ACCESSING AND MAKING USE OF OPEN HEALTH DATA

FIVE STEPS TO HELP USER GROUPS BENEFIT FROM OPEN HEALTH DATA

HOW-TO GUIDE

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Open data on health is a critical resource for both governments and citizens. Through quality open data, governments can understand the key health issues of their citizens, anticipate the resources needed to manage these, and identify and evaluate interventions. On the other hand, open data can help citizens understand their rights to healthcare, locate providers that meet their needs, and hold governments to account for healthcare spending.

This guide is written for donors, civil society organisations, governments, and other stakeholders who would like to build capacity of user groups in accessing and using open health data to improve their advocacy or development work. In some cases, user groups will be entirely new to open data. Others might have experience using health data, but are unaware of better ways to find datasets efficiently and/or struggle to make effective use of them.

1 WORK WITH USER GROUPS TO IDENTIFY KEY PROBLEMS AND RELATED DATA NEEDS.

Begin by understanding the key problem your user group faces, and how open government data could help to solve this or understand it better. Be honest – will open data really help? If the answer is yes, then facilitate a process to understand what datasets are needed (data needs), what data they already have (data assets), and what is still missing (data deficits).

Practical Tip: Structuring the data mapping exercise following a template (see below) will be helpful. Doing this process through a focus group discussion or workshop is better than doing this as a survey questionnaire. In-person approaches allow sharing and learning among organisations dealing with the same problems, meaning they can share data assets and collectively find strategies to deal with data deficits.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED		
Data Needs	**Data Assets**	**Data Deficits**

2 ANALYSE EXISTING DATA AND SEARCH FOR NEW SOURCES OF DATA.

Based on the results of Step One, conduct a detailed analysis of each of the data assets to determine if they are truly open by answering six key questions: (1) Is it available online? (2) Is it provided in machine-readable formats? (3) Is it available for bulk download? (4) Is it available free of charge? (5) Is it openly licensed? and (6) Is it up-to-date?

Next, an element of searching will be required – both to fill the data deficits, and to bring existing data assets up to standard. Searching for data will mean that the groups will visit websites of government agencies and other stakeholders and probably interview people whose offices are potential data sources.

Practical Tip: This process usually takes at least one to two weeks to complete. It is important that regular meetings are conducted with the user groups to determine progress and provide support. A relevant guide for this process can be found in the ODDC Assessing Country-Level Open Data Supply.[1] While written for country-level analysis, this can also be used in the sub-national context. If needed, conduct preliminary training with the user groups, so that they will understand key terms such as 'machine-readable' and 'openly licensed'.

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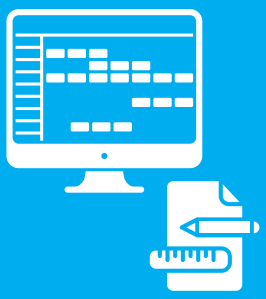
3 BUILD SKILLS.

Data skills training is important to ensure user groups see the value of open data in their work. First, run a data skills assessment questionnaire with potential participants to assess their current level of knowledge and skills. Based on this, formulate a capacity building programme that will assist the user groups in accessing, analysing, and making use of data. It is best to do this training using live datasets once the data search is complete, so that the training will have direct relevance to day-to-day work.

Practical Tip: In most cases, data skills trainings include essential key modules such as data appreciation, extraction, cleaning, online and offline visualisation, creation of narratives from data, and more. In our experience, a mixture of classroom training and on-site mentoring is the best way to cultivate open data skills.

4 CHALLENGE THE USER GROUPS TO PRODUCE A TANGIBLE PRODUCT.



Let user groups test their new skills on the newly found and opened data with a challenge to create a concrete product. This will vary according to the problem being tackled – it could be a visualisation, infographic or a detailed report.

The process can take three weeks or more – from the start of the first training to the time that user groups are able to come up with a tangible output.

Practical Tip: To sustain user groups' interest and motivation, the products should be aligned with the plans and priorities of government agencies or CSOs and advance their work. When needed, extra encouragement can also be added. For example, participants can be told from the start of the capacity building session that submission of the final output is required for them to get a certificate of training completion. Another strategy is to ensure the best output is rewarded with a skills-related grant, e.g attendance at a relevant conference.

5 FACILITATE A LEARNING SESSION WITH THE TRAINING PARTICIPANTS.

To learn from the process and use it to inform future initiatives, conduct learning workshops with the trained user groups. This is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the process, as well as determine future plans and how the groups would have preferred to be supported. Complement this learning exercise by re-running the data skills assessment questionnaire that was administered in Step Three to see if there is any change in the reported level of knowledge, skills, and attitude towards data utilisation.

Practical Tip: It is helpful to conduct both a group-based learning process (e.g. learning workshops) and an individual-based reflection (e.g. surveys, questionnaires), as some participants may not be very vocal with their opinions in groups. Group-based learning approaches are also important because they highlight consensus points. When possible, hire an external facilitator so that participants feel more free to articulate their thoughts.

[1] Available at: http://bit.ly/2dn8u1Z

We encourage you to test the approach outlined above so that we can build evidence of how the approach can work in different sectors and different contexts. If you have questions regarding this guide and its accompanying resources, email us at **info@labs.webfoundation.org**.

ABOUT THE PROJECT From November 2015 to June 2016, the World Wide Web Foundation's Open Data Lab Jakarta and the Transforming Administration-Strengthening Innovation (TRANSFORMASI) project of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, collaborated on a project aimed at strengthening engagement between civil society and the local government to achieve governance reforms. Called "Strengthening Local Bureaucracy Reform through Open Data", this initiative took place in Banyuwangi, Indonesia, and was centered around open health data.