



Public Sector to Research Sector Bridges Program

Background

The Australian Research Data Commons ([ARDC](#)) is a National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy ([NCRIS](#)) facility, providing Australian researchers with a competitive advantage through data. This Public Sector Bridges program is part of the ARDC's larger [National Data Assets](#) initiative. Through strategic partnerships between the ARDC and key stakeholders, projects in this initiative will develop national scale data assets that support leading edge research.

The operational activities of most public sector bodies create significant data assets for research. In a survey conducted by the OECD in 2017¹, respondents were asked about the relevance of broader sources of public sector information to scientists. The results show that 74% of respondents assessed the relevance of public sector information for public research as 'High' or 'Very high'.

Public sector (PS) data availability to citizens, research, business, and other parts of government is a significant component of national innovation policy. Notable recent Commonwealth milestones include the Productivity Commission's "Data Availability and Use" report of 2017, the establishment of the office of the National Data Commissioner in 2018, and the Data Availability & Transparency legislation expected in 2020. Within this emerging policy environment, public sector agencies are increasingly acknowledging their role as "information agencies" on top of their core administrative or service provision responsibilities. This evolution is part of societal movements in expectations, responsibilities, and resourcing in the digital information age. Public sector agencies are on a spectrum of maturities along that journey.

For the purposes of this program, baseline data management and data availability is an assumed capacity of public sector departments/agencies and a prerequisite for eligibility.

¹ OECD 2019 Enhanced access to and sharing of data (EASD) - Reconciling Risks and Benefits for Data Re-use across Societies.

Public sector to research sector bridges

The Public Sector Bridges program targets scenarios where specialised access for researchers to public sector data requires more than the baseline *availability* or *management* from the public sector data custodian. Some illustrative examples include:

- Where researchers require access to a particular state of the data (e.g. raw data access vs data product access).
- Where researchers require access to more sensitive states of the data (e.g. individual data points vs aggregated).
- Where researchers require standardised data formats and access protocols to enable tool or platform development over public sector information (e.g. standardised machine to machine protocols rather than 'download a csv file').

These projects will extend or improve public sector data (standards, access arrangements, interfaces, quality, governance) to better support leading edge research. The resultant 'bridge' will allow the public sector data asset to function as part of 'extended' national research infrastructure.

Expected Participants

The Public Sector Bridges projects will be partnerships between the ARDC, public sector organisations, relevant research institutes and broader beneficiaries as defined below.

- **Public sector departments/agencies:** While any public sector department/agency is potentially in scope, Commonwealth entities are likely to align with the *national* focus of the NCRIS program and the ARDC National Data Assets initiative. State level (or multi-state) initiatives may be in scope where they are clearly aligned with or on the path toward a national initiative. Projects should include at least one public sector department/agency (mentioned either in the [APS agency listing](#) or [Australian Government Organisations Register](#)). Public sector project partners are expected to make enduring changes to their data and its access arrangements (selection criteria 1 & 2)
- **Relevant research organisations:** Projects should include at least one research organisation (such as Universities, NCRIS facilities, Publicly Funded Research Organisations, and Medical Research Institutes). Research sector participants are expected to provide requirements and user scenarios to guide development and to implement connections to research infrastructure, analytical tools, virtual research environments and platforms. Broader representation from multiple research organisations will be interpreted as a stronger proposal in terms of establishing collaborative sector-wide research infrastructure (selection criteria 2 & 3)
- **Beneficiaries:** Representatives of down-stream beneficiaries (e.g. business, consumers, patient groups) are encouraged to participate to facilitate planning for long term impact (selection criteria 4)

Either a public sector department/agency or research institute should be the lead in the project, however each should be responsible for some of the work packages.

In Scope Activities

In scope activities for projects in this program include:

- implementing research sector-compatible data standards
- extending collection coverage for research sector needs
- developing programmatic access interfaces for research sector
- establishing new governance, policy, and access arrangements
- connecting public sector data with research infrastructure, analytical tools, platforms, modelling environments
- planning for and monitoring of research use and broader impacts

These activities relate to selection criteria 1 and 2.

Project Funding and Timeline

The ARDC proposes to invest up to \$350,000 in each of the Public Sector Bridge projects (up to a total of \$1,750,000). The ARDC recognises that the COVID-19 situation has placed financial constraints on many organisations, which are restricting the funds available for infrastructure projects. To assist in the continued development of e-research infrastructure, the normal requirement for 1:1 matching co-investment will not apply for this investment program; however, the level of co-investment will form part of the proposal evaluation criteria (selection criteria 5).

The projects' duration is up to two and a half years. The ARDC will publicly call for expressions of interest and proposals. The ARDC investment decisions will be based on published selection criteria and advice from a selection panel.

As well as financial investment, projects will be eligible for a number of resources provided by the ARDC such as support for communities of practice, cloud compute allocation (confirmed for the duration of the project), specialist consultancy, and support for and access to ARDC national information services for identifiers, vocabularies, and catalogues.

Potential COVID-19 special track

At the EOI stage, projects that directly and significantly support Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic may be transferred into a special workflow to fast-track investment decisions. Projects in this track will have accelerated milestones and increased data sharing responsibilities.

Application Prerequisites

1. Project includes at least one research sector organisation (For example, Universities, NCRIS facilities, Publicly Funded Research Organisations, and Medical Research Institutes.) that can identify the research needs and facilitate integration into research infrastructure, tools, and platforms.*
2. Project includes at least one public sector department/agency (mentioned either in [APS agency listing](#) or [Australian Government Organisations Register](#)). *
3. Public sector department/agency has baseline data management and data availability in their business as usual operations.
4. The research organisation and the public sector department/agency should each be responsible for some of the work packages.

*By the time of full proposal submission, letters of support from all the partners and collaborators mentioned in the proposal are required. This is desirable at the EOI stage, but one of the functions of the initial EOI is to also allow for match-making around ideas before submission of a full proposal submission. See [Brokering process](#) below.

Selection Criteria

1. The proposal demonstrates improvements to public sector data and its access arrangements, that will support specialised research requirements.
2. The new data and its access arrangements will act as ongoing *national research infrastructure*. They would be broadly usable by more than just the project partners in a non-trivial fashion and serve as input to a wide range of research.
3. The proposal demonstrates the purpose of the proposed data set by indicating how it
 - a. will support new research programs, insights, or efficiencies; AND
 - b. have impactful application beyond research.
4. Project has identified beneficiaries and preferably has them (or their representatives) as project partners or active stakeholders in the design process.
5. The level of co-investment.

Call Process

The solicitation of proposals will take place in two phases: Expression of Interest (EOI) and Request for Proposal (RFP).

Expression of Interest phase: 28 May 2020 - 29 June 2020

On May 28th, 2020, ARDC will launch a call for EOIs. The EOI submission will close on June 29th, 2020. The EOI phase is intended to elicit preliminary ideas for the program. Eligible EOIs will be made public at the end of the EOI period. Feedback on the EOIs will be provided via email on August 10th, 2020. We will use this period to endeavour to broker similar ideas or projects that are missing partners.

Request for Proposal phase: 17 August 2020 - 14 September 2020

A call for proposals will open on August 17th, 2020 and will close on September 14th, 2020. Proposals will be invited from the pool of eligible EOI participants. Feedback on the proposal will be provided in the week beginning October 5th, 2020.

Brokering process

ARDC will attempt to assist 'match-making' between public sector and research sector organisations.

Before submitting your Expression of Interest:

If you are a public sector department/agency holding data with research potential, or a research institute interested in data available in of the public sector departments/agencies, but you do not have the contacts to establish a project, we encourage you to [contact us](#), and we will endeavour to help you find the right contacts.

At the EOI stage:

You may submit an EOI (deadline 29 June) without having formal support from one of the required parties (public sector or research sector partner). If your EOI is otherwise eligible it will be published on the ARDC website with the other EOIs, noting its provisional eligibility. ARDC will publicise these through our research and public sector communication networks and broker contact where possible.

At the Request for Proposal Stage:

By the Request for Proposal Stage (deadline 14 September) you must have firmly committed research AND public sector partners with confirmed project roles, responsibilities, and co-investment.

Program Objective

By partnering with public sector departments/agencies and relevant research communities the ARDC seeks to create value by:

- Addressing data access and data quality needs of researchers that cannot be addressed by the core business arrangements of public sector data management.
- Providing public sector bodies with prioritised and coherent research requirement scenarios.
- Aligning/coordinating public sector and research sector resources within a project framework to achieve outcomes that would not emerge naturally from the existing market forces between the sectors.

- Focusing on virtuous circle scenarios where improved flow of public sector data to the research sector results in improved public policy, administration, and service delivery, such as:
 - Improved research sector advice/ modelling/ analysis for the public sector.
 - Public sector officials accessing research sector tools or platforms enabled by new 'bridges'.
- Extending the notion of national research infrastructure into public sector national data assets.

If you have a question please use the [form](#). These questions and their answers will be entered into a publicly available [FAQs Register](#).

If you are interested in submitting an EOI please follow the link from the [program page](#).