Open Government Partnership New Zealand

National Action Plan 2018-2021

End of Term Report

Commitment 11: Authoritative dataset of government organisations as open data for greater transparency

Lead agency: Department of Internal Affairs

Objective: To release and maintain an authoritative dataset of government organisations as open, machine-readable data to enhance the transparency of government structures to the public.

There will be cross-agency agreement to maintain this dataset, providing assurance that the data being used is the authoritative source. This dataset becomes a foundation for both digital services and information about government.

Ambition: New Zealanders and others will have access to authoritative, open data about government agencies and their roles, learn more about how government is structured, what agencies do, and be able to reuse the open data in new and innovative ways.

OGP values: Transparency, Accountability and Technology and Innovation

What we achieved:

This Commitment originally consisted of four milestones. Its objective was to make information about how government works easily accessible and reusable. Following a review in early 2020 (in light of lessons learnt in the course of implementing the Commitment and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic), four additional milestones were added. These recognised the need to ensure that, once created, the dataset continues to be maintained and enhanced.

The Commitment is poised for completion once decisions are made on ownership, governance and the ongoing maintenance process. This work will be completed after the expiry of NAP3.

Summary

Milestones[1]		Progress[2]
1	Identify owners, contributors and maintainers for the data held in the proposed dataset. *Start/End dates:* October 2018-December 2018	☺

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[1] Some milestones have been revised and some new milestones were created since the Commitment 11 work began. This reflects improved understanding of activity required to implement the dataset. In the interests of transparency, revised and new milestones have been clearly marked.

[2] In the draft self-assessment of the 2018-2021 Plan, we have categorised "underway" milestones as "poised for completion/substantially completed" as the Commitments are poised for completion once decisions are made on ownership, governance and the ongoing maintenance process. This work will be completed after the expiry of NAP3.

2	Investigate and agree on the appropriate open standards for the dataset. *Start/End dates:* October 2018-June 2021	☺
3	Work with identified dataset contributors to agree on the process for ongoing maintenance of the dataset. *Start/End dates:* December 2018 – June 2021	😐
4	Explore and then agree on a governance model and ongoing ownership for the data model and dataset.* *Start/End dates:* August 2020-June 2021 *Added milestone.	☺
5	Draft and then confirm a data model of the 'machinery of government dataset' to support the ongoing release of data about government organisations.* *Start/End dates:* January 2020-June 2021 *Added milestone	☺
6	Publish the machinery of government open dataset, released by the Public Services Commission in 2020, on data.govt.nz* https://catalogue.data.govt.nz/dataset/mog-events/resource/bfc80102-20f8-4a37-815a-2c07c667101c *Start/End dates:* December 2018 – June 2020 *Revised milestone	😃
7	Ongoing technical task of making the agency name data set available via the data.govt.nz open data Application Programming Interface (API).* *Start/End dates:* December 2018 – June 2021 *Revised milestone	😐
8	Secure active users of the dataset/API by promoting the opportunities of reuse to government agencies, non-governmental organisations, business, and the public.* *Start/End dates:* June 2019 – June 2021 *Added milestone	☺

Progress key: 😐 **some delays**   ☺ **underway**   😃 **completed**

What we achieved

Milestone 1: Data contributors

We have identified owners, contributors and maintainers for the data held in the proposed dataset. The various data are produced in a range of government agencies including the Treasury, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Public Service Commission.

A linked data approach will enable the future integration of this data. This will support further progress on the dataset when resourcing permits.

Milestone 2: Open standards

We have identified a range of candidate ontologies and key dimensions by which we can evaluate which ontology is most suitable for our purposes. An ontology is a necessary companion to the dataset, since it describes the entities contributing the data as well as their relationships. An ontology also enables effective interrogation of data because it is described in a consistent way.

A decision on open data standards has been postponed until evaluation of the ontology is complete, since choice of standards needs to be made in relation to an ontology.

Early thinking was undertaken on the use of unique identifiers for government organisations, using URIs to support a linked data approach. It was proposed that a URI minting service be set up as well as development of a set of principles (similar to the approach adopted for www.govt.nz). Work on a URI minting service was put on hold until the issues of governance, ontology and standards were clearer.

Milestone 3: Process for ongoing maintenance of the dataset and Milestone 4: Governance model and ongoing ownership of the data model and dataset.

Ongoing maintenance of the dataset is contingent on ownership. The working group has identified an apparent gap in system ownership for the dataset, which appears to fall between responsibilities of the two functional lead roles of the Government Chief Digital Officer and the Government Chief Data Steward. Options for a potential system owner for the database are being explored, with a view to implementing the dataset after the expiry of NAP3.

Milestone 5: Data model

We have run a series of workshops to understand the business context in which the data is produced and to model entities and relationships contributing to the C11 dataset. A diagrammatic model has been produced and will be used develop and agree a formal data model that will support development of the dataset.

The working group sees opportunity to run further workshops to explore and model additional entities and relationships supporting the data (for example, between legislation, agencies and portfolios).

Milestone 6: Publication of agency name open dataset on www.data.govt.nz and Milestone 7: Ongoing technical task of making the dataset available via the data.govt.nz open data Application Programming Interface (API)

To make a start on releasing open data about government organisations while work to plan the C11 dataset was going on, the Public Service Commission (represented on the C11 working group) released its machinery of government (MoG) dataset in 2020 for publication on data.govt.nz.

The MoG dataset is available at https://catalogue.data.govt.nz/dataset/mog-events/resource/bfc80102-20f8-4a37-815a-2c07c667101c

Milestone 8: Securing active users of the dataset

Narrative and use cases

A narrative has been developed to articulate the value of the dataset, and use cases identified and described. This has been shared with the Public Service Commission to support conversations across the system.

Govt A-Z sandbox experiment

To demonstrate for decision-makers the potential of the dataset, a sandbox experiment was undertaken to understand the practicalities of consuming datasets in production systems. This kind of use of the dataset will be a key indicator of success for the Commitment when the final dataset is built and published.

The MoG dataset, which contains data about a subset of the agencies that will be included in the wider dataset, was tested on a copy of the Government A-Z feature of www.govt.nz. The Government A-Z listing provides contact and other key information about government organisations. Content updates are currently done manually based on a variety of inputs, including the PSC's MoG dataset.

It was envisaged that the experiment would take the MoG dataset and use a content model API to update the relevant fields in the Government A-Z list automatically, to determine whether this could meet user needs and reduce maintenance costs.

A working prototype was set up in the sandbox environment to display the data with the look and feel of the Government A-Z listing.

Data cleansing and scope definition is in progress.

The experiment will proceed to testing consumption of the data using APIs and will also examine:

- whether the relationships within the MoG dataset can be built out to increase functionality (comparing relationships like host agency as defined in the Govt A-Z vs MoG dataset);

- expanding the fields included in the MoG dataset to improve the usability of the data (for example, including organisation contact details); and

- defining which organisations should be included in the MoG dataset as an input vs what is included in the final A-Z output.

How we included diverse voices and engaged diverse communities

- Work on the commitment is being assisted by civil society representatives and members of the public interested in this commitment. Previous blog posts on digital.govt.nz have encouraged people to get involved if they are interested, for example:

- Blog post: Agency name open dataset – ready for reuse!
  https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/agency-name-open-dataset-ready-for-reuse/

- Blog post: Building blocks of digital government transformation:
  https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/building-blocks-of-digital-transformation/

- A Basecamp site was set up to share documents, support ongoing discussion and enable easier collaboration amongst the Commitment 11 working group.

- A blog post on digital.govt.nz is planned to provide an update on progress made in 2021. This will be amplified by using public and private Twitter accounts to extend the reach of the post.

Commitment links

- Machinery of Government data model workshops:
  https://twitter.com/vicwray/status/1306715302458060804

- Blog post: Agency name open dataset – ready for reuse!
  https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/agency-name-open-dataset-ready-for-reuse/

- Blog post: Reusing the Public Service Commission's open dataset to validate and update government information:
  https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/reusing-the-public-service-commissions-open-dataset-to-validate-and-update-government-information/

- Commitment 11 planning out to June 2021:
  https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xCBmG9giYgsy9ET_0dbG6A-lVN3nIChpINOyJIzxcuw/edit#gid=0

- Blog post: Building blocks of digital government transformation:
  https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/building-blocks-of-digital-transformation/

- Blog post: Exploring open standards for the government organisations dataset:
  https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/exploring-the-standard-for-government-organisations-data-give-us-your-feedback/

Impacts

<u>Immediate impacts</u>

- Improved access to information about the structure of government agencies: the Public Service Commission's data set continues to be the only authoritative list of government

organisations. Since June 2020 this has been available and maintained by PSC as an open data option via www.data.govt.nz.

- The impact of not having decided on a canonical ID or establishing a URI minting service means that the linked data approach has not been developed. The impact on the C11 work programme has been minimal, however, since the C11 work is not yet at implementation stage.

Medium term impacts

- Completing the Govt A-Z sandbox experiment will provide valuable insights into the practicalities of consuming datasets in production systems (for example, the capabilities, testing environments and organisational maturity required) and will demonstrate for decision-makers the potential of the C11 dataset.

- While early indications are promising, it is likely that senior decision makers, including the data and digital functional leads, will need to be actively involved in progressing the work around system ownership, governance and product ownership of the C11 dataset to ensure sustainable conditions necessary for its maintenance, use and development.

- Pairing the dataset with an ontology will visualise the relationships between public service entities and the data they produce. These will be key system assets to be used to improve the production, management and use of data across the public service.

What we learned:

We learned that:

- there is an apparent gap in system ownership between the two functional lead roles of the Government Chief Digital Officer and the Government Chief Data Steward. This has had to be resolved to finalise the Commitment and has affected progress on establishing governance and direction (product ownership) for the dataset, and consequently finalisation of issues such as an ontology and open standards;

- it was important to describe the potential value of the dataset by developing a narrative, use cases and demonstrator;

- there is potential to enrich the MOG dataset with data supporting the Govt A-Z feature on www.govt.nz;

- frequent brief communication from the "lead" public servants to the wider C11 group supports trust and engagement with civil society members more effectively than less frequent updates on substantive progress;

- public servants and civil society representatives see and appreciate each other's efforts; and

- that a collaboration tool can support discussion and engagement between meetings of the wider group, but that email remains the default for most people.

What's next:

Consideration will be given, because of its systemic value, to continuing the work on the dataset and the enabling environment beyond the end of the 2020/21 financial year. Given the value to the project of using working methods consistent with the OGP's ethos of co-design and co-production, we recommend that the continuation of work on the dataset also continues this way of working.

Once milestones 3 and 4 have been achieved, the dataset will be ready for use.