives Act (for preserving and conserving the archives of the Commonwealth) have also been impacted, with a resulting reduction in the period of time in which the FOI Act applies for access to Commonwealth documents.  The open access period for Commonwealth records (except for Cabinet notebooks and census information) will be reduced from 30 years to 20 years over a 10 year period commencing from 1 November 2010.

***Whistle-blower protections***

Whistle-blower protections in Australia were significantly improved by the 2013 *Public Interest Disclosure Act* which officially commenced on 15 January 2014. The stated purpose of the Act *is to facilitate disclosure and investigation of wrongdoing and maladministration in the Commonwealth public sector, and for other purposes*. Under the Act, those who disclose wrongdoing in the public sector can expect that their case will be properly managed, appropriate action will be taken, and that they will receive protection from reprisal and immunity from criminal, civil and administrative liability.

***Adoption of Creative Commons***

To accommodate access to government information and bring consistency to licensing arrangements, the public service adopted Creative Commons Attribution 3.0.

***Public Data Policy Statement***

The data held by the Australian Government is a strategic national resource that holds considerable value for growing the economy, improving service delivery and transforming policy outcomes for the Nation.

The Australian Government, in recognising the importance of effectively managing this national resource for the benefit of the Australian people, has committed to optimise the use and reuse of public data; to release non-sensitive data as open by default; and to collaborate with the private and research sectors to extend the value of public data for the benefit of the Australian public.

Public data includes all data collected by government entities for any purposes including; government administration, research or service delivery. Non-sensitive data is anonymised data that does not identify an individual or breach privacy or security requirements.

***Data.gov.au***

Data.gov.au is an online portal, established in 2010, to centralise access to appropriately anonymised, government data. It facilitates citizen access and reuse of public datasets. In addition to providing access to a catalogue of available datasets, the portal houses a toolkit containing a wide range of resources on open data.

Since its inception, the number of discoverable datasets has grown from approximately 500 to over 7,000.

To deliver the Public Data Statement, Australian Government entities will publish appropriately anonymised government data on or linked through data.gov.au for discoverability and availability.

Among the many public sector datasets now available under open data terms is a national geocoded address file. The open release of this highly sought after file will remove barriers to greater use of the data and unlock and create opportunities for industry innovation and competitiveness.

***Digital Transformation Office***

The Digital Transformation Office (DTO) was established in July 2015 and is part of the Prime Minister’s portfolio. Its mission is to lead the transformation of government services to deliver a better experience for all Australians.

The DTO itself works as an incubator helping to develop an environment – including the method, culture and talent – that supports rapid service transformation.

To achieve this, the DTO is building digital expertise and capabilities across government agencies, helping to create a world-class public service and a world-leading digital economy.

Its priorities are to deliver projects that demonstrate the best ways to achieve rapid transformation, to improve in-house digital capabilities in government agencies, and establish common platforms to make government more efficient.

***Senate Estimates***

At least two times each year, estimates of proposed annual expenditure of government agencies are referred by the Senate to eight legislation committees for examination and report. This process ensures transparency and encourages efficiency in government spending. These hearings are documented and available for public consumption.

***Anti-Corruption***

Active engagement in a range of regional and international forums and initiatives to combat corruption is led by the Attorney-General’s Department.

Australia is a key member of the G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group, and led the development of the G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan, and the subsequent 2015-16 Anti-Corruption Implementation Plan.

In 2012 Australia's implementation of Chapters III (Criminalisation & Law Enforcement) and IV (International Cooperation) of the United Nations Convention against Corruption was reviewed and found to be fully compliant.

Australia ranked 13th out of 168 countries on Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perception Index.

**Commitments**

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**Government Engagement**

To ensure that the interests of Australian Government agencies were accommodated in the development of the National Action Plan, an Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) was established. This Committee was chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet with nominated high level officers contributing. The agencies engaged in this process to date, include:

* Attorney-General’s Department
* Australian Bureau of Statistics
* Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity
* Australian Electoral Commission
* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
* Australian Public Service Commission
* Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
* Department of Communications and the Arts
* Department of Defence
* Department of Education and Training
* Department of Employment
* Department of the Environment
* Department of Finance
* Department of Health
* Department of Human Services
* Department of Immigration and Border Protection
* Department of Industry, innovation and Science
* Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
* Department of Social Services
* Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
* Department of Treasury
* Department of Veterans’ Affairs
* Digital Transformation Office
* Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

In addition, the Parliamentary Departments are being appraised on the progress of the development and delivery of the National Action Plan.

The Inter-Departmental Committee will continue to meet throughout the delivery of the National Action Plan, remaining apprised of the progress, and consider the reports generated under the annual self-assessment process and the Independent Review Mechanism.

**Civil Society Engagement**

Throughout Australia’s National Action Plan drafting process, the Australian public has been actively engaged through the following mediums:

social media (for example Twitter);

the OGPAu website (ogpau.govspace.gov.au);

in-person events (with live-streaming and online participation enabled where possible);

a ‘wiki’ (which the public can log in and edit);

email and postage contribution; and

civil society, industry and other government jurisdiction led events for contributing to the consultation.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has established a dedicated team, including engagement specialists, to manage the drafting process. This team is responsible for engaging community groups, private sector, government agencies and everyday citizens who have expressed an interest in Open Government or the Grand Challenges to contribute to the plan.

The NAP has been developed in five stages, three of which involved public and civil society engagement.

The National Action Plan has been developed across five stages, three that involve engagement, to ensure we meet the OGP requirements, including the June 2016 deadline:

Stage 1 – Prepare the NAP framework and collect background information (November – December 2015)

Stage 2 – Raise awareness of the initiative, gather commitment suggestions (January – March 2016)

Stage 3 – Prioritise commitments and host a drafting workshop (April 2016)

Stage 4 – Submit the draft NAP for consideration by the Australian Government (May 2016 – June 2016)

Stage 5 – Pending the Australian Government’s decision, aim to launch the National Action Plan (July 2016)

The engagement approach was designed to be open, transparent, and efficient, empowering individuals and organisations to contribute meaningfully.

During stage one, information sessions were held across Australia in December 2015 to inform stakeholders about the National Action Plan.

Stage two focused on encouraging stakeholders to suggestion commitments related to the chosen Grand Challenges.

During this stage, a public wiki was created for the purposes of collaborative drafting. Civil Society and the public were invited to suggest actions directly onto the wiki, where they could also view and comment on existing suggestions. Contributions were initially added to a general commitments page, then categorised into nine themes.

As drafting progressed, the engagement coordinator facilitated introductions between contributors with shared interests. In response to stakeholder interest, a teleconference series was initiated for discussion of themes and commitments among civil society members before the drafting workshop.

As they were identified throughout the process, stakeholders with aligned interests were introduced by email by the engagement coordinator. In response to stakeholder interest, a teleconference series was also used to connect stakeholders and discuss themes among civil society.

Submissions for suggested actions closed on the 31 March 2016, but comments were still welcomed on the wiki. Two follow up teleconferences were also scheduled so that civil society stakeholders could connect before the April workshop. The engagement coordinator provided her contact details so that stakeholders could call or email her directly with questions, at any time.

During Stage three, civil society organisations and members of the public who had proposed an action in Stages One and Two were invited to join government agency representatives at a workshop on proposed commitments. At this event, they also discussed the formation of an implementation committee to oversee the progress of Australia’s first National Action Plan, and discussion of the formation of the group who will oversee the implementation of Australia’s first National Action Plan.

**Conclusion**

The Australian Government is committed to openness as a basic principle of modern government. The Australian Government’s membership with OGP and this two-year National Action Plan reflects Australia’s drive for improvement in government transparency, accountability, participatory democracy and innovation. In particular, the Australian Government’s commitments focus on improving public services and better managing public resources. The Australian Government’s National Action Plan was developed with civil society, the private sector and the public at large – in order to strengthen open government in Australia.