



Principles of access to public sector information

Preamble

ALIA's first object in the ALIA Constitution is 'To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy, environment and democracy'. Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) welcomes the federal government's commitment to open government policies and freedom of information. Initiatives include Open Government Partnership Australia¹, developing National Action Plans to enhance transparency, accountability and public engagement; the Australian Government Public Data Policy Statement², and Data Sharing and Release Legislation, seeking to make more government data available as a national resource³.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) agrees that public sector information should be recognised as a national resource to be developed and preserved in the public interest. ALIA defines public sector information as including:

- information created by parliamentary, commonwealth, state and local government agencies – published and unpublished works, in all formats;
- databases such as Government Online Directory, data.gov.au and Australia.gov.au;
- research commissioned by government agencies such as the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council funded research.

ALIA commends the work of the National Library of Australia in providing long term access to public sector information through the PANDORA Archive and the Australian Government Web Archive⁴. ALIA also supports the F. A. I. R. principles of findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable.

¹ <https://ogpau.pmc.gov.au/>

²

https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/aust_govt_public_data_policy_statement_1.pdf

³ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/public-data/issues-paper-data-sharing-release-legislation>

⁴ <https://www.nla.gov.au/what-we-collect/archived-websites>



ALIA asserts that public sector information should be publicly available except where restricted by law, privacy considerations or is business in confidence and offers the following Principles of Access to Public Sector Information.

Statement of Principles

- The public has the right of access to government information and research data. Government agencies should guarantee online, timely and uninhibited access to public sector information in line with the federal government's Open Government commitments⁵.
- The requirement for online access to public sector information should be mandated through legislation, such as the Commonwealth's Freedom of Information Act and Data Sharing and Release Bill. The legislation should ensure long term access to these information resources.
- Governments should guarantee the long term access to public sector information in a preservation archive, preferably through the National Library of Australia's PANDORA archive and/or the Australian Government Web Archive and/or National eDeposit⁶.
- Governments should ensure that public sector information is easy to locate and easily discoverable online.
- Public sector information should be available through a single license system with conditions equivalent to the Attribution Creative Commons license (see <http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses>).
- All online resources of government and parliamentary agencies must meet accessibility standards (W3C).
- Governments should safeguard the privacy of persons who use or request information, as well as the privacy of persons about whom information exists in government records.
- Governments should actively support access through libraries, particularly public libraries, recognising that more than 15% of Australians cannot afford the internet at home or do not have the digital skills, devices and connectivity. For many, public libraries provide the only easy access to digital information..
- Governments should not allow cost to obstruct individual users' access to government information. Costs incurred by creating, collecting and processing information should only cover direct costs.
Acknowledging the enormity of the tasks, governments should increase public access to public sector information online through a program of actively digitising older materials such as Parliamentary Papers and government reports, based on their level of use and significance.

Conclusion

ALIA urges all levels of governments to adopt these principles to ensure the creation, use, dissemination and preservation of public sector information.

Adopted 1999. Amended 2009, 2019.

⁵ <https://ogpau.pmc.gov.au/>

⁶ <https://ned.gov.au/>