

Open data for VSC organisations – Frequently Asked Questions

What is open data?

Open data represents information that is freely available for others to access and use.

What kind of open data exists?

There is a wide range of open data available from many organisations, for example: - local authorities publish monthly spreadsheets of all the items they've spent over £500 on - the office for national statistics release data on a whole range of demographic and community data - funding bodies are increasingly publishing the data on the organisations they provide grants to.

What's so special about open data?

Quite often, open datasets are made available to the public for the first time. Previously, they could have been locked away with special access rights or needed certain knowhow. In some cases the information might already exist as word documents or PDFs, for example. The difference with open data is that it is published in 'data formats' (such as spreadsheets) that make it easier for people to access, analyse and - sometimes - mix with other datasets.

What do people do with open data?

Maps, apps, websites, charts, reports – you name it! Quite often, teams of people make interesting projects based on open data.

Who is open data?

The open data 'movement' is wide ranging. It can involve technical computer scientists, through to journalists, activists and researchers. Many people are interested in open data, for varied reasons and motivations - it is a worldwide movement.

Why is it relevant to the voluntary and community sector?

Open data is linked to many of the issues that are key to the sector - transparency, accountability, openness. Open data can assist VCS organisations to access insights and information that may have previously been out of reach.

Does the Wiltshire Community Foundation open any data?

Yes – Wiltshire Community Foundation publishes data on all the grants we make to charities and community groups around Wiltshire.

Do I need to be technical to talk to anyone about open data?

No members of the Wiltshire Community Foundation team can help and assist you with open data.

Should our organisation use open data?

Of course! Start to look at some of the links on our website for open data sources. Think about how you could use open data in your organisations. It helps you find funding, find other groups to collaborate with or to find areas of greatest need for your services or funds.

Should our organisations publish data too?

If you can. Try and identify any key aspects of your organisation that others may be interested in. We believe that the more of the sector that publishes data, the easier it will be for us to get a true picture of the charitable sector and to support it to become more efficient and effective.

Key things to think about

It must be remembered that publishing open data requires responsibility and diligence. At Wiltshire Community Foundation we take care to ensure that all our data is anonymised and cannot identify individuals. We also have an Open Data Policy that describes our approach to open data. For every dataset we publish, and update, we keep some notes to help those that may be interested in it.