

# THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA ARCHIVE

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## Introduction

The Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA), located in the [Research School of Social Sciences \(RSSH\)](#) at [The Australian National University \(ANU\)](#), was set up in 1981 with a brief to collect and preserve computer-readable data relating to social, political and economic affairs and to make the data available for further analysis.

The Archive has now evolved to a distributed network, with nodes at the Universities of Queensland and New South Wales. Over time, we aim to extend the network to provide a node in each state.

The national role of the Archive is recognised by the Australian Research Council and attaches the following condition to all Discovery and Linkage grants:

- C8. *Social Science Data Sets:* Any digital data arising from a Project involving research relating to the social sciences should be lodged with the Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA) for secondary use by other investigators. This should normally be done within two years of the conclusion of any fieldwork relating to the Project research. If a Chief Investigator is not intending to do so within the two-year period, s/he should include the reasons in the Project's Final Report.

## The ASSDA Catalogue

ASSDA collects data files from all parts of Australia, and from many different types of organisations, including universities, market research companies, and government organisations. Since its establishment, ASSDA has collected over 1050 datasets from Australian surveys and opinion polls. ASSDA also holds the Australian Bureau of Statistics Historical Census Data Archive, preserving ABS tabulations dating back to 1961. ASSDA holds a number of overseas datasets, which have been deposited due to a lack of general data archiving facilities in the Asia Pacific region.

The collection is accessed via ASSDA's online data discovery service called NESSTAR. NESSTAR allows browsing through the catalogue where studies have been categorized according to the APAIS thesaurus. Searching is also possible across multiple catalogues, or specific metadata fields, allowing ready comparison between different studies.

The metadata standard used is the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI), developed by the international data archiving community. Using XML, the DDI is used by all major data archives around the world.

## Preservation Methods

Using ASSDA developed software, data entering the archive are checked for errors, standardised then converted into two versions, the Archival and the Access copies. The archival copy converts the data to text, removing any software or system dependence, facilitating future migration efforts. Metadata is stored in XML format, with related documents stored with the data in text or pdf.

The Access copies are designed to be user friendly. Accessed through ASSDA's data dissemination software NESSTAR, data can be browsed online. Also possible are basic analyses like cross-tabulations and regressions. When authority is granted to have a personal copy of the data, the client downloads the data directly from the website, where it is converted into one of nine popular analytic formats as selected by the client.

### **ASSDA in the International Context**

ASSDA is a member of both the [International Federation of Data Organisations \(IFDO\)](#) and the International Association for Social Science Information Service and Technology (IASSIST). Through these links, ASSDA maintains contacts with data organisations abroad, ensuring ASSDA's practices always meet the industry standards. By developing relationships with overseas data providers, ASSDA is able to source international data for Australian researchers on request.

As one of the few general public data archives in the Asia/Pacific region, ASSDA plays an important leadership role. ASSDA preserves "at risk" data when requested by other countries and offers advice and support to developing data services, with international data archiving training programs planned for 2006.

### **Other Projects at ASSDA**

ASSDA is currently being funded by the ARC to establish two new data archive nodes at the University of Queensland and the University of New South Wales. Using NESSTAR's grid enabled technology ASSDA aims to provide clients with a seamless transition between multiple catalogues at the three nodes by the end of 2005. The project has been designed to be scalable, with nodes in each state planned for the future.

ASSDA staff are also responsible for the fieldwork of several leading mail surveys including the Australian Election Study, the Australian Candidate Study, and the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, which includes the Australian components of the World Values Study and the International Social Survey Program. With ASSDA's focus on high quality data and documentation and quick public release of data, these key surveys are put into the public domain in the fastest possible time.

In conjunction with The Australian Institute of Family Studies, and funded by the Attorney General's Department, ASSDA is conducting an audit of all Family Law related data holdings collected by government, academic and private organizations. A searchable metadata database will be created by ASSDA, with AIFS researchers analyzing the results, looking for the strengths of and problems in the family law data record.

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