CONDUCTING ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

by Olivia Michalczuk
Indigenous Planning Studio
April 2018

Summary

This fact sheet explains what archival research is, how to do archival research, when you should do it, and why it is important to the plan.

Keywords:

collecting data, managing / storing data, analyzing data, building capacity

Why Conduct Archival Research?

Many communities find that they need to know where they have been in order to plan where they are going. Researching your past can help you make informed decisions[1] in the present and create goals for your future. This research can act as a good foundation before you move forward.

History and background information are important to include in your plan. This information often serves as the groundwork for your planning process. Researching can help you learn from the past as you make decisions in the present. Doing thorough research helps you make decisions based on facts and evidence.

There is often a lot of research to do, but often the best way to get started is to look at what is already available. This way, you aren't doing extra research that has already been done.

Archives contain lots of information and even though it takes time to get through all the information available, it will save time and money in the future.

What is an Archive?

An archive is like a library for important documents but the main differences between a library and an archive are:
- Libraries hold items that have many copies, but archives usually hold the only or original copy of an item.
- You can borrow things from a library but you aren't allowed to borrow them from the archives.
- Libraries usually hold books and news articles, but archives hold documents and files.

Archives collect the original copy of different types of documents. They often have documents, reports, governmental files, manuscripts, letters, photographs, moving images, audio recordings, artwork, books, diaries, artifacts, and more. Often, these documents cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

When you go to the archives, you can search through, look at, and sometimes copy documents. Be sure plan ahead so you know how to use the archives and what you are looking for before you go.[2]

Figure 1 | *A corridor of files at the National Archives*
Source (The National Archives UK. "A corridor of files at the National Archives." Digital image. Wikimedia Commons. August 15, 2011. Accessed February 28, 2018. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_corridor_of_files_at_ The_National_Archives.jpg.

When is Archival Research Done?

Research is part of the pre-planning stage. According to the CCP Handbook, research is the fourth step in the pre-planning phase: [3]

1. Assess community readiness
2. Develop a budget, identify funding
3. Build a planning team
4. **Research**
5. Build a work plan

What Types of Information Are There?

Research helps makes sure that your plan is relevant to the community and helps ensure a successful planning process. According to the CCP Worksheet, *Gathering Background Information,* there are two types of information: internal research and external research.[4]

Internal research is information that already exists in the community. This may include existing reports in the Band or Administrative offices that are done by consultants or the First Nation. Maps, plans, and information from community members might be of interest.

Archival research is considered external research on the CCP website. To find external information you have to ask: Who else might have some information that is useful? From there you can start looking at places like:

- Federal government departments
- Provincial / Territorial governments
- Neighbouring cities / municipalities
- Forestry / mining / fisheries / other companies
- Archival resources

Who is Involved in Archival Research?

Before conducting research, you should talk to your planning team. If you know what you are looking for, it is much easier to find it. Brainstorm some information that would be helpful to making a better plan.

You can also involve community members and Elders who know some historical information about your community. Their memories can help you figure out what events or topics need more research. Next, you can create some questions and research topics. These can be based on ideas from your planning team and information from community members.

When you phone the archives to make an appointment, you will speak to an archivist who is there to help you find what you are looking for. They will usually prepare some materials for you to look at when you arrive. They are there to help you find what you are looking for and are available to help answer any questions you have about the material. They can also help you make copies of the information if that is allowed.

How do You Conduct Archival Research?

There are two ways to conduct archival research. One way is to go to the actual building where the files are kept. The second way to conduct archival research is online, because lots of archived material is scanned and put on their websites.

Physical Archives

The City of Winnipeg's website suggests following a few before visiting a physical archive building:[5]

1 Get to Know Your Topic

Before you go to the archives, see if the information is already available at public libraries, research libraries, or on the internet. Get to know as much as you can about your topic so you know the gaps you need to fill when you get there.

2 Formulate Your Questions

Try to know exactly what you are looking for before you go. Try to have some questions ready and some goals for your visit.

3 Discuss Your Topic With Archive Staff

Call the archives for an appointment and let them know what you are looking for. That way, when you get there they can have some materials for you to look at and give you an estimate of how much time it will take.

4 Allow Enough Time

Archival research can take a lot of time if you keep finding more information. Block off lots of for your visit or visits so you have time to look through everything that might be helpful.

Online Archives

To conduct archival research online, you need to know a little bit of background information and keywords to search for.

Use important keywords like the name of your community, previous names of the community, and important people who live in the community. Once you have some keywords, questions, or know what information is missing, then you can start searching on websites like *Library and Archives Canada*. There are a lot of resources and people available to help you get what you need in this stage of planning, it just takes some work and asking the right questions.

Final Thoughts

Conducting archival research may seem like a lot of work, but it is worth it in the end to find all the information that you can. Research is like following a treasure map, with clues that lead you down different paths where you find wealths of information. Good research takes a look at where you have been, giving your plan meaning and your community a strong base to move forward.

Further Reading

Archives and Records Control by City of Winnipeg

This website has lots of information on archives in Winnipeg and how to conduct archival research. There are available online search options as well as who you should call in Winnipeg if you want to make and appointment at the archives. If you are not from Manitoba, there are still useful tips on how to conduct archival research in general.

http://www.winnipeg.ca/clerks/toc/archives.stm

Library and Archives Canada by Government of Canada

By clicking on your province, you will find a list of resources that includes all types of information that may be helpful in your project. It also links you to other websites where you can conduct searches. This is a very good external resource to get started.

http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/genealogy/places/Pages/manitoba.aspx

Upper Right Limb: Taking a Look & Determining Where the Community is At by Darrell Phillips and Wanda Phillips-Beck

The Community History section has tips to help you gather historical information from your community and inform your questions before beginning your research.

https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/mvng-twrd-strngr-ftr/index-en.aspx#a13

Endnotes

1 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, "CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia, Second Edition," *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada*, 2010, https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1377629855838/1377632394645#pre.
2 Dalhousie University. "Differences between archives and libraries." *Dalhousie University,* 2017, http://dal.ca.libguides.com/c.php?g=257178&p=1718238.
3 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010, p. 23.
4 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, "Comprehensive Community Planning Training Program Materials," *Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources,* 2007-2009, http://www.yourcier.org/comprehensive-community-planning-training-program-materials.html.
5 City of Winnipeg, "Making the Best Use of Archives," *City of Winnipeg,* 2014, http://www.winnipeg.ca/clerks/archives/bestUse.stm.

Faculty of Architecture
Department of City Planning

UNIVERSITY of MANITOBA
EST. 1877

Indigenous Initiatives Grant