Chapter 2
Research Methods

This chapter outlines the principles of high quality research for Indigenous land rights projects. Quality research involves more than just a collection of documents and reports submitted to a band or legal team. To guarantee quality research means to develop and adhere to a clearly defined code of ethics and to practice good research habits throughout your project. If you devote the time and resources to achieving these goals your findings will be a valuable resource for your community. High quality research will do more than serve the needs of your current project; it will enhance your community's cultural knowledge for the future.

The information in this chapter is presented according to a general outline of the research process. It leads you through three phases of research and identifies the issues you will want to consider along the way. The phases are: (1) planning and coordinating a project; (2) conducting research, including analyzing and evaluating documents, and managing the materials you collect; and (3) presenting and storing your findings. You will likely find that the tasks laid out here will be ongoing or overlapping depending on the needs of your project. Every research project is different and will always require you to balance multiple tasks and use your own initiative and creativity as you uncover new information. Make sure that you seek help when you need it and ask questions of the resource people you meet along the way.

Planning Your Project

Practicing Ethical Research

Any research project that takes place in an Indigenous community must be founded upon a **research protocol** that respects the history, culture, knowledge, values, rights and aspirations of the community. A research protocol is an ethical code of conduct that determines the focus and nature of the research. It informs the research design and methods that guide the project, the research questions and the reasons why they are being asked, and the hypothesis and predicted outcomes. Basing a research project on a clearly articulated and agreed upon research protocol will help you ensure that the entire research process—from the planning stages to presenting and storing information —is respectful, empowering and beneficial for the community.

An ethical research protocol carries many responsibilities. To conduct ethical research in an Indigenous community means to:

- Seek permission and direction from the community from the outset of your project.
- Obtain informed consent from participants. This involves getting a written agreement from research participants to voluntarily take part in a research project based on knowledge and understanding of the purpose of the research, the type of information being collected, how the information will be used, and the risks, benefits, and uncertainties of the project.
- Seek ways to involve the community in the whole process of research (rather than just during the information gathering stages).
- Balance your expectations with those of your sponsor or supervisor, the community, and other individuals in ways that keep the best interests of the community at the forefront of the project. If a conflict occurs during the research project, you may need to reconsider your goals and seek alternatives that are compatible with the research protocol.
- Follow appropriate traditional protocols in the collection, interpretation, and use of knowledge and information as far as possible.
- Be as accurate as possible in collecting, interpreting, and presenting knowledge and information.
- Share knowledge and information in ways that are consistent with traditional teachings and practices.
- Protect knowledge and information in ways that minimize the potential for its misuse and misunderstanding.

Some communities will have a general research protocol in place. If this is the case it is your responsibility to ensure that your research project follows this protocol. If there are no protocols in place you should discuss drafting them before you start your research. It is important to note that these responsibilities apply whether or not you are a member of the community in which you are doing research.

Drafting Confidentiality Agreements

Protecting Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge systems includes protecting research materials from misuse or appropriation by governments, **third parties**, or other researchers. An important tool to help you do this is a **confidentiality agreement**. Confidentiality agreements are written documents that identify specific information as private, establish the standards for storage, security, and protection of information, and limit distribution and access of research materials to designated individuals for identified purposes. Such agreements are a key feature of ethical research that help protect your community's intellectual property rights and allow people the right to retain copyright authority over all community knowledge that is being shared with others.

You should work out a confidentiality agreement with the leaders in your community before you or any other researchers begin collecting information. While you are drafting the agreement you will want to consider the following key questions: What you are going to do

with the products of the research? Who is going to use the information and for what purposes? How are you going to make sure that the information is stored securely? How do you propose to protect the privacy of the individuals named in the records and documents? How are you going to deal with requests from individuals from within the community to see these records (or information about them)?

There is more information on protecting your research and drafting confidentiality agreements in the UBCIC-Ecotrust Canada publication, *Chief Kerry's Moose: A Guidebook to Land Use and Occupancy Mapping, Research Design and Data Collection.* This manual is available in print or online at: http://www.nativemaps.org/chiefkerrysmoose.

Identifying Research Questions

Determining the scope of your research

It is important to clearly identify the goals of your project before you begin searching for information. This involves getting a clear estimation of the scope of your research and identifying the key issues you will focus on. Are you planning on researching the history of your traditional territory in its entirety or are you researching a specific issue that took place on one of your reserves? To determine the scope of your research, consult community members with a wide range of expertise and other reference people outside the community for advice, such as people working in other communities, advisors, or lawyers. Ask them for help determining which issues in the project are most urgent and where you should focus your efforts.

Indentifying priorities and general research questions

After you have talked to all the available resource people and you have isolated the most important issues you can begin to develop specific research questions. For example, imagine you are a researcher who has been approached by Chief and Council to undertake a research project. They ask you to find out how their reserves came to be the way they are today. You begin by confirming that you understand what information they want and by asking the following questions: Is their primary interest in the history of the establishment of their reserves or are there other issues more important to them such as why an old cemetery located outside of the reserve boundary was not included in the initial reserve? Once you have clearly identified their objectives, you can pose a set of general research questions. For example: How were Indian reserves initially established, what did the community members think about the reserve allotments, and how did these reserves change over time?

Developing specific research questions

Once you have identified your general research questions, you will need to break them down into smaller and more manageable pieces. In the above example, you might do the following: After talking to the community, identify key topics included in the set of research questions. In this case, these topics include 1) initial reserve establishment, 2) community response and 3) changes to the reserves over time. Next, list the specific questions that need to be answered for you to fully address each topic. For example, on the topic of initial reserve establishment, one specific question to ask is on what date reserves were first allotted. Another specific question is who allotted the reserves and under what authority, policy or

law. It is important to list as many questions as possible at this stage for every topic you have identified. This will help you develop a clear and focused research plan.

Creating Your Research Plan

Once you have refined your general research questions and identified smaller, more manageable questions, you can develop a plan for finding the information you need. Research planning involves evaluating existing research and determining the resources and time you need to search for more information. There are some specific issues you will want to consider in the process:

- How much background knowledge do you have? Are you starting from scratch or has some work been done on the questions you are researching? If you are carrying on with a project begun by a previous researcher make sure you critically assess their research.
- How much time do you have? Remember that every task will take much longer than you expect, and you will encounter many challenges that are hard to plan for. Try to be realistic.
- How much money is available in the research budget? Try to plan ahead by finding out how much it will cost to call long distance or visit different institutions, particularly if you have to stay overnight (accommodation, meals and other expenses add up quickly). Remember to ask in advance if you must pay to have documents located, copied and mailed to you. Plan ahead to save money where you can and avoid being over-budget.

Conducting Research

Searching For Information

Research is best approached in steps, each one building on the last to piece together a complete record. If you try to find all the information you require at once, you will waste time and end up with a large collection of unmanageable material that cannot be summarized in a clear and understandable narrative.

A general principle for planning your research is to begin with background research close to home and then move further out as you explore your research question in greater depth.

First, speak with community members who may have some knowledge of the issue you are researching. Elders, Chief and Council, the tribal council or treaty office staff and former Chiefs will have valuable insights that will add to your project. Also check your band office, tribal council or treaty office for notes from previous researchers, as well as general files and information that relate to your project.

Second, examine relevant **secondary sources** (second-hand accounts that interpret or analyze an event) before you start looking at **primary sources** (original documents). Secondary resources will help to provide a context for your primary research. As well, the information that you get from secondary materials about dates and important historical

actors and government agencies will help you to know where to begin when you start investigating primary resources. The background information will also help you to make sense of the documents, maps and other resources you find. For example, if you were working on a project for the High Bar First Nation, you could read a general history of the Clinton and Lillooet areas to get some background, such as when and where settlers established towns and built roads. Be sure to critically evaluate secondary sources and be aware of the author's use or misuse of other source material.

Once you have completed your background research you can start identifying the primary resources that might help answer your questions. Use the Internet and phone to start compiling information on collections at local libraries, archives, and museums. Libraries, archives, and other large institutions are much different from regular public libraries and are often challenging for beginning researchers. Plan to spend time learning the procedures for access and use of materials at the institutions you will visit. See Chapter 3: Resource Institutions for information on how these institutions operate.

When you are beginning your primary research it may seem that you are being asked to become an expert in many things, including archival research, history, and geography. Remember that you can always ask for help from the resource people around you. By identifying your research questions you will be able to make the best use of the resources available to you. Be specific. For example, if you ask an archivist to help you find out about the history of High Bar reserves, you may get a general answer that does not address your research questions. If you instead ask for help with your smaller, more manageable and specific questions, such as the name of the government official who allotted High Bar reserves, you will likely be shown records more relevant to your goals.

Managing Information

Managing the information you collect involves taking clear and helpful notes and organizing your research findings in useful and efficient document management systems. Whether your research is used in land claims, negotiations, court cases or for another purpose, organization can be a critical factor in the success of the project. If someone questions something you found in your research, a clear system of organization will allow you to quickly refer back to your evidence.
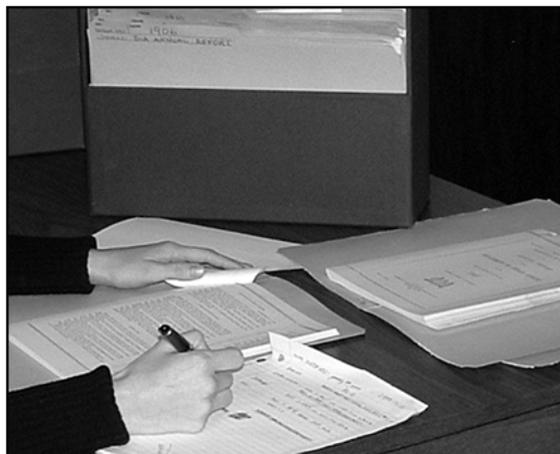
Taking clear notes will help you at every stage of your research project.

Tracking the path of your research

Make a note of every resource you review, whether it contains useful information or not. You can make these notes at the archives while you are doing your research and transfer them to a form at your office. These notes will help reduce the risk of losing information or mixing up sources. The path of your research should be clear enough that another researcher, following in your footsteps, could duplicate the work that you have done.

Some material may seem irrelevant at first. There is always a chance it may become useful at a later stage though so you should not disregard it. If you discover a document that relates to a different issue, set it aside until you have an opportunity to decide whether that issue can be considered in your research project. Otherwise you may spend a lot of time on a research task that is not relevant, or that has already been considered and rejected.

Citing documents

Every single page you collect should bear a reference identifying the complete source of information. Write it in the same place on the page every time. It is a good idea to write the citation information on the back of the documents themselves so that it cannot be lost. If you have to write on the front of the document make sure that you also have one unmarked copy. Use a consistent formula for citing documents. Different institutions will have different systems for categorizing materials so it is easy to get confused about how to write the citation. If in doubt, write down as much information as possible and then work on formatting references at a later stage. See Appendix 1 for examples of how to cite different types of documents.

Keeping lists of key information

When you are examining sources keep a running list of the names, institutions, officials and their position, places, and dates. This will help you organize your findings into subject groups or timelines at a later stage. For instance, you may want to develop a **chronology** (a list of events over time) or sketch family trees. Your lists will also help you track systems of command and determine which government official or ministry was responsible for specific issues, where, and during what time period.

Record variations in the key search words you are using. This will also help you find information in the future. Your notes will help you locate a greater range of information about your subject, as different institutions will have organized their materials according to the various spellings that appear on documents and according to which spellings were in use when documents were transferred there.

Document management

You should consider creating a comprehensive index to help you manage your documents. A document index can be used to summarize content and provide key facts such as author, recipient, date, and general contents of each document. The basic components are included in the "Sample document index" at the top of the next page. You could include a variety of other fields as well if you needed to, such as page numbers.

Develop a document indexing system that works for you. For example you might use a hardcover research notebook, index cards, or an **electronic database** (a computerized system that organizes your entries in specific fields). If you will have a lot of documentation to answer many different questions, you might prefer to use an electronic database rather than handwritten notes because it will allow you to sort and summarize your data in different ways.

Sample document index

Document Type	Author	Recipient	Date	Source	Summary	Research Notes
Letter	D.C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General, Department of Indian Affairs	W.E. Ditchburn, Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies, Department of Indian Affairs	October 6, 1920	Library and Archives Canada, RG 10, vol. 11302, file C-II-2	Letter requesting approval of timber lease application by T. H. Hughes.	Microfilm copy very light; should obtain another copy on microfilm or arrange to get copy of original

Extracting Information

Relevance

Extracting information involves constantly making decisions about what is relevant to your research project. This involves emphasizing certain sources of information more than others. Often there are no clear right or wrong decisions so you will have to balance the information depending on your particular research questions. In all cases, you should include an explanation of why you made those decisions with your research findings.

Extracting information also involves highlighting specific information within a particular document. You will find that some information can by summarized briefly while other information needs to be restated simply in your words or quoted directly. Again, this will depend on your particular aim. One rule of thumb is to use direct quotes sparingly. Quotes should only be used in cases in which the wording or sentence structure of a specific phrase conveys information that cannot be expressed another way.

Marginalia

Do not overlook unusual features in the documents you are using. One thing to look for is **marginalia** (writing on the margins of the document by the author, recipient, or another person). Marginalia can provide information on decisions that were made or give proof that the letter was received. When photocopying documents it is important to include all the marginalia, in a readable form.

Bias

With each source of information that you consult, be aware of the author's **bias** (an unacknowledged preference for a specific perspective or topic). Some examples of bias in documents include the following:

- Government documents reflect daily business as seen through the eyes of public servants of the government.
- Annual reports, whether from government or business, often highlight the positive rather than the negative aspects of the previous year.
- Historical books, articles, and journals attempt to put other sources and situations into perspective, but still reflect the bias of the writer. In most of these sources, information is used selectively in order to make a

convincing argument. There is also a chance these sources could include errors.
- Personal diaries and journals document the recollections and opinions of one individual.

It is always a good idea to read as many sources as possible and cross reference each of them in order to get the broadest view of the topic you are studying.

Internet reliability

Be careful when you use sources from the Internet. Try to make sure the information you get on the Internet is authentic and reliable. Some of the criteria you should use to evaluate websites include:
- Who wrote the content for the site? Is the author's name given with his or her credentials and is there a contact address? If it is a paper published on the Internet, for example, it may be a good idea to try to contact the author or find a published copy of it to make sure that it has not been altered.
- Is the site affiliated with a known organization?
- Does the site show a bias that makes you doubt the credibility of the authors?

Refining Your Research Task

You must regularly revisit your original research question. You might realize that the research question is too broad, or is unrealistic given time and money limitations. Also, you might not be able to find enough information on your topic. Do not be afraid to change your research objectives as you get further into your project and do not feel as though you are wasting time. No research time is wasted by such changes as long as you are documenting everything you have done. Shifting direction is a natural part of a research project.

Completing Your Project

Presenting Your Research Findings

Research product

The end product of your research may be one of many things. It might be a summary of your findings, an oral presentation, or a written report. Consider which is the best way to share your findings with the rest of your community. That way, your work can be part of a larger process of sharing knowledge about your community and your territory. Here are some general steps to follow when presenting your research findings:
- Re-read your notes and collected documents.
- Consider the information you have gathered and ask if you have answered your research question. If portions of the question are unanswered, decide whether it is realistic for you to do more research.
- Look at your topic and break it down into main categories or headings.

- Create an outline to follow as you write your report. It should begin with an introduction that lays out the argument ahead. The body of the report should contain a logical sequence of information that follows your chosen headings. Finish with a strong conclusion that summarizes your argument based on the evidence.
- Thoroughly edit and proofread your work.
- Double-check all of your references and supporting documents.

Research materials

You will also need to submit all the research materials you have created, collected and referred to in your report to your band, community organization or legal team. Your notes and the documentation of your research are essential parts of your project and must stay with the collection of materials that you have assembled. The key issues you should take into account are the following:

- The copies of documents you submit must be clear, readable, have no added markings such as highlighting, underlining or comments added (except citations) and must be properly cited.
- For documents that are hard to read, you may have to provide a **transcript** (a written copy of the original record). Sometimes the original is readable but the copy is not. This is often the case with **microfiche** or **microfilm** copies. Attach the transcript to the original making sure you provide the citation information.
- Any document you submit will be considered in the context of the rest of the evidence. If documents contradict each other, you will have to be able to explain why.
- Even if a document relating to the issue does not seem important to you, include a copy of it. That document may be a link for more important documents, or it may provide a detail that will support other evidence.

Storing Research Materials

Computer backup

Make sure that you have a master copy of your report on backed-up on a computer disk or CD and safely stored away, preferably in another location.

Keeping original documents safe but available

The original documents you have collected should be properly labeled and stored in marked files according to the source. If the information is not stored in a permanent location (such as a locked file cabinet or locked room in the band office) in an organized fashion, then it is not readily accessible and therefore not very useful for your community. Without some security in place, reports can get separated from their supporting materials, information can leave the office forever when somebody borrows it and does not return it, or time can pass and new leadership and office staff may be completely unaware of the project and materials' existence or location.

You will also need to make sure that the storage area is safe from damage. Take

precautions to make sure the materials are protected from fire, flood, mould, or other disasters.

Confidentiality of original documents

If the information you have collected is sensitive or confidential, there are some particular issues you need to take into consideration when you are deciding what to do with your final research product and materials. Hopefully, you dealt with this topic at the beginning of your research with a confidentiality agreement. If not, refer to the section on confidentiality agreements at the beginning of the chapter.

Conclusion

Regardless of the type of research you are doing you will want to guarantee that your project is guided by the principles of quality research. This will help ensure that your community can use the information you collect to help advance a variety of projects, now and in the future. Quality research means that:

- Research is conducted in an ethical manner that is respectful of the community's needs and protocols.
- Confidentiality agreements have been drafted and signed.
- The research project has clear objectives, an answerable research question, and a detailed research plan.
- Research methods are clearly and accurately stated.
- A consistent and complete referencing system is used throughout project.
- A complete set of supporting documents (with reference information on each page) is included with findings.
- Research conclusions are based upon thoughtful and thorough analysis of data and information.
- There is a clear research summary that answers research question or explains why it cannot be answered in the way it was asked.
- Research materials are stored safely.

Resources

Battise, Marie and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson. 2000. *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge.* Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.

National Archives Canada. 2003. *Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers.* [Webpage]. Available at: http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416_e.html

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London: Zed Books.

Organizations and Government Departments

UBCIC Research Department and Resource Centre
500- 342 Water Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 1B6
Ph: 604-684-0231 Fax: 604-684-5726
Email: research@ubcic.bc.ca, library@ubcic.bc.ca

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Specific Claims West Centre
600-1138 Melville Street, Vancouver, BC V6E 4S3
Ph: 604-666-8711

Treaty 8 Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Resource Centre
10233 - 100th Avenue, Fort St. John, BC V1J 1Y8
Ph: 250-785-0612 Fax: 250-785-2021 Email: reception@treaty8.bc.ca