

Four key points for the Data Act:

1. Agencies like USAID and the State Department should use their IATI files to comply with the requirements of the DATA Act. Any additional fields required should be incorporated in addition to their IATI file. This will likely reduce the burden on the agencies whose core mission is foreign assistance.
2. For other agencies that spend a smaller amount on foreign assistance it is critical that the information required by the DATA Act is tagged as either domestic or foreign assistance. This will facilitate the exchange of data to and from usaspending.gov and the foreignassistance.gov sites.
3. Encouraging automated data transfer will be an important way of ensuring that data is high quality and timely.
4. It is important not to displace the efforts of international standards where there are strong use cases and highly developed standards. Agencies for which a large part of their total spend is foreign assistance should be strongly encouraged to continue to automate their publication to IATI, or begin to do so in the short term if they have not already published.

Note: The U.S. [joined](#) the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) in November 2011. This commitment was announced by Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, at the fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Korea. The U.S. became the 25th signatory to IATI, a common standard for publishing aid information that makes it easy to compare aid from donor to donor. The U.S. has also included a commitment to foreign assistance transparency on its [first](#) and [second](#) National Action Plans under the Open Government Partnership.

A. Please describe or provide examples of data standards on data exchange that could ensure the data is “open.” Open in this context means anyone can access, use, or re-use posted information, including the public, Federal agencies, local and state governments, academia, media, industry, standard-setting bodies, transparency groups, on a worldwide scale.

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) developed and agreed a common, open, standard for the publication of aid information – the [IATI standard](#).¹ Organizations implement IATI by publishing their aid information in IATI’s agreed electronic format (XML) – usually on their website – with a link to the IATI Registry, The Registry acts as an online repository or index of links for all of the raw data published to the IATI Standard.

Almost 300 organizations have now published their data to the IATI Standard. The highest quality data is published automatically out of donors’ own systems – rather than requiring a manual export and unnecessary data manipulation. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has already begun publishing data automatically to IATI by sharing their own IATI XML file with the Foreign Assistance Dashboard, the U.S. designated instrument responsible for passing all U.S. foreign assistance data to IATI.

¹<http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/resources/submission-un-expert-advisory-panel-data-revolution>: Agreed in 2011, the IATI Standard is a technical publishing framework allowing open data from different development organisations to be compared, aligned with partner country budgets, and linked to results at national level. The Standard was developed after extensive consultations on the information needs of partner countries, CSOs and donors.

IATI data is used by a wide range of stakeholders: academics, researchers, recipients of aid and taxpayers. A number of data portals have been built to visualize IATI data:

- One of the best examples of this is **Akvo's openaidsearch.org**, where visitors can customise interactive maps to see how projects are distributed geographically by region, country and sector. It uses all datasets from the IATI Registry, visualises them on the platform and also makes the data available through an API, allowing for further platform development.
- **AidData** scales up this approach, producing a series of maps incorporating data from IATI and 90 bilateral agencies (<http://aiddata.org/gis>).
- The use of interactive graphs and menus, for example on **Sweden's Openaid.se** and the **UK's Development Tracker** (<https://www.gov.uk/devtracker>), allows the exploration of aid volumes, projects and results across different sectors, locations and time periods at the click of a button. This gives users a more relevant insight into a country's aid portfolio or an organisation's work, as the information can be easily tailored to their individual needs.²

Another data standard that should be taken into account is the [Open Contracting Data Standard](#) (OCDS), launched in November 2014. The standard is interoperable with the IATI standard, meaning data can be looked at side by side, overlaid and used in conjunction with other data to make the information more complete. The OCDS "aims to formalize how contracting data and documents can be published in an accessible, structured and repeatable way".

D. Please describe or provide examples of data standards on data exchange that could ensure the implementation of appropriate "validation" processes. "Validation" in this context means an ongoing process for validation and integration. Validation has spectrum end points that are rules-based or document-based. Rules-based refers to business rules of the data standard which are interwoven into the fabric of the standard output and standard governance body. Document-based end points are business rules separately stored and not entirely contained within the standard output or standard governance body.

IATI has developed its own IATI XML validator. Anyone publishing to IATI can use this tool: <http://validator.iatistandard.org/>. This ensures basic compliance against the IATI XML Schema.

Publish What You Fund has also developed a data validator to assess data used in the annual [Aid Transparency Index](#): <http://tracker.publishwhatyoufund.org/>. This tool is designed to run automated checks and tests on each organization's data, providing both a comparative view across organizations and granular details on each organization's data.³

For the purposes of the Aid Transparency Index, documents such as evaluations, objectives, budget documents, contracts and tenders were also manually sampled to verify that they contained the information outlined in the [indicator guidelines](#).

E. Please describe or provide examples of data standards on data exchange that could ensure appropriate "extensibility." "Extensibility" in this context is defined as functionality for flexibility (maintenance) of future modification to the data standard. The end points of the spectrum for these criteria are flexible and rigid. Flexible references extensibility and implementation ease whereas rigid relates to the pliability of the construction and rules integration.

² http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ATI-2014_Final-report.pdf: 2014 Aid Transparency Index:

³ <http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/resources/fags/>: The quality of data published in IATI XML is assessed by running a series of tests on all activity and organisation data packages being published to the Registry. These tests have been designed to assess the availability and comparability of aid information and to determine whether an organisation's IATI data conforms to the IATI standard appropriately. Most of the tests have been derived directly from the IATI schemas which provide formats for reporting data on various information fields to the IATI Registry.

The IATI standard allows for extensibility via “namespaces” in the XML data. These have been used by the U.S. to add U.S.-specific pieces of information, such as the Treasury account that the funds flow from, and the agency that the funds were initially appropriated to. France has also used this feature of the IATI Standard to add information specific to the French context.

The IATI standard is periodically reviewed and upgraded.⁴ Changes to some or all of those parts of the standard can be suggested by publishers and users of the data. The proposals are then reviewed by the IATI [Steering Committee](#) through its Secretariat and [Technical Advisory Group](#). There are three types of revisions to the standard:

1. Minor changes:

- bug-fixes
- modifications to non-embedded codelists
- improvements to documentation

Minor changes can be tracked through the [IATI GitHub](#) account

2. Decimal upgrades:

- bug-fixes
- modifications to embedded codelists
- minor additions to the standard which improve the functionality without introducing substantial new content
- changes will be optional
- changes will be backwardly compatible.

3. Integer upgrades:

- substantial additions involving new areas of data
- new mandatory fields
- changes that are not backwardly compatible
- proposed minor upgrades that are disputed by one or more members.

⁴ <http://iatistandard.org/upgrades>: All proposed changes, for Integer and Decimal Upgrades, will be published on the IATI Knowledge Base (<http://support.iatistandard.org/forums>) in the IATI Standards forums. The entire process should be open to public scrutiny at all times.