



Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

# **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)**

## **AEDC Data Application Assessment Guidelines**



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## About the AEDC Data Application Assessment Guidelines

### Content

The AEDC *Data Application Assessment Guidelines* (the Guidelines) set out the procedures and operating environment used by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) Data Management Agency (DMA) when assessing applications for AEDC Data in all its forms and should be used in conjunction with the AEDC Data Guidelines.

The purpose of these Guidelines is to establish an effective framework for the proper consideration of information contained in AEDC Macrodata and Microdata application forms and other data requests submitted to the DMA in order to obtain AEDC Data. The Guidelines apply to all AEDC applications made to, and reviewed by, the DMA.

### Amendments

The Australian Government Department of Education (the Department) reserves the right to amend these Guidelines from time to time by whatever means it may determine in its absolute discretion.

The Department may need to make such amendments to reflect Australian Government priorities. The Department will publish any changes online at [www.education.gov.au](http://www.education.gov.au) and [www.aedc.gov.au](http://www.aedc.gov.au).

### Version

Version	Published	Comment
1.0	November 2015	New publication to coincide with the release of the AEDC Data Guidelines v2.0
2	November 2023	New publication to coincide with the release of the AEDC Data Guidelines Cycle 6

### Notice

The information contained in these Guidelines is provided for guidance only and does not constitute legal advice, nor should it be treated as a substitute for legal or professional advice, particularly in relation to subjects such as human research ethical approval requirements, privacy and the use and storage of personal information.

Should you have any questions in relation to these guidelines, contact the Data Management Agency or the Department at [support@aedc.gov.au](mailto:support@aedc.gov.au) or by calling 1800 092 548.

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## 1. Determine application form compliance

An application form is considered '**compliant**' when the following requirements are met:

- a. all sections of the application form, relevant to the data being requested, have been completed with appropriate and acceptable responses
- **NOTE:** the use of words such as '**N/A**', '**None**' or '**NIL**' as a response against items where the project would reasonably require such information to exist and be included are not acceptable without explanation(s), particularly against items in the Risk or Data Security sections
- b. the Declaration has been completed correctly and signed appropriately and the form has not been altered in any way
- c. the application is not from an individual or organisation that has had their access to AEDC restricted or removed as a result of a previous breach of guidelines

If, 30 working days after feedback is provided to the applicant from the Data Management Agency (DMA), the application remains incomplete and the applicant has not responded or provided all information, then the DMA will follow up with the applicant. If the applicant does not respond within 10 working days, the application will be considered withdrawn.

## 2. Determine application/project risk

### 2.1. Unauthorised use of AEDC data or potential for release of Identified Information

In compliance with the Privacy Act 1988, AEDC Data can only be utilised for the purposes they have been collected for. Authorised uses of AEDC data are outlined in Section 3.1 of the AEDC Data Guidelines.

The AEDC is not intended to identify individuals or evaluate schools, nor is it designed or intended to produce diagnostic data or measures about the status or performance of individual children, classes, teachers or schools. Under the Privacy Act, the DMA has an obligation not to provide sensitive AEDC data that would reasonably allow data users to re-identify individuals, or to identify individuals as developmentally vulnerable, including through integration with other information or based on the data users' prior knowledge.

If after an initial assessment, the project is found not to comply with these criteria, the applicant is to be consulted and, unless the application is amended, will not be considered further and is to be rejected. The Special Criteria at Section 3 will not apply.

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Project is an unauthorised use of AEDC data, consistent with AEDC goals and objectives	-	E
It may be possible for individuals to be re-identified by the applicant/organisation during the project	-	E

## 2.2. Project Summary information

The overall nature of the project can provide sufficient information to assist in the determination of the project's likely risk rating. Organisational skills and capacity, data storage and retention plans, etc., should feature in determining an application's assessment. The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application depending on the question's response:

Assessment finding	No	Yes
The requested demographic variables are congruent with the project's requirements	H	L
Project has clearly defined analysis techniques for requested variables	H	L
Project has clearly identified risks (see below)	H	L
Project has clearly identified risk management strategies for all risks	H	L
Plans for the public release of project results are compliant with AEDC Data Guidelines	H	L
Project ' <i>public good or benefit</i> ' has been assessed against the project's potential privacy impact by a committee properly convened by the applicant for this purpose	M	L
Applicant has considered relevant legislation (all levels of government), particularly in relation to privacy and the handling of personal information	H	L
Where applicable, project has any exemptions to these legislative requirements	H	L
Project institution has suitable capacity, infrastructure, and security to accommodate and manage the data and has satisfactory data security, retention and destruction plan(s) in place	H	L
Project details are clearly defined for all possible projects stemming from use of the data	H	L
Where the applicant has had an application for AEDC data for the same or for a similar research project(s) rejected or declined by either the DMA or the Department in the preceding 12 months, the applicant has clearly detailed the changes to the project in order to meet the assessment criteria	H	L

Where an application generates a **HIGH** response to any of these questions, the DMA is to consult with the applicant to resolve the issue. Use of words such as 'N/A', 'None' or 'NIL' as a response against items where the project would reasonably require such information to exist and be included are not acceptable without explanation(s), particularly against items in the Risk or Data Security sections.

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, and unless the applicant meets one of the criteria detailed in section 3, the application is to be rejected.

Where applicants may be able to access the data for projects that are not explicitly mentioned in their application, then it may be more appropriate to enter into a data sharing agreement instead of an application.

## 2.3. HREC approval

The DMA requests all applications seek Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Approval, as either low risk/negligible risk or full ethical review. Where full ethical approval is not required, applicants are to provide proof that this assessment has been carried out by the appropriate agency.

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Project has all necessary Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approvals or has submitted an application to an HREC and is awaiting approval	M	L
Where applicable, proof that HREC approval is not required, in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research	H	L
Project does <u>not</u> have necessary Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approvals and has <u>not</u> submitted an application to an HREC	-	H

## 2.4. AEDC data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The Australian Government Department of Education recommends that applications for AEDC data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children abide by the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. It is also recommended that data applicants wishing to disclose previously unpublished AEDC data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to third parties, including but not limited to community organisations, local governments, and the general public, secure ethical clearance with AIATSIS (or another research ethics committee with adequate cultural capabilities).

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Project abides by the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research	M	L
If the project intends to disclose previously unpublished AEDC data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the researchers have ethical clearance from AIATSIS (or another research committee with adequate cultural capabilities)	H	L

Where it is not possible to meet the above recommendations, data applicants are invited to discuss their requirements with the DMA.

## 2.5. Geospatial settings

Generating data at finer granularities increases the possibility of individual identification. The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application:

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Project requested geospatial variables at SA4 level	-	L
Project requested geospatial variables at SA3 level	-	L
Project requested geospatial variables at SA2 level	-	L
Project requested, or is linking AEDC data to, geospatial variables at SA1 level or equivalent (when combined with other demographic variables)	-	H
Project has requested, or is linking AEDC data to, geospatial variables at granularity finer than SA1	-	H

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, the application is to be forwarded to the Department.

## 2.6. Unique records

The number of unique demographic records that an application generates in a resulting dataset indicate the possibility of individual identification, with higher numbers of unique records increasing this possibility. The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application depending on the number of unique records generated:

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Dataset contains less than 75 per cent unique records	-	L
Dataset contains more than 75 per cent unique records	-	M
Dataset contains more than 90 per cent unique records (see below)	-	M

Applications that generate a dataset with over 90 per cent unique records are still **MEDIUM** risk, but the DMA is to consult with the applicant if all variables are required.

## 2.7. Publication and reporting

Where project assessed as high/medium risk, DMA request applicant to include details within application form.

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Presentation and publication plan details submission to the AEDC DMA prior to any publication, and mentions the relevant timelines; i.e. materials produced by government agencies or under contract for a government agency, which contain national level data for public release, will be submitted to the AEDC National Committee for a 10- business day comment period prior to publication	H	L
Publication and presentation plan details adherence to AEDC publication rules	H	L

## 2.8. Data linkage

Projects that are requesting AEDC data for data linkage purposes can present additional factors that can impact the risks associated with the generated dataset. Projects requiring data linkage must use one of the Commonwealth Approved Data Linkage Units or Accredited Integrating Authorities as specified here: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data-hub/data-applications/access-by-application>. The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application:

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Linking to the AEDC is essential for the project	M	L
Achievement of separation principles is clearly defined	H	L
Dataset to be retained after end of project	-	H
Applicant has been previously provided with AEDC data which, if linked to this application's data, presents an increased risk of individual identification	L	M

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, the application is to be rejected.

## 2.9. Data elements

The data variables requested by a project are assessed to ensure these meet AEDC data guidelines

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Requested variables are relevant to the research project	H	L
Where requested variables include individual instrument items, valid justification for these items is provided (i.e. ATSI status, Special Needs status etc.)	H	M
Sufficient justification is provided for the provision of geographical variables (particularly relevant for requests for SA1 or more granular levels of geography)	H	M
Requested, or is linking AEDC data to, SA1 (or equivalent) level variables in conjunction with SchoolID	-	H
Requests for data items not included on application form (other variables)		M/H

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, the application is to be rejected.

## 2.10. Data security

It is vital that sensitive AEDC data be stored and managed appropriately and securely by the applicant. The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application:

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Data storage plan meets conditions outlined in section 5.3 of the data guidelines	H	L
Data usage meets conditions outlined in section 5 of the data guidelines	H	L
Data disposal/destruction details meet conditions outlined in 8.5 of the data guidelines	H	L

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, the application is to be rejected.

## 2.11. Declaration and signatures

The applicant must agree to the terms of the declaration in the application form. The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application:

Assessment finding	No	Yes
Declaration is unedited	H	L

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, the application is to be rejected.



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## 2.12. Potential for release of identified information

Under the Privacy Act, the DMA has an obligation not to provide AEDC data that would reasonably allow data users to re-identify individuals, through the integration of other information or based on their prior knowledge.

The following table shows the risk rating that should be applied to the application:

Assessment finding	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely to occur	Possible	Likely to occur	Almost Certain
Individuals can be identified by the applicant/organisation during the project	-	-	H	E	E

Where it is not possible to reduce a **HIGH** rating after consultation with the applicant, and unless the applicant meets one of the criteria detailed in **section 3**, the application is to be rejected.

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### 3. Special criteria

If, at the end of an assessment process, and after consultation with the applicant, an application continues to have a **HIGH** rating against one or more 'Assessment findings', it is to be rejected unless the applicant meets one of the following criteria:

- (a) the applicant's organisation is an Australian Government or a state or territory government agency
- (b) the applicant requires the data to deliver a project or series of projects under contract to an Australian Government or a state or territory government agency

Where an applicant meets one or more, of these criteria, the application is to be forwarded to the Department for consideration and final decision.