



Responsible Data Sharing Frameworks

A practical approach for
building trust and
coordination when data is
shared across organisations

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From pilot to process: a reusable method

In complex programmes, the data needed to deliver outcomes is often held across multiple organisations. Some of it may be sensitive, commercially restricted, or otherwise not suitable for full release under an open licence. It still needs to be shared responsibly – and used well.

A **Responsible Data Sharing Framework (RDSF)** is a practical way to set shared expectations around how data will be shared, used and safeguarded when responsibilities are distributed. An RDSF helps to bring clarity on purpose, roles, access and protection – so that data sharing is workable in practice, even when data cannot be made fully open. It is a structured, repeatable process, designed to reduce friction and build trust in data sharing.

This approach was developed through the Distributed Access to Renewable Energy Scale-Up (DARES) programme – in collaboration with the World Bank and Nigeria's Rural Electrification Agency. It was co-designed with 25+ stakeholders across public and private actors in the distributed renewable energy sector, then tested and refined through delivery.



What is a Responsible Data Sharing Framework?

A Responsible Data Sharing Framework (RDSF) is a practical way to agree how data will be shared and used when it's held across multiple organisations. It provides a **common reference point** that can make coordination more consistent, and collaboration more trusted.

What makes it responsible is the emphasis on clear purpose, appropriate safeguards and shared coordination. An RDSF helps actors with different incentives – including public agencies, private implementers, regulators, and funders – align on roles, access and responsibilities, so that data can be used well and risks are understood from the start.

An RDSF sets out:

- What data will be shared
- For what purpose
- Between which actors
- Under what principles and safeguards

When do you need an RDSF?

RDSFs are useful in any context where data is held by different actors, but more valuable when that data is brought together.

They are particularly useful when:

- multiple organisations each hold part of the data needed to deliver a programme
- there are privacy, commercial, legal or ethical constraints
- data requirements risk arriving late, or being renegotiated repeatedly
- you need shared definitions – including Key Performance Indicators – so information is comparable and usable
- roles and responsibilities for data collection, access and use are currently unclear
- incentives are misaligned – for example, where implementers are concerned about competitive disadvantage, or public agencies are concerned about legal or reputation risk

Implemented early, an RDSF helps to reduce friction – avoiding surprises around data requirements, misalignment between stakeholders, repeated negotiations about sensitive information, or unclear accountability. An RDSF can also be introduced mid-delivery, to bring clarity to data sharing that is already happening informally.



The impact of a Responsible Data Sharing Framework

In use, we've found that the value goes far beyond the document set. The process of developing the framework matters just as much, by building shared understanding, making expectations explicit early, and supporting implementation over time.

Shared rules from the start

When delivery involves multiple implementers, shared expectations reduce ambiguity and cut time spent renegotiating requirements – especially when established early. Agreeing data definitions and sharing expectations once also reduces the reporting burden and makes participation easier for delivery partners. Consistent reporting then makes it easier to track delivery, assess performance fairly, step in early when problems emerge – and build the evidence base needed for learning and improvement across a programme.

A common language for data

When partners work with different definitions, it's hard to know whether you are comparing like with like. Shared indicators and methods mean the data coming back from across a programme is consistent and interoperable from the start. That makes it faster and easier to interpret, reducing the analytical burden and giving programme teams and funders greater confidence in what the data is telling them.

Designed with, not for

In complex programmes, the organisations that hold the most valuable data can often be the most cautious about sharing it, for understandable reasons – commercial pressures, regulatory risk and reputational concerns. We've found that how a framework is built matters as much as what it contains. Developed with all parties rather than handed to them, a shared RDSF creates the conditions for data to flow where it's needed, and for trust to develop over time.

Foundations for what comes next

Complex programmes evolve – and the tools and technologies available to deliver them change too. Without clear data governance from the start, adapting to those changes means retrofitting trust and renegotiating expectations. An RDSF lays the groundwork early, so programmes are better placed to adopt new approaches – including artificial intelligence – responsibly as they emerge.

Data sharing built for impact

The point is not data for its own sake. An RDSF helps data function as a shared resource for planning, coordination, learning, and decision-making – so that the people and communities at the centre of a programme see the benefits of better delivery, better decisions, and continuous improvement.



What does an RDSF include?

An RDSF is made up of four linked components:

The Responsible Data Sharing Framework

A key set of principles that inform and guide data sharing across relevant organisations.

These principles help build trust, support coordination, and make sure data is shared in a responsible and consistent way.

Data Sharing Arrangements

A version of the framework adapted to specific regulatory, policy and sectoral contexts it will be used in

Data Sharing Agreements

Formal agreements setting out who is sharing data, why, what data is included, and what safeguards apply

Standard Key Performance Indicators

Agreed definitions, indicators and standards ensuring shared data is usable, comparable and relevant to programme goals

These four components are designed to work a single system, moving from shared principles to practical implementation. They are not purely a technical instrument.

Each component needs to be shaped to fit the regulatory, operational and cultural context it works in, and tested against the realities of delivery.

Organisations come to a framework with different levels of data maturity. For some, the process reaffirms the strength of existing data governance practices. For others, it helps to identify gaps and creates a structure to address them. This approach is designed to meet organisations where they are, while building towards a consistent standard across the programme.



Phases of development

Development of an RDSF is delivered through four phases:

Phase 1: Foundation and scoping

Objective	Establish a shared understanding of the data ecosystem, constraints and priorities
Key Activities	• Map organisations that generate, process or use data • Identify priority data uses (e.g. oversight, planning, learning) • Understand the legal, ethical and operational risks • Review relevant legal and regulatory context

Phase 2: Co-design the framework

Objective	Build shared expectations and trust before data sharing obligations are fixed
Key Activities	• Convene key stakeholders in structured workshops • Agree principles for appropriate, efficient and effective data sharing • Agree standard KPIs, data inventories and definitions • Clarify roles, responsibilities and boundaries for data use

Phase 3: Translate into data sharing arrangements / agreements

Objective	Turn principles into practical, enforceable arrangements – including assurance for where commitments aren't met.
Key Activities	• Draft Data Sharing Agreements tailored to regulatory context • Define specific data inventories, KPIs and metrics • Test draft arrangements with implementers or delivery teams

Phase 4: Embed and iterate

Objective	Ensure the framework works in practice
Key Activities	• Onboarding sessions for participating organisations • Practical checklists to support compliance • Feedback loops to identify where refinement is needed



Adapting this approach

Over the past decade, Open Data Services has supported 50+ organisations to design and deliver data initiatives that deliver impact.

We've found that the most effective frameworks are built through genuine collaboration – shaped by the people who will use them, and tested against the realities of delivery.

The goal is programmes that are better coordinated, more accountable, and more likely to deliver for the people and communities they centre. Data sharing, done well, is how you get there.

If this approach resonates, we'd welcome the conversation – whether that's sharing examples of our work, or thinking through what an RDSF would look like in your context.

About Open Data Services

We partner with governments, multilaterals, charities, academics, social innovators, and other purpose driven entities who share our vision of using data to deliver lasting impact in communities worldwide.

In recent years, we've worked with:

- World Bank
- African Development Bank
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UK
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- World Health Organization
- CoST – Infrastructure Transparency Initiative
- Mozilla Foundation
- 360Giving
- Open Ownership

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