Questions and Answers on Data Exchange (DEX) - Contractual requirements and policy related questions

Context

DEX reporting is a key component of the Government's 2014 streamlined grants administration initiatives. DEX was introduced to focus on the collection of consistent data across all Government programs. Through the aggregated service delivery data items, government is seeking to build the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of client facing programs and service delivery approaches. SETS providers are also required to submit an annual Activity Workplan Report which is complementary to DEX reporting and was designed to capture qualitative reporting.

Q) Many clients do not consent to their data being shared. When we tick that they have not consented, the client converts into an anonymous client. How could this be addressed so that we can accurately capture our client numbers and meet contractual requirements?

All organisations are required to obtain client consent on behalf of DSS before storing personal information in the DEX. Organisations reporting through the DEX must ask clients if they consent to the collection of their personal information for storage in the DEX.

When consent is not given, the client's personal information is not stored in the DEX. In these cases, organisations can only see demographic data for that client.

When consent is given, only the organisation will be able to access information identifying who clients are. Each organisation is expected to have internal policies to protect client records.

A client providing their consent or not, should not affect an organisation's ability accurately capture client numbers and meet contractual requirements. A consenting client and a non-consenting client will still result in a client record being created in DEX, and that client record being attached to the relevant case and session records.

The DEX takes client consent very seriously and cannot store personal information of the client without their consent. We encourage organisations to keep in-house processes to ensure anonymous clients can be identified by the organisation if needed, possibly by the nomenclature of the 'Client Id'.

Please note, the 'Client Id' must not contain any identifying information about the client's personal information, such as name, or initials. If organisations have client identifiers assigned to clients in their own systems, filing, etc. – then it might be good to adopt these for the DEX Client Id, noting the above privacy advice.

Please see our Privacy Impact Assessment Report and Protocols to understand the Data Exchange's approach to privacy and our legal obligations. We also recently published a training module further explaining consent.

Q) To mitigate unknown or poor data entered into DEX, could particular questions that would assist the Department with high level policy decisions and program development, be mandatory?

The Department of Home Affairs is currently working with the DSS DEX Team on refining the Program Specific Guidelines. In particular, making clear those aspects of data collection that the Department would like it to be mandatory for organisations to collect.

Q) Is the Department going to incorporate outcomes not just outputs into the DEX system, such as aligning data reporting to the National Settlement Outcomes Standards?

DEX is a whole-of-government system, not specifically designed around SETS, as such the outcome fields do not match exactly to settlement areas, such as those set out in the National Settlement Outcomes Framework or associated outcomes documents that have been developed by the sector. However, the domains used to collect SCORE data are broadly consistent with the settlement areas identified in these documents eg Financial resilience, material wellbeing and basic necessities, house, mental health, wellbeing and self-care, physical health, personal and family safety and age appropriate development.

Q) Did the Department use DEX data to inform the additional $26.8M investment in settlement services to target domestic and family violence (DFV)?

The Department of Home Affairs uses DEX data as an evidence base for a range of matters including assessment of the impact made by programs. For example, the Department regularly responds to questions asked on how the SETS programs addresses various settlement issues, including for example facilitating acquisition of English language skills, improving employment outcomes, addressing issues such as domestic and family violence etc. DEX data is also used to demonstrate the return on Government investment, for example funding per client; and to help determine future investment for the program, including in informing the investment of additional funding for SETS providers targeting women's safety.

Evidence used to inform the case for additional funding for DFV included reference to the Reason for Seeking Assistance, Referral Reason and the Circumstance domain for SCORE, including identifying trends in client numbers and outcomes related to 'personal and family safety''.

To capture DFV activities related to the additional funding, the Department has requested to have added a new Service Type into DEX to capture client 's specifically receiving DFV services. . This should be available for the first six monthly reporting period in 2021-22 and will be reflected in an updated Program Specific Guidance document.

Q) Does DEX data demonstrate a need for services for clients over 5 years in Australia? Is this being considered in policy development?

DEX is designed to capture information for clients who are eligible for the SETS program. A range of issues, including the current five year period for some settlement services, are being reviewed as part of the overall settlement reform work being led by the Coordinator General for Migrant Services.

Q) Does the Department also pay the same amount of attention to qualitative data and if so, how?

The Department reviews both the six monthly quantitative performance reports from DEX and the qualitative information in the annual Activity Work Plan report. The information in both reports contribute to creating the overall evidence base for the program.

Q) Does the Department use DEX data to assist with briefing the minister, particularly before he visits particular SETS providers? If so, what information is generally included?

The Department uses DEX data (and AWP Reports) to assist in briefing the Minister on a range of issues, including for visits to SETS providers. Information provided in briefing is tailored to the particular issue for discussion, however it can include, for example, information on client numbers, types of services provided, demographic information for clients, trends over time and SCORE (outcomes) data.

Q) What support is available for smaller organisations who have limited resources for training and staff to make DEX inputs?

The Data Exchange website has a number of resources available to support organisations such as short videos, recorded webinars, fact sheets and task cards. In addition, organisations can contact the Data Exchange Helpdesk on 1800 020 283 or dss.dataexchange.helpdesk@dss.gov.au.

SETSCoP is also a useful forum for small providers to get assistance from other SETS providers on any issues related to reporting requirements and to share best practice.

Organisations are encouraged to enter data to DEX regularly, to minimise the administrative burden of inputting 6 months' data at the end of each reporting period.

For more information and support please refer to:

- The Data Exchange Protocols
- Program Specific Guidance
- DEX website
- DEX Training
- Email or call 1800 020 283 the Data Exchange Helpdesk
- Contact your SETS Funding Arrangement Manger (FAM) –for general reporting requirements for SETS

Q) Is there a way to see people who are SETS eligible and have recently settled to a region on DEX?

The Data Exchange was designed to ensure a client's personal information is protected through strict protocols that comply with the requirements of the *Privacy Act 1988*, including the Australian Privacy Principals (APPs).

All data submitted to the Data Exchange is de-identified and therefore, it is not possible to show individual information about a person's circumstances or where they reside.

Q) What should I do when it's difficult to collect individual demographic information (e.g. when it's not possible to capture individual data in an online group session)?

If you are unable to collect individual client details due to method of service delivery, you can record them as unidentified clients. The Department also recommends you advise your FAM of any significant changes to service delivery by the Activity Workplan Report, to help them understand why your numbers of unidentified clients may have increased.

See Program Specific Guidance for more information.

Q) How can I report on volunteer engagement as it can't be captured through DEX?

As the purpose of DEX is to record services delivered to and outcomes achieved by the primary client cohort rather than administrative effort, organisations can report volunteer engagement through their Activity Work Plan Reports rather than on DEX.

Q) How is DEX data used?

Data collected on DEX helps to tell the 'story' about program outcomes and demonstrates:

- How much is being done?
- How well is it being done?
- Did we achieve what we expected?

Articulating the outcomes achieved enables Government to better understand the complexities of a program and the people it is aiming to support.

SCORE has greatly contributed to the Department being able to:

- better understand what levels of service leads to the best outcome
- assess the gains made by a program
- understand where more effort or investment needs to be made
- better understand a client's pathway and the services they access
- gain insights into what works and what isn't working in terms of service delivery for continuous improvement

Q) How should I record 'check in's'?

Recording depends on the nature of the service. If a client is pre-existing client with their full details on a client record, you can attach a session to their record, using a service type that describes the type of service delivered.

If you are providing a check-in for group clients and only have the client's name, they will come under unidentified clients.

If you are doing a lot of check-ins in one day or week, you can create a case called 'Check-in' and create sessions for either the day or week, and all unidentified clients could be attached to that session.

Q) How can I record data for a client who has presented with a range of issues?

You can only select one service type per session and should select the most dominate issue. However, you can record SCORE assessments across as many domains that are relevant to the session.

Q) How can I define and score a low- or medium-intensity client?

As per the Program Specific Guidance:

Low-intensity client: someone who requires minimal assistance to meet their settlement needs and achieve their goals. They engage with SETS only once or at infrequent intervals. They may not see the same caseworker. This includes warm referrals where possible.

Medium-intensity client: someone who requires greater support as identified in the individual needs assessment. A case worker is generally assigned to the client to ensure continuity of support, a case plan developed, responsibilities and timeframes to achieve outcomes are identified, warm referrals to other services are provided and regular contact with the client is given until their needs are met.

Q) How can providers assess how they are tracking and identify areas of improvement?

The 4 different types of outcomes or components of SCORE (Circumstances, Goals, Satisfaction and Community), have a number of standard domains. SETS providers can track progress by conducting a SCORE assessment against domains that are relevant to the session.

Another way to track progress and identify areas for improvement, is by reaching out to your FAM. FAMs conduct 6 monthly assessments and provide feedback about areas of data quality that need improvement.

Lastly, the DEX report functionality allows providers to see their data summarised in graphs, charts and tables. Reports provide information such as:

- how many people have accessed their services
- the types of services delivered
- the demographics of the people accessing services
- the impact they are making

Evaluating reports provide valuable data to identify gaps, areas of improvement and achievements.