

CONDUCTING PRECEDENT STUDIES

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December 2016

Summary

This fact sheet discusses how your community can use precedent studies in your planning process.

Keywords: communication tools, collecting data, analyzing data, planning team, funding, building capacity

What is a Precedent Study?

A precedent is an example for future projects.¹ You can use a precedent study or case study to look at plans and projects done by a similar community. By doing this, you will learn more about the process and end results.² By the end of the study, you will see if a similar project would work in your community. Precedent studies explore a plan, project, program, event, activity, or process in detail.

A precedent study looks at best practices or the best example for different planning activities. Your community can learn from the best practice to learn from their experience. You can try to improve upon the project and possibly become the new best practice. A precedent study can generate ideas for a new project and help guide your community through the process. Precedent studies give insight into how another community has approached a similar task.³ You can use precedent studies for many things, from developing a piece of land to starting a recycling program.

precedent

something that can be used as an example to be followed in the future⁹

Who Does a Precedent Study?

Any community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, planning firm, architect, or community member can conduct a precedent study.

“The basic idea is that one case will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate.”⁸

– David Silverman

Why are Precedent Studies Used?

Your community may choose to do a precedent study to help bring an idea to action. Precedent studies are a way to figure out the time, costs, and steps required to complete a project. They can also help you to communicate an idea to community members by finding a similar example.

You may find it valuable to learn from and study what has been done in other Indigenous communities. Precedents are a common tool in both planning and design to learn from other communities. Your community could choose to do a precedent study to research completed projects and guide a project.⁴

A precedent study cannot provide a formula that is guaranteed to work in any context. What worked for one community may not work for yours since there are many variables that contribute to the success of a project. Evaluate the information you gather to see the precedent's strengths and weaknesses. Think about differences between the precedent and your community's project. Instead of copying a precedent exactly, use it as a general guide for your community's project. The exact same process may not work for your community and may need to be adjusted to work in a different context.

How are Precedent Studies Used?

You can use a precedent study to guide your project. The lessons you learn from your precedent study help your project go faster and with fewer issues. Precedents are also good for finding ideas, thinking outside the box, and trying something different.⁵

For example, in the pre-planning phase, you could look at another First Nation's plan. Doing this could help you define your scope, set a realistic timeline, and find resources. In the planning phase, you might look at precedents for exciting community engagement activities or interesting ways to share your community vision. Finally, if one of your community's objectives is to build a new water treatment plant, you could use a precedent study in the implementation phase. You could research a community with the system you're looking to build and find out things like how much it cost, how much time it took to build, community satisfaction, and if there have been problems with it.

When are Precedent Studies Done?

Precedent studies can be done at any stage of a planning process to help a project move forward. They are usually completed at the beginning of the planning process to help make decisions about the project and figure out how long it will take.

How are Precedents Found?

You can find precedents in many ways, including the internet, newspapers or journals, or word of mouth. There is no right or wrong way to find precedents. However, differences between the communities may require changes to the process to reach a desired end result.

How are Precedent Studies Done?

A precedent study is a research project. You can find information on your precedent on the internet, in newspapers, magazines, journals, and books. You may also visit the project to learn more about it from being on site. You can talk to people who work there or who helped guide the project.⁶

It is important to choose a precedent that is similar to the one your community is exploring. It is also important to have access to lots of information about the project. The more information available, the better. Otherwise, it will be hard to learn from and find lessons to apply to your project. Knowing a lot about a project will make it a lot easier to apply similar concepts and approaches to the new project.

The content of a precedent study depends on the specific project. You may include pictures, a detailed description of the project, location, context, cost, support, timelines, market analysis/current value, community approval process, demographics, and why this precedent is important to the proposed project.⁷

The length of a precedent study is not important - it could be one page or ten. What matters is that it includes information needed to help your community make a decision on a project or provide ideas for a potential project. Creating one document that combines all of the information on a project can save time later.

You can use the following four steps when doing your study:

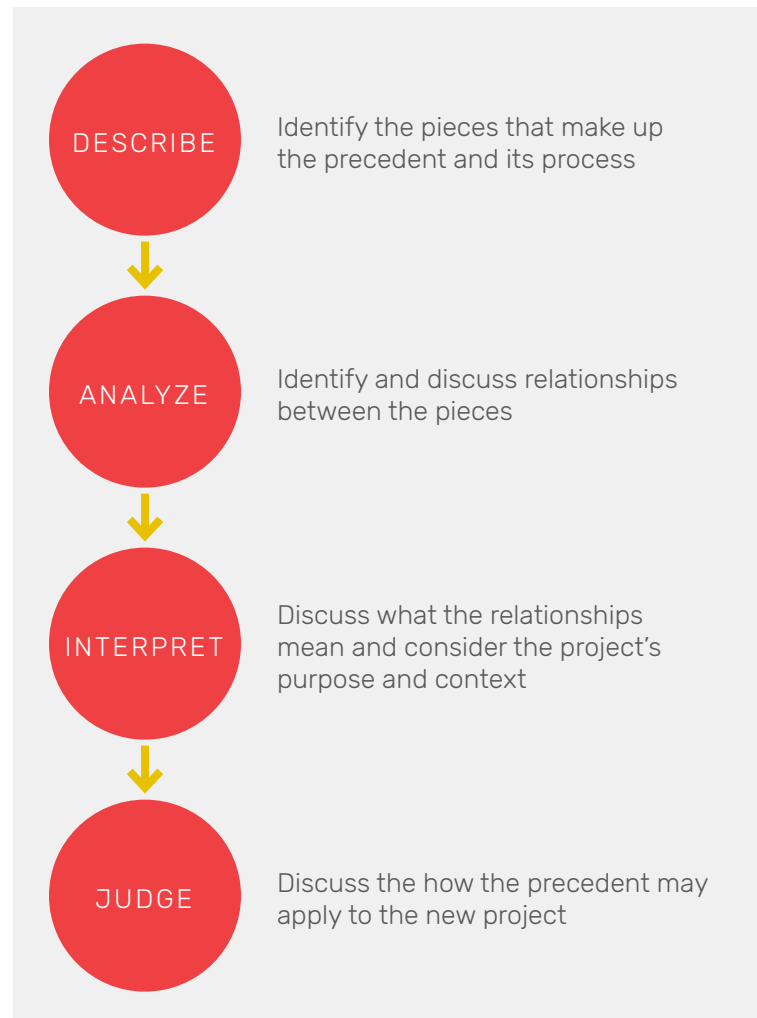


Figure 1 | Steps in conducting a precedent study.

Final Thoughts

Precedent studies are a great tool you can use in your planning process. They can help you learn about the successes and challenges of a project or process you're about to undertake. You can learn lessons from another community's experience to guide your own. Precedent studies can be used for your planning process, a new infrastructure project, or anything else you can think of. They often don't take a lot of technical expertise or cost a lot of money. Plus, a lot of information can be gathered online, with a phone call, or with a site visit, so they can be done by just about anyone.

Further Reading

Best Practices in Aboriginal Community Development: A Literature Review and Wise Practices Approach by Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and Brian Calliou

The article discusses how Best Practices can be used by an Indigenous community to learn from other Indigenous communities for their own development.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259176947_Best_Practices_in_Aboriginal_Community_Development_A_Literature_Review_and_Wise_Practices_Approach

Guidelines For Writing A Case Study Analysis by Ashford University

This resource lays out step-by-step instructions and structure for doing a precedent study.

<https://awc.ashford.edu/tocw-guidelines-for-writing-a-case-study.html>

Endnotes

- 1 Christine, G. H. Franck, "The Use of Precedent in Design," *SlideShare*, 2013, <http://www.slideshare.net/cghfranck/aibd-first-tuesday-precedent>.
- 2 Rachel Weber & Randall Crane, *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Planning (Oxford handbooks)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 250-251.
- 3 First in Architecture, "Architecture Precedent Study and Analysis," *First in Architecture*, n.d., <http://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/architecture-precedent-study-and-analysis/>.
- 4 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>.
- 5 First in Architecture, n.d..
- 6 First in Architecture, n.d..
- 7 Clement, "Analysis of Precedent," *Kansas State University*, 2012, <http://faculty.capd.ksu.edu/lcweb/LAR%20433/433%20Analysis%20of%20Precedent.html>.
- 8 David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research (3 ed.)* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010).
- 9 Merriam-Webster, "Precedent," *Mirriam-Webster*, 2016, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/precedent>.