

Making Your Data Open: A Guide

Open Data Commons Project



What is Open Data?

Open data is data that anyone is free to use, reuse and redistribute without restriction (except, perhaps the requirements to attribute and sharealike). For precise details see <http://opendefinition.org/>.

Why Does Openness and Licensing Matter?

Why bother about openness and licensing for data? After all they don't matter in themselves: what we really care about are things like the progress of human knowledge or the freedom to understand and share.

However, open data is crucial to progress on these more fundamental items. It's crucial because **open data is so much easier to break-up and recombine, to use and reuse.**

Licensing is important because it removes uncertainty. Without a license you don't know where you, as a user, stand: when are you allowed to use this data? Are you allowed to give to others? To distribute your own changes, etc?

Together, a definition of openness, plus a set of conformant 'open' licenses deliver clarity and simplicity. Not only is interoperability ensured between different sets of open data but people can know at a glance, and without having to go through a whole lot of legalese, what they are free to do.

So How Can I Make My Data Open?

1. Make your data publicly available!
2. If your data isn't publicly available then you make it hard for others to use it (or even decide whether to use it).
3. Apply a suitable open data license.
4. Explicit licensing is important for clarity and certainty and is needed even if you want your data to be 'public domain'.

How Do I License My Data?

Open Data Commons have already prepared a set of suitable licenses for you -- all you need to do is apply one. The 2 basic options are:

- Public Domain: Apply the [Public Domain Dedication and License](#)
 - Puts all your material in the 'Public Domain'
- Share-Alike: Apply the [Open Database License](#)
 - Like the GPL (or CC Share-Alike) requires public reusers of your data to share back changes.

NB: even though both these licenses tend to mention "Databases" rather than "Data" they are entirely suited to "data" -- it is simply that in lawyers-speak the preferred term for a collection of information is "Database" rather than "data".

To apply the license you would add a statement such as the following to your data (or place it on the page where it is available):

Public Domain Dedication and License

This {DATA(BASE)-NAME} is made available under the Public Domain Dedication and License version v1.0 whose full text can be found at <http://www.opendatacommons.org/licenses/pddl/>

Open Database License

This {DATA(BASE)-NAME} is made available under Open Database License v1.0 whose full text can be found at <http://opendatacommons.org/licenses/odbl/>. Any rights in individual contents of the database are licensed under the Database Contents License whose text can be found <http://opendatacommons.org/licenses/dbcl/>