Guide on Metadata Attributes

The 26 Office of the National Data Commissioner (ONDC) metadata attributes were developed by the Data Champions Network and endorsed by the Deputy Secretaries Data Group as a minimum standard to enhance the discoverability and reusability of data assets.

These 26 metadata attributes can be further grouped into:

- 10 **core attributes** that are critical for data management and discovery, and
- 16 **additional attributes** that further support discovery and reuse of data assets.

While all agencies should aim to include all 26 metadata attributes as best practice to describe their data assets, the 10 core attributes are mandatory for the Australian Government Data Catalogue (the Catalogue).

Core Attributes (Mandatory)

Core Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
Identifier	**The identifier is used to distinguish the data asset as unique and different to another data asset.** It is key to finding the data asset and ensuring the specific data asset can be referenced without confusion. Ideally it is globally unique, such as a Digital Object Identifier (DOI). However, the identifier can start with an acronym relevant to your agency followed by letters, numbers or symbols.	Free text (max. 200 char) e.g. FIN000077
Title	**The title is a unique, clear and descriptive name for the data asset.** People searching for data should gain a basic understanding of the business use/intent of the data asset from the title. If a new data asset record is required due to an error in the data, the title should note that it is a revised version.	Free text (max. 200 char) e.g. Team productivity modelling based on APS Employee Census results for 2000-2022
Description	**Easy to read information about the data asset** to enable users to find and evaluate the data asset for their needs. The Description attribute is typically several sentences long and is used to search for the data asset so keywords should be carefully considered. Agencies are encouraged to include field names (e.g. gender/sex, age, address) collected within the data asset. This will help answer any specific research, policy or program questions a user may have, and help manage requests for additional information about the data asset received by your agency.	Free text (max. 500 char) e.g. This model provides the breakdown of team productivity across the APS by the team job functions, providing management with richer insights into employee perceptions on a range of key indicators. These Census indicators include staff engagement,

Core Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
	This attribute is supplemented by the **Title**, **Keyword** and **Purpose** attributes.	leadership, communication and change management, workplace conditions, health and wellbeing among others.

Data custodian	**The data custodian(s) is the agency that is responsible for the data asset and has the authority for sharing and disclosure.** The data custodian can differ from the publisher (see **Publisher** attribute).
	
	An agency may also be a data custodian under the *Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022* if:
	
	(a) *"[they are] a Commonwealth body; and*
	(b) *[are] not an excluded entity; and*
	(c) *either:*
	    (i) *controls public sector data (whether alone or jointly with another entity), including by having the right to deal with that data; or*
	    (ii) *has become the data custodian of output of a project in accordance with section 20F."*
	
	The data custodian value must be consistent with the Government Directory, Non--Government Organisation (NGO) List or Research Organisations Register.
	
	This field is related to **Publisher** attribute.
		Free text selected from the following:
		
		• For Government department and agency
		• For non-government organisation
		• For research organisation
		
		e.g. Department of Finance

Point of contact	**An email address or a contact web form for users to request additional information related to the data asset.** A group email address or contact web form is preferred because it is generic and enduring compared to an individual's contact. This minimises the need to regularly update this attribute. Some agencies may choose to have a different point of contact for the Australian Government Data Catalogue and for internal purposes.	**Group Email** (or **URL** to contact web form) for the point of contact e.g. data.discovery@finance.gov.au

Core Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
Access rights	**Specifies access (or restrictions) to the data asset.** Access is based on the agency's privacy, security, or other policy approaches that apply to the data asset. Access can be: • **Open** - Data that is publicly accessible online (account registration may be required). • **Conditional** - Data that is publicly accessible subject to condition(s) that the user must meet to access the data. For example: a fee-for-service model applies to access the data; the user must have a .gov.au email to create an account and access the data; or the data is only accessible at a specific physical location. • **Restricted** - Data access is limited for reasons such as legal, privacy and sensitivity. For example: during an embargo period; security classification is PROTECTED and above; access can only be provided under the DATA Scheme. This attribute is supplemented by the **Security Classification** and **Sensitive Data** attributes.	Choose term from: Open Conditional Restricted
Security classification	**The security classification applied to the data asset as specified in chapter 9 of the [Australian Government Protective Security Policy Framework](#), release 2024.** The originator of the data asset is responsible for applying the relevant Security Classification. This attribute is supplemented by the **Sensitive Data** and **Access Rights** attributes. **NOTE:** Data assets classified as UNOFFICIAL should **not** be listed in the Australian Government Data Catalogue.	Choose term from: UNOFFICIAL OFFICIAL OFFICIAL: Sensitive PROTECTED SECRET TOP SECRET
Keyword	**Word(s) or terms that describe the data asset subject matter.** It answers the question "what is in this data asset?" and supports the discovery of the data asset. This is a critical component in helping users find your data asset. Careful consideration of keywords should be applied and use as many keywords as you can. As an absolute minimum, agencies must include:	Free text [Australian Governments' Interactive Functions Thesaurus (AGIFT)](#) high-level terms are: Business Support and Regulation Civic Infrastructure Communications

Core Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
	• At least one high-level term from the [Australian Governments' Interactive Functions Thesaurus (AGIFT)](#) to enhance the user search experience in the Australian Government Data Catalogue, followed by detailed AGIFT terms that better describe the data asset. • Terms that describe enduring Government priorities. For example: ▪ Indigenous related data are tagged with the keywords 'First Nations people' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' ▪ Disability related data are tagged with the keyword 'Disability' ▪ Data assets containing sex (information collected on sex characteristics observed at birth or infancy) or gender (information collected as a result of gender identify, expression and/or experience) are tagged with the relevant term. Further information can be found on ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables. Other keywords to supplement the AGIFT terms can be selected from: • Vocabularies used by your agency • [ANZSRC Field Of Research Code 2020](#) • [Description of functions and sub-functions (Department of Finance).](#) Where multiple keywords apply, separate the terms with a comma.	Community Services Cultural Affairs Defence Education and Training Employment Environment Finance Management Governance Health Care Immigration Indigenous Affairs International Relations Justice Administration Maritime Services Natural Resources Primary Industries Science Security Sport and Recreation Statistical Services Tourism Trade Transport Data assets with information on people should include (if applicable): Gender Sex Disability First Nations people Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander e.g. A data asset containing APS Employee Census results can have the keywords: Governance, Public service, Gender, Disability, First Nations people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, APS, census
Resource type	**Specifies the type of data asset.** The most common types of data asset applicable are listed below with their definitions. Further information can be found in [Dublin Core - List of Resource Types](#). **collection** an aggregation of items. The term collection means that the resource is described as a group; its parts may be separately described and navigated.	Choose a term from: collection dataset event image interactive resource model physical object party physical object

Core Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
	dataset structured information encoded in lists, tables, databases, etc., which will normally be in a format available for direct machine processing. For example - spreadsheets, databases, GIS data, midi data. Note that unstructured numbers and words would be considered as text. **image** the content is primarily symbolic visual representation other than text. For example - images and photographs of physical objects, paintings, prints, drawings, other images and graphics, animations and moving pictures, film, diagrams, maps, musical notation. Note that image may include both electronic and physical representations. **interactive resource** a resource which requires interaction from the user to be understood, executed, or experienced. For example - forms on web pages, applets, multimedia learning objects, virtual reality. **model** an abstraction of the real thing, i.e. some generalisation and interpretation. Models could be considered a symbolic representation. Examples include performance models, cost models, mechanical models, etc. This attribute could be supplemented by attribute **Format**.	place service software sound text
Date modified	**The most recent date the data asset record was either created, changed, updated or modified.** This date refers to the date in which the *metadata* of the data asset changes or is first recorded in the data inventory, not a date pertaining to the underlying data asset itself. This attribute is critical for agencies in managing their data assets and supplemented by the **Publish Date** attribute.	**Date/Time** in format: AS/NZS ISO 8601.1:2021 e.g. 2023-09 2023-09-17 2023-09-17T23:20:30+04:00

Additional Attributes

Additional Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
Access URL	**The Uniform Resource Locator (URL) that links to the data asset.** If the **Access Rights** of the data asset is "open", this could be a publicly accessible permanent URL that provides direct access to the data asset. If the **Access Rights** of the data asset is "conditional" or "restricted", some agencies may choose to have one URL to a website explaining how	URL

Additional Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
	to access the data asset for external users (including through Dataplace) and a second URL to an internal system location for internal users.	
Temporal coverage from	**The start period for the underlying data.** Temporal coverage refers to the time period that the data asset covers. This field is related to the attribute **Temporal coverage to**.	**Date/Time** in format: AS/NZS ISO 8601.1:2021 e.g. 1973-09 1973-09-17 1973-09-17T23:20:30+04:00
Temporal coverage to	**The end period for the underlying data.** Temporal coverage refers to the time period that the data asset covers. It is recommended this field be completed even when the data asset is still active and temporal coverage is expected to be extended in future iterations. In this case, the 'temporal coverage to' field should reflect the data currently available in the asset. This field is related to the attribute **Temporal coverage from**.	**Date/Time** in format: AS/NZS ISO 8601.1:2021 e.g. 2023-09 2023-09-17 2023-09-17T23:20:30+04:00
Update frequency	**The frequency at which new, revised, or updated versions of the underlying data are made available.** For data assets that are regularly released, one data asset record will represent a series of underlying data. Agencies will determine when a new record is required for a data asset, based on changes in methodology, collection and related policies or to correct typographical errors in the underlying data. Further information can be found in Dublin Core™ Collection Description Frequency Vocabulary.	Choose term from: Triennial Biennial Annual Semiannual Three times a year Quarterly Bimonthly Monthly Semimonthly Biweekly Three times a month Weekly Semiweekly Daily Continuous Irregular
Publish date	**The date which the underlying data asset was made available for use, consumption, or analysis.** *This date should constantly change whenever the underlying data is updated.* This is not to be confused with **Date Modified** which is the recorded date of metadata in an agency's data inventory.	**Date/Time** in format: AS/NZS ISO 8601.1:2021 e.g. 1973-09 1973-09-17 1973-09-17T23:20:30+04:00
Purpose	**A descriptive summary of the intentions which the data asset was developed and proposed to be used for.**	Free text (max. 500 char)

Additional Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
	This field supplements the attribute **Description**.	e.g. The APS Employee Census results for 2000-2022 enables richer insights to transform the APS and improve productivity.
Location	**The geographic area or location that the data asset covers.** Location represents the geographic area of the *entire* data asset (e.g. "Australia"). It is not intended to represent specific location values contained within the data asset itself. For example, if the data asset is about installation of solar panels, the location would describe the entire coverage of the data asset such as "Australia" or "Australian Capital Territory" or a mesh block from the Australian Statistical Geography Standard. Location values contained in the data asset such as specific suburbs or regions can be captured within the **Keyword**, **Description** or **Purpose** attributes.	Choose term from: Australia New South Wales Victoria Queensland South Australia Western Australia Tasmania Northern Territory Australian Capital Territory Other Territories* International *Other territories include Jervis Bay Territory, Territory of Christmas Island, Territory of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island **OR** Provide at least one area from: Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3, July 2021 - June 2026
Sensitive data	**The type of sensitivity of the data asset, where applicable.** If the **Security Classification** is "OFFICIAL: Sensitive" or above, the type of sensitivity should be provided. For further guidance, refer to section 9.4 of the Australian Government Protective Security Policy Framework – Guidelines, release 2024. This attribute is supplemented by the **Security Classification** and **Access Rights** attributes.	Choose term from: N/A [e.g. open data] Legislative secrecy Personal privacy Legal privilege

Additional Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
File size	**A measure of the digital storage needed by the data asset.** For digital assets, ideally you should provide a number and the unit. If the file size is constantly changing, then you can provide an indicative size or an indicative size range for your data asset. If size cannot be determined, fill in the number of data tables stored for the data asset. Additionally, if the data asset is a data service or interactive resource, this field may not be relevant (fill in N/A) This information may be sourced through the agency's IT or data management departments.	Free text e.g. 4MB 5GB TB PB 10 data tables in SQL
Format	**The distribution format of the data asset.** This information may be sourced through your agency's IT or data management departments. This attribute supplements the **Resource Type** attribute.	Free text e.g. CSV DataCube GeographicData JPEG MP4 WebPage WebApplication
Language	**Refers to the language used within the data asset** - e.g. "English". The default value may be set to "English". Some agencies may have assets containing languages other than English, in which case the [Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)](#) can be used.	Free text selected from the following: [Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)](#) e.g. English
Legal authority	**All legal mandates under which the data asset was collected, created, received, used or disclosed.** Legal mandates could include Memorandum of Understanding; Legislation; Machinery of Government; Government policies or acts; etc. Where multiple legal mandates exist, separate their URLs with a comma. This information may be sourced through the agency's legal department. If information is not yet available, fill in "To be determined" and update the legal authority once it becomes available.	Free text (max. 200 char) For Legislation as the legal authority, select from https://www.legislation.gov.au/ e.g. Legal authority for APS Employee Census results is *Public Service Act 1999*.
Licence	**A legal document under which the data asset *can be distributed or is made available*.** This information may be sourced through the agency's legal department.	Attach (or provide a URL to) the licence document e.g. Licence for APS Employee Census results is

Additional Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
	If information is not yet available, fill in "To be determined" and update the licence once it becomes available.	Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia. e.g. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence GNU Free Documentation License 1.3 with no cover tests and no variant sections MIT license (MIT) Other (Copyright/Closed) The BSD License
Disposal	**Information on the correct retention or disposal action of the data asset.** This is important because agencies are legally required to appropriately manage and dispose of their data. Where multiple disposal actions exist within the data asset, provide the longest retention period. For further guidance, refer to "**18.3 Disposal Action**" within Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard. This information may be sourced through the agency's legal department. If information is not yet available, fill in "To be determined" and update the disposal date as soon as it becomes known.	Free text: e.g. "Destroy 7 years after last entry" "Destroy 75 years after date of birth of employee" "Retain as national archives"
Data status	**This refers to the status of the data asset registration within the data inventory, not the status of the underlying data asset itself.** • **Under Development** - Registration is in progress (i.e. metadata has not been cleared by the relevant decision-maker, or not all core metadata attributes are populated in the data inventory) • **Completed** - Registration complete.	Choose term from: Under Development Completed
Publisher	**The agency that made the data asset formally available** and may control any future version release. The publisher can differ to the data custodian (see **Data Custodian** attribute). The publisher value must be consistent with the Government Directory, Non-Government Organisation (NGO) List or Research Organisations Register. This field is related to **Data Custodian** attribute.	Free text selected from the following: • For Government department and agency • For non-government organisation • For research organisation e.g. Department of Finance

Administrative Attributes

In addition to the 26 metadata attributes developed by the Data Champions Network, the ONDC uses two attributes to facilitate administration of the Catalogue. These metadata attributes do not add to or modify the metadata stored within data custodians' own data inventories, but assist in the presentation and discoverability of records within the Catalogue.

Administrative Attributes	Definition and Guidance	Format and Recommended Values
Related entities	**Organisations or individuals involved in the creation, ownership or administration of the underlying data asset, excluding those listed as the Custodian or Publisher.** The relationship of the entity to the data asset should be described. Where no related entities exist, this metadata attribute should be left blank. This attribute supplements the **Data custodian** and **Publisher** attributes. This attribute provides data custodians with a flexible option to present additional information on entities related to the data asset, which they might capture in a variety of forms within their own data inventories.	Free text (max. 500 char) e.g. Joint custodian Australian Government Department of Finance Copyright Commonwealth of Australian and State of Victoria Report authors J. Smith and M. Chan Developed in collaboration with the Centre for Statistical Sciences, Australian National University
Source	**The origin of the record.** 'AGDC specific' indicates the record has been directly contributed to the Catalogue by an Australian Government agency. Alternatively, the location of another public facing data collection from which the record has been sourced for entry into the Catalogue. This metadata attribute has been added to help Catalogue users filter search results to the data sources in which they are interested.	System generated – data custodians do not need to add this metadata attribute to the Catalogue

Version History

March 2023	Original release of the Guide on Metadata Attributes.
November 2023	Minor rewrite of some metadata attributes.
September 2024	To facilitate administration of the Catalogue, the ONDC has defined two new metadata attributes: Related Entities and Source.
February 2025	Revision to guidance on 'Temporal coverage to' field, recommending that this field be defined for every record. Reference documents for 'Security Classification' and 'Sensitive data' fields updated to 2024 release of the Australian Government Protective Security Policy Framework.
June 2025	Minor formatting and wording update to increase clarity of the guide.