

USING A COMMUNITY PROFILE

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Summary

This fact sheet provides information about using a community profile. It will introduce the what, why, how, who and when of this planning activity, as well as provide several additional resources making use of a community profile.

Keywords: communication tools, analyzing data, funding

What is a Community Profile?

A community profile is a document with information about your community.¹ Topics can include the natural and built environment, society, culture, and economy.² Discuss priorities with community members to help you decide what is important to include in your profile.

Involving community members when creating your community profile is important. The document should be your community's story and told in a way they understand.³ Ask people to think about their community, give their opinions about it, and imagine what changes they want to see. Your community profile is like a conversation with your community that shows where it stands, what its challenges are, and where it wants to go.



Figure 1 | Themes of information in a community profile.

Why use a Community Profile?

Community profiles can be used as starting points for more complex planning activity. They can be used for:⁴

- **Marking a reference point.** A community profile can compare conditions before and after a policy or program was implemented. They show how particular policies or programs are making a difference.
- **Initiating discussion on needs and priorities in the community.** Discuss challenges and ideas for the future with community members. Next, think about any common patterns and themes people talked about. Arrange them in order of importance or feasibility.
- **Using local knowledge.** Your community's policies and programs should always strive to match its way of life. A community profile that uses traditional knowledge and practice can make initiatives more compatible, useful, and valuable to the community.
- **Fact-based policy and practice.** Sometimes, it can be useful to have demographic, statistical, or community engagement data to back up a claim that there is a problem or opportunity. This might be used to win political support in a community or to support a funding application.

See the *Creating a Community Profile* fact sheet for information about the process of building a profile for your community.

How are Community Profiles Used in Planning?

What is Needed to Use a Community Profile?

Resources and Tools

- Community engagement and traditional knowledge are examples of research you can do yourself.
- Demographics and statistics are examples of research someone else has done that you use.
- Maps can be helpful to understand a problem or opportunity in context.
- Knowledge of current community resources, funding opportunities, staff, and local initiatives

Skills

- Good analytical skills
- Organizational skills
- Critical thinking
- Ability to prioritize⁵

What are the Steps to Use a Community Profile?⁶

- 1. Scan and identify:** Scan the community profile to identify patterns, themes, and linkages. As a member of the community, many of these will be obvious to you. Others will be easier to identify after engagement with the community or by using statistics and demographic information. It can be useful at this stage to conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.⁷

- 2. Frame a problem or opportunity:** State the issue neutrally without suggesting a solution or placing blame. It is important to approach a situation without assumptions. This can help when trying to get people to agree when discussing a touchy topic.
- 3. Identify the driving forces:** Causes are often very difficult to identify because problems are complex. It is important to think about a problem and ask questions. Try the following steps:
 - a. Stating the problem
 - b. Asking “why?” and thinking of a possible answer.
 - c. Doing research
 - d. Answering the question
 - e. Repeat steps b through d until satisfied
- 4. Identify other factors that are linked to the problem or opportunity:** The challenges and opportunities in communities are always connected. Try to think about how one topic could affect or be affected by the other sections of the community profile.
- 5. Look to the Future:** Analyze the topics with the future in mind. There are a variety of techniques that can be used to think about an issue moving 5, 10, or 20 years into the future. They focus on what might happen if nothing is done about a certain issue. This helps identify the driving forces behind an issue.
- 6. Plan for Change:** The planning stage often involves bringing the community together to create a vision, goals, objectives, and strategies for the future.

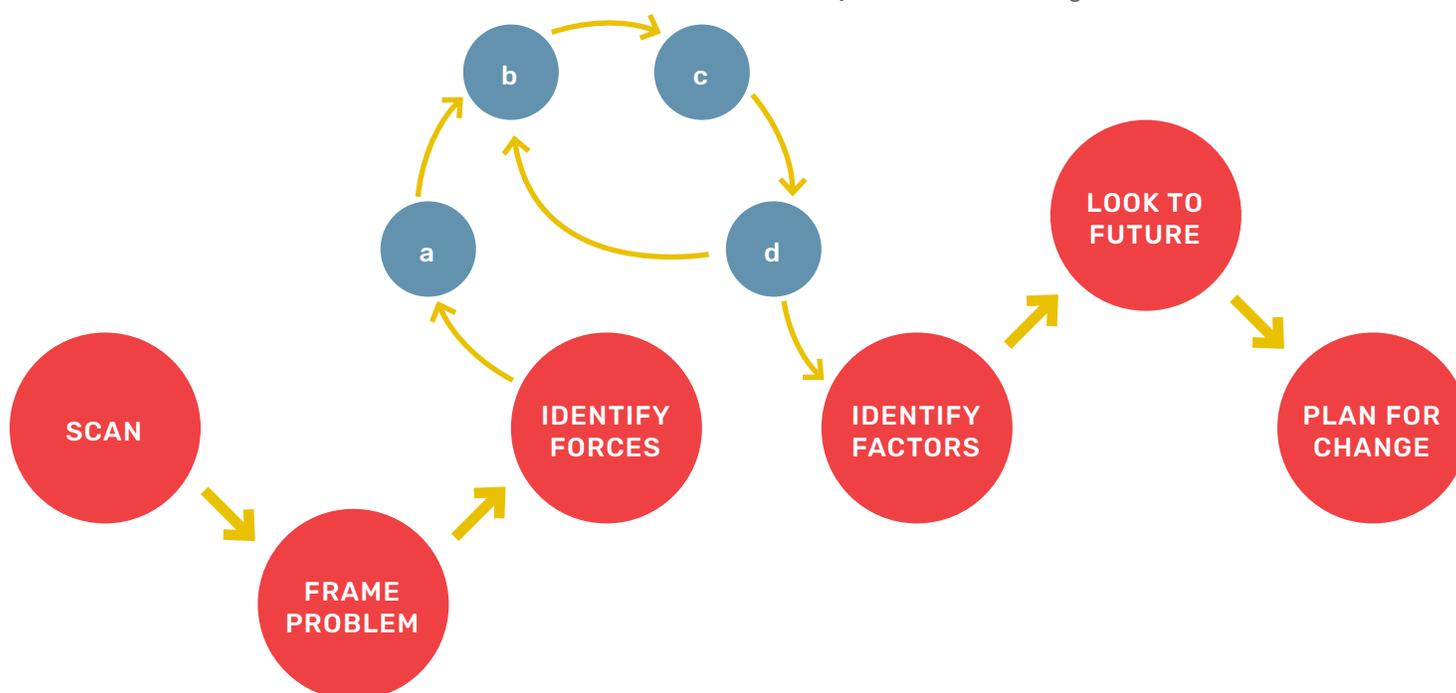


Figure 2 | Steps to use a community profile.

Example Community Profile Usage

The following example follows Jolene as she moves through the steps outlined above in the use of a community profile. Please bear in mind that this is just a simple example used to illustrate the process of using a community profile – each step is much more complex in practice!

1. **Scan and Identify:** Jolene has a completed community profile and has begun to look for patterns, themes, and linkages. She found a passage in the community engagement section that explained that housing was very crowded in the area. She knew from experience that extended families often lived in small houses. She double-checked the demographic information in community profile, and it showed that there were an average of 7 people per household. She had identified a challenge facing her community.
2. **Frame a problem or opportunity:** Jolene framed the challenge by stating simply: “There is not enough housing in the community.”
3. **Identify the driving forces:** Jolene began to think about what might be causing this situation. She came up with the following thought process:
 - There is not enough housing.
 - Why? – Because too many people are being born in the community.
 - She looks through the community profile to find out about the population growth rate. She discovers that the on-reserve population is growing at a rate of about 1% per year. This is not very high.
 - Why else? – She continues researching and finds that the housing stock has stayed the same for a very long time. There aren't enough houses being built!
4. **Identify other factors that are linked to the problem or opportunity:** Jolene looks through the community profile and begins to reflect on the natural environment in the community. She realizes that drainage is a major problem, leaving much of the reserve's territory partially flooded at certain times of year. She realizes that a shortage of buildable land might be contributing to the housing shortage because there are no new areas to build.
5. **Looking to the Future:** Jolene uses a population projection to show how large the population will be in 15 years. She finds out that the housing problem is only going to get worse if there aren't more houses built. She uses a scenario exercise to show what will happen if:
 - nothing changes
 - the community increases the density of housing by building new houses closer together, or by building higher density buildings
 - the community clears land with drainage solutions to make room for new neighbourhoods
6. **Plan for Change:** Jolene sets out to begin developing plans, engaging the community, and developing a strategy to alleviate the community's housing shortage.

Who can use a Community Profile?

Anyone! Community profiles are a reflection of the community. It contains a story about where it has been and where it is today. Leaders (elected or unelected) and planning champions are important in planning because they can help to unite community members.⁸ If you are unfamiliar with planning, a community profile is a great way to learn new things about your community, to see things differently, and to start thinking about the future.

When Should Community Profiles be Used?

Community profiles are usually used in the early planning stages of community development. Before using a community profile, make sure your community has a desire

to plan for its future, can achieve some level of consensus, understands the value of visioning and planning, and has the resources it needs to move forward. That being said, even when communities are conflicted or troubled in some way, community profiles can be useful tools that help show common concerns and shared stakes in the future.⁹

Final Thoughts

A community profile is a useful tool that outlines a wide range of information related to a community's current status and resources. It is useful to identify needs and opportunities for the future, provide evidence, establish baselines, or use local knowledge. Using a community profile doesn't take a lot of resources or special skills, but it takes time and effort to use meaningfully. They are an important stepping stone on the way to developing plans for the future.

Further Reading

The Community Tool Box

This resource has extensive information pertaining to general community planning. It provides step-by-step guides organized into chapters that match the phases of planning, and offers a wealth of tools and resources to achieve them. Though it is not specifically tailored to Indigenous communities, it is sensitive to the notion that every community will have different values and goals.

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/analyzing-community-problems/main>

Our Community Story: An Annotated Table of Content Planning Tool

This document is a template for a community profile report. Each section contains text that explains the specific activity to undertake, and the kinds of tools required. Though it is specifically tailored to Indigenous communities, it should not be understood as the only structure necessary. As a guide, it can be useful to help communities ensure that they have covered all of the central parts of community profiling.

http://www.yourcier.org/uploads/2/5/6/1/25611440/ccp_training_session_2_-_our_community_story.pdf

Community Profiling: A Practical Guide

This book is an excellent in-depth guide to the community profiling process. In addition to the other resources mentioned in this fact sheet, it can fill in the gaps in knowledge by providing additional background, theory, and tools for undertaking the community profile.

Murray Hawtin & Janie Percy-Smith, *Community Profiling: A Practical Guide*. (2nd ed.) (Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2007).

Endnotes

- 1 Murray Hawtin & Janie Percy-Smith, *Community Profiling: A Practical Guide*. (2nd ed.) (Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2007), p. 6.
- 2 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. "CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia, Third Edition," *Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada*, 2013, Accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/ccphb2013_1378922610124_eng.pdf, p. 2-9.
- 3 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, "Our Community Story: An Annotated Table of Content Planning Tool," *Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources*, 2008, Accessed October 22, 2016, http://www.yourcier.org/uploads/2/5/6/1/25611440/ccp_training_session_2_-_our_community_story.pdf, p. 1.
- 4 Hawtin & Percy-Smith, 2007, p. 17-19.
- 5 World Bank, "Community Profile: Procedures and Examples," *World Bank*, 2007, Accessed October 23, 2016, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTTOPPSISOU/Resources/1424002-1185304794278/4026035-1185375653056/4028835-1185375678936/2_Community_profile.pdf.
- 6 Bill Berkowitz, "The Community Tool Box," *Community Tool Box*, n.d., Accessed October 23, 2016, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/analyzing-community-problems/main>.
- 7 Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2006, p. 33.
- 8 Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2006, p. 66.
- 9 Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2006, p. 66.