

Indigenous Child Welfare Research Network

RESEARCH IN ACTION



STEPS TO INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

The “steps to research” handout provides an introductory guide to develop and implement a research project in your agency or community. The steps do not have to be followed in order. **Indigenous research can occur in diverse contexts and follow different pathways.** Your research partners (community, agency, advisory, Elders, etc.) can help determine what works best in your context.

1. IDENTIFY YOUR RESEARCH VISION

Research Vision

An important step in any research project is to identify a **research vision**. This typically involves developing **research question(s)**. In traditional Euro-Western research, the research question(s) often arise out of a review of previous research and literature. In Indigenous research, a research question and vision might be grounded in a need expressed by the community, a goal identified by an agency or community advisory, an important teaching, traditional stories, and even dreams. You may be guided by your existing roles in the community or agency, or invited to take part in a research project because you have important expertise or skills to share.

Values, Needs and Goals

Identifying a research vision involves determining your **values, needs and goals**. Think about the following:

- *What is our vision for this project?*
- *What teachings and values guide our work?*
- *What do we really want to see come out of this project?*
- *Who will be involved and how?*
- *Where will the research take place? What is our time frame?*
- *How will the research be used?*
- *How does the project relate to our larger vision as a community or agency?*
- *How does the project meet the needs of our community?*
- *What strengths do we bring to this process, and what challenges will we face?*

2. IDENTIFY YOUR RESEARCH PARTNERS

Another important step is to identify **who will partner with you** in the research process. Develop a list of every possible task necessary, including applying for funding, planning consultations, developing an Advisory, setting up the research, training team members, preparing resources, documenting and analyzing information, communicating findings, evaluating the process, reporting back to the community, etc. Think about the following:

- *How will we outreach to and consult with the broader community?*
- *How will we develop and involve an Advisory?*
- *Who will provide advice and guidance on research methods?*
- *How will our Elders, youth, staff, and community members be involved as key partners in the research?*
- *Will we partner with external researchers? Will any students be involved? Will we partner with other agencies or communities? If so, who and how?*
- *Who will take on the research tasks such as consulting with Elders, gathering information, reviewing literature, preparing reports, hosting a community feast, and evaluating the process?*
- *What barriers and successes can we anticipate?*

3. DEVELOP YOUR PROTOCOLS AND ETHICS

Community and Cultural Protocols: Community and Cultural Protocols provide important guidelines for conducting research in a good way in a community setting. Protocols include guidelines for communication, behavior, asking questions, receiving teachings, collecting information, thanking people, participating in ceremony, and many other important topics. Good Indigenous research ensures the process of research is respectful of community histories and values, while making the research team accountable to how the research is conducted.

Community Advisory: Many Indigenous research projects are guided by an advisory. An advisory can help ensure the project evolves in a good way, and that the original vision remains true to community needs and expectations. Advisors can help outreach to community members and assist with disseminating project findings and outcomes. Consider how you will involve and compensate your advisors.

Memorandum of Understanding: Many indigenous communities and agencies who engage in research (whether the researchers are internal or external to the community) have developed extensive MoUs that outline terms of agreement for the development and implementation of research. MoUs formalize protocols and ethical guidelines and provide a contract for all research partners in order to protect the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous peoples during and after the research process. MoUs typically ensure that Indigenous communities have control, access, and full ownership and participation at every stage of the research process.

University Ethics: Universities also have their own guidelines for research ethics. University ethics usually require a very detailed plan for doing research, such as a description of the methods, questions asked, who will participate and how, and how the information will be

used. It may take weeks to months to have an ethics form completed and approved. All university-related research requires university ethics approval. It is often helpful to partner with a university researcher or student in this process.

4. IDENTIFY A FUNDING SOURCE

Writing **research grants** is a skill in itself. The larger the research project, the more resources it will require. Research expenditures can cover everything from community gifts, honoraria and salaries, travel, food and space rental, equipment such as computers, software or tape recorders, salaries for staff and consultants, and materials such as posters, pamphlets and newsletters. Like all grants, research grants may take months to develop; it is often helpful to partner with a university researcher or student in this process.

5. DEVELOP A PROCESS: METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

The words “**methodologies**” and “**methods**” can seem intimidating, but all they refer to are the ways in which the research will be conducted. This involves the vision, goals, design, tools and approaches used to complete the research project. At some point in your planning process, undertake background research to find out what is currently known about your issue, what has worked and not worked in previous projects, and what your project might offer that is unique and important. The next step in determining research methods is to decide **what tools you need to proceed**. You can use Indigenous methods and approaches that are specific to your context, or adapt other research methods to suit your needs. For example, if you want to:

Document cultural stories and practices and integrate them into your child and family services?

- An Indigenous storytelling method might work well. Think of a model for traditional teaching that is relevant to your context and community (i.e., basket, Big House, fishing, sacred circle, etc.). You may want to gather people in groups, or visit with them in their homes or communities.

Evaluate an existing program?

- Evaluation methods come in all shapes and sizes, but usually involve a mix of methods (questionnaires, statistics, interviews, consultations, group discussions, etc.). Evaluation methods can easily be adapted through methods such as home visits, storytelling, community consultations, cultural gatherings, Elders and children’s groups, community mapping, etc.

Track your service outcomes, and compare them to other agencies?

- A mix of quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (stories) methods would help you get a more complete picture of your client profiles and the successes and gaps in your agency.

Complete a community survey of assets, strengths and/or needs?

- A Needs, Strengths or Assets Assessment and/or Appreciate Inquiry (AI) would allow you to consult with community members to identify key characteristics, needs,

barriers, challenges, assets, strengths, and resources, and develop strategies for a common vision. This approach is often considered a first step in pursuing other funding.

Create change in your community through a collaborative project?

- You may want a more participatory, action-centered research approach. Community or Participatory Action Research (CAR, PAR) are often employed by Indigenous agencies and communities who want to go beyond collecting information or evaluation, to create change through their research.

Engage children and youth in a creative process?

- Engaged methods such as storytelling, traditional music such as songs and drumming, art, theatre, video and photography, are wonderful ways to engage community members in research, especially children and youth.

* These are only brief examples of the wide array of research methods available. In many cases, these approaches to research can be mixed and matched. For example, you can use traditional songs and storytelling methods in many different kinds of research projects. No matter what methods are used, **Indigenous research is typically rooted in community values and teachings, and is community-based.**

7. IMPLEMENTATION, DISSEMINATION, AND EVALUATION

A good research design should include a plan for **implementation** (putting the findings into action), **dissemination** (sharing the findings with as broad a circle as possible), and **evaluation** (making sure the project is documented, and that communities have an opportunity to provide input into every step of the process).

Implementation: How and by whom will the research be used? How will you implement the project findings? Who will be involved in pursuing the vision in the months and years after the project is completed?

Dissemination: How will you share the findings or outcomes of the study? Examples might include personal visits, gifts, pamphlets, posters, a community feast or forum, workshops, conference presentations, articles, a video, exhibit, report, article, etc.

Evaluation: What kinds of evaluation tools do you want to use, and how will the evaluation process be incorporated at every step of the research process? How will the evaluation reflect the values and vision of the community and cultural protocols?