



Data custodians play a critical role in ensuring their data is used legally, responsibly and in a way that delivers value for the community. Through shared governance, privacy-by-design processes and secure technical environments, the ABS works alongside custodians to create safe, high-quality integrated data. This collaboration enables richer insights, supports important research that drives better outcomes for society, while ensuring custodians retain control over how their data is managed and accessed.

This guide is intended to ensure prospective data custodians can fulfil this role and to prepare for smooth and efficient data sharing, linkage and access processes. We recommend you consider the questions below to determine if you are ready to take this on before initiating a new data integration request.

### Has the necessary internal support been established?

ABS projects require custodians to have adequate resourcing and organisational commitment to avoid delays and ensure successful supply of datasets for integration.

To achieve this, your organisation should:

- Confirm funding and resource availability for data preparation, supply and governance activities. For an indication of ABS costs, please refer to the charges section of the [ABS Data integration service](#) webpage.
- Confirm it can meet its data preparation and data supply timeframe commitments.

### Does your organisation have the governance, privacy and legal foundations in place to share data?

Strong governance and legal foundations are essential for organisations acting as data custodians in ABS data integration projects. These foundations ensure ABS' compliance with integrating authority requirements, protect individual rights and maintain public trust.

These foundations include:

- The legal authority for data sharing. Confirm your organisation has the legislative basis or regulatory authority to share data with the ABS for the purposes of data integration.
- Privacy compliance: For datasets that contain personal information, ensure data supply adheres to the Privacy Act 1988 and Australian Privacy Principles (APPs).
- Ethics: Where required, ensure you have addressed ethics requirements to support the supply of sensitive data for integration, research and/or statistics.
- Consent: review whether your consent instruments or collection notices support sharing of data for integration, research and/or statistics.
- Clear accountability for data management decisions and approvals within your organisational structure.
- Preparedness to enter into formal agreements with the ABS to support data supply and access.

### Is your organisation prepared to consider data access requests?

ABS aims to maximise the public benefit of integrated data. Custodians should expect to receive requests for access for diverse research and policy purposes and be transparent about availability. Limiting access requires strong and defensible justification which is published by the ABS.

As the custodian, your organisation needs to:

- Consider whether your data can be requested by approved DataLab researchers
- Ensure any restrictions on availability are supported by a clear and defensible justification (e.g., legal, ethical or commercial constraints).
- Plan for transparency in responding to data requests.



### Does your organisation have the necessary data management capability?

Data integration requests often involve complex datasets, which require robust technical and operational controls to safeguard integrity and security throughout its lifecycle.

Your organisation should have the capacity to:

- Participate in detailed data specification discussions to determine the linkage method and analytical module development.
- Provide detailed metadata and documentation about the dataset to be supplied, including data item lists, data dictionaries and data models.
- Prepare the dataset for secure data supply, including applying functional separation and other required technical controls.
- Provide subject matter expertise to researchers and the ABS to support accurate interpretation, responsible use, and high-quality analysis of your dataset. This will involve reviewing draft publications.

### Are you prepared for an ongoing partnership with the ABS?

As a data custodian, you will play a continuing role in supporting the safe and appropriate use of your data. This partnership varies across custodians, but in general your organisation should be ready to:

- Review and approve project-level access requests involving your data (where not delegated to the ABS)
- Supply updated data and metadata as agreed.
- Support transparency and public benefit by contributing to a responsible, well-governed integrated data system. This may include engagement in process and system improvements, participating as an observer or member of strategic committees and contribute your organisation's views when requested to support the growth of a safe and valuable integrated data system.

### Ready? Talk to us!

If your organisation can say yes to most of the above, then you are ready to be a data custodian!

To progress your data integration project, please [contact us](#) to initiate a Data Integration Request and we will guide you through the process. We aim to make this process as smooth and transparent as possible. If questions arise or any requirements are unclear, we are here to help at every stage.

### Not quite ready? We're still here to help.

If there are questions you're unable to answer or areas where you're unsure, we'd still like to support you. Some of the ways we can help include:

- connecting you with governance, privacy or technical specialists within the ABS to answer questions you may have;
- provide guidance on how you can strengthen the areas you're unsure about;
- partnership on grants to build your data governance or technical capability.