In brief: the National Data Network

The National Data Network provides a distributed library of data holdings relevant to policy analysis and research. These data holdings remain held and controlled by their Custodian organisations.

This initiative promotes improved integration and consistent systems across government by facilitating greater collaboration between data providers and faster access to data.

Data Custodians will have access to a range of web based services, protocols, procedures, and tools to assist them to more efficiently manage and share data in a way that ensures security and privacy.

Over time, significant values and benefits will be delivered to:

- agencies, by sharing development costs;
- policy makers, by supporting efficient access to data;
- researchers, by articulating clear and consistent access protocols; and
- the community, by improving outcomes from government policies.

Whilst data is held by each Custodian, the National Data Network provides a complete catalogue of available data sources to allow users to easily search for, and access data holdings which have been exposed.

The National Data Network consists of the **NDN Central** linking to the **NDN Nodes**, which are libraries of metadata about each agencies data holdings. Researchers and policy analysts can search the National Data Network through the web site. Once access conditions have been met, researchers will be provided access to data held on the custodian’s node.
How Does it Work?

Custodian Nodes are linked to the National Data Network central server using an open source application that has been developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This software is free to download.

When exposing data to the Network, the Custodian determines the access conditions of each data source they own. The network will manage communications between the custodian and the researcher, authenticating users and reporting on data requests. For the majority of transactions on the National Data Network, authentication will be via unique usernames and passwords.

The National Data Network exposes metadata about data, rather than the data itself. Researchers and policy makers will have access to metadata to identify data which may be of value to their work. They can then apply for access to the data source.

Data remains held and controlled by the Custodian and access to the data will only be provided after access conditions are met.

Metadata

Custodians will expose data to the National Data Network by preparing metadata that is consistent with the NDN Metadata Schema. This metadata documents key aspects of each data source. Users are able to search for data by using key words across a number of the priority elements of the NDN Metadata Schemas.

A metadata schema ensures that data exposed through the network is described in a consistent way. Metadata schemas and protocols for the demonstration phase of the National Data Network have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders and are compatible with the Australian Government Locator Service (AGLS), which maximises the visibility and accessibility of Australian Government information on the web.

Statistical Services through the National Data Network

The Network will provide a range of on-line and downloadable services aimed at developing improved data in Australia. These services will support the creation, management, integration and analysis of data.

Some of these services will be provided by NDN Central, while others will be provided by third party service providers.

Progressively, the National Data Network services will be expanded to cover the full life-cycle of statistical processes. Services will be provided to aid Custodians in designing, creating and disseminating statistical data; and researchers in analysing this data.