**Why should we worry about sustainability?**

Open data must be relevant, up-to-date and accessible in order to be useful.

A sustainable open data programme is one that continues to release data regularly with at least the same or improving quality and quantity.

**In this module we'll explore the following:**

How to make sense of sustainability

Why sustainability matters to you

What to look for in sustainable open datasets

**Making open data sustainable - in 2 minutes**

ODI Startup Programme Manager Ulrich Atz explains the importance of sustainability for open data and why it matters to users. He also talks through some of the key indicators that an open data initiative is built to last.

**What makes open data sustainable?**

**A sustainable open dataset is supported by:**

**Secure funding** to cover the cost of updates

**Active support** of publishers to prioritise updates

**Wide reuse** by others to demonstrate the value

**Making sense of sustainability in open data**

What factors help make an open dataset sustainable?

# Secure funding for open data

Just because a dataset can be freely used does not mean there is no cost to collecting or releasing the data. Funding can be secured by:

Charging for access or enhanced services

Funding from another source who supports open data publication

Demonstrating the ongoing value of open data to the organisation

# Active support for open data

Making open data sustainable for an organisation usually requires the backing of its management, to make it a priority, and the support of staff responsible for maintaining quality.

Active support is most commonly achieved by a company committing to maintaining open data as part of its daily operations.

# Wide reuse of open data

Sustainable reuse is achieved when the services created with that data become critical to the success of the publisher’s business. The Berlin transport system Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg's datasets are used by millions when they access transport apps like Citymapper. These apps drive usage of VBB services and, as such, VBB have a commitment in their digital strategy to regularly update the data.

[Take me to Citymapper Berlin](https://citymapper.com/berlin)

**Why does sustainability matter?**

Why should I care whether or not the open data I work with is sustainable?

# Solid foundations

Sustainability is not just good for the users. The publisher also benefits from a sustainable open data programme by:

Enhancing the trust of the community in the publisher’s organisation.

Supporting the creation of new products and services.

Simplifying the publishers reuse of their own data.

# Enhances trust

Sustainable open data allows a large community to build and analyse data in order to draw their own conclusions, often in support of a publisher's view.

# Builds business connections

Sustained open data has the power to unlock new customer channels, enabling other businesses to build on a publisher's data. In many cases these businesses provide direct benefits back to the publisher.

# Improves data usability

One of the most frequent reusers of a publisher's data may well be the publisher. Why separate the public release of data from the internal data usage?

**Looking for clues**

A sustainable release combines secure funding, active support and wide reuse. These traits are not always obvious when you first find a dataset. Ask yourself the following to help spot good sources:

**What is the source?**

Ask yourself who has released the data and how much confidence you have in their commitment to continue to update it.

One of the most important indicators of sustainability is how confident you feel in the organisation who collects it.

If the data is from government, might an election or a change in priority affect its open release?

**Who is funding the release?**

Data available at no cost might seem ideal, but it's important to ask yourself how a publisher is funding its sustained release.

Ask yourself whether the data is being released due to transparency pressures, or whether there is a wider beneficial use driving demand.

Try to find out whether there is a specific short-term programme funding the data's availability or whether the release is part of the organisation's core strategy.

**What does the licence say?**

Licences can also offer clues about data's sustainability.

When looking at a licence, ask yourself what the text might indicate about the dataset's future and the publisher's confidence in it? Does it contain a commitment to update it regularly?

Remember that without a licence, data is not truly open. The licence gives you certainty that data can be freely used and shared.

**Who is already using the data?**

The more widely a dataset is used, the more pressure there is for it to be sustained.

Ask yourself who else is using this dataset and for what purposes.

Try to find out whether the dataset is used internally by the publisher.

Both aspects indicate whether the publisher cares about the dataset and is under external pressure not to remove access to it, or change it for their own purposes.

**What is the publishing history?**

Assessing open data's sustainability ultimately depends on how much trust you place in its publisher.

Ask yourself how long the dataset has been published for. A long history of updates is a good sign, but beware external factors such as project length or term in office. A key indicator of a sustainable initiative is one that outlives these external factors.

**How can I contribute?**

Using a dataset yourself will help drive its demand and influence its sustainability.

Think about joining any communities of practice that exist around the dataset.

Try to find out whether the publisher plays an active role in these communities and whether they act upon feedback to improve their services.

Ask yourself what value you can demonstrate that will enhance the sustainability that is ensured by the data publisher.

**Are you ready for sustainable open data?**

There are two helpful things to remember when thinking about sustainable open data, can you remember them?

**What influences sustainability?**

**Which of these does not influence the sustainability of an open dataset?**

Secure funding

Large filesize

Active support

Wide reuse

**That’s right!**

File size is not a factor in data's sustainability. What matter most are a secure source of funding, the active support of the publisher and wide reuse to generate value from the data.

**Are you sure?**

File size is not a factor in data's sustainability. What matter most are a secure source of funding, the active support of the publisher and wide reuse to generate value from the data

**What should I look for when assessing sustainability?**

**What should you look for when assessing the sustainability of an open dataset?**

The data's publishing history

How much it costs

Who is already using the data

What format the data is in

Who is funding the data's release

**That’s right!**

Looking for the publishing history, who is using the data and how it is paid for are all key questions to ask when determining the sustainability of the dataset.

**Are you sure?**

Looking for the publishing history, who is using the data and how it is paid for are all key questions to ask when determining the sustainability of the dataset

**Sustainable open data**

When searching for sustainable sources of open data, it is important that they are relevant, up-to-date and accessible.

A sustainable programme is one that continues to release data regularly, with at least the same or improving quality and quantity.

Using simple indicators listed above, it is possible to identify sustainable sources of open data that can be used in your future work.

In the next module, we explore how open data platforms can simplify the process of publishing and using data.

Next module

Main menu

**Module 7 – video**

I’m Ulrich, I’m the Start-Up Programme manager at the Open Data Institute. Well, by sustainable open data we mean at its core to answer the question “how long will the data be around?” and we can think of two main factors that affect the sustainability of an open data release. The first one is the funding, and the second is the use and re-use. By funding we mean of course how the data release is funded so open data may be free but we still have cost associated with it. For example, as a publisher you have to collect data you have to clean the data. Or as a user you have to have the necessary skills to be able to analyse and process the data. In terms of use, the more a dataset is used the higher the likelihood that it will be around because you have a good story to tell why the dataset is useful. On the flipside, if there are no clear use cases of that open dataset it undermines the sustainability of an open data release. Sustainability for open data is important because it gives users the trust and the confidence that the dataset will be around in coming years. For example, if you are an open data business you want to make sure your investment is worth it. There are several indicators for sustainability for open data for example, the first one would be how is the dataset funded? Who is paying for this specific data release? Another indicator is the primary reason the dataset exists; is it collected for a specific purpose, or is it collected as an exhaust product of an existing activity? Another indicator would be the licence associated with the open dataset does the licence specify how long the data release will be available in the future? And lastly the use and re-use of the open dataset is a very good indicator of its sustainability. The more used the dataset is, the more impact it shows the likelier it will be available in the future.