

ESTABLISHING BASELINES

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Summary

This fact sheet explains how to establish a set of baseline data to use as an evaluation tool. Baseline data is an important part of evaluation as it gives you a 'before picture' of what you are measuring.

Keywords: collecting data, managing/storing data

What Is a Baseline?

An important part of any plan or program is the process of evaluating your progress. Through evaluation, you are able to judge whether your plan has been a success or not.¹

Evaluation is often thought of as the last step in the process. However, it is important to think about evaluation from the start in order to conduct one properly.²

A key part of the evaluation process is gathering baseline data.³ The baseline data will let you make before and after comparisons. Unlike data that is gathered to measure the

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success of your plan, baseline data is gathered before the plan has been implemented. Gathering the data at the beginning of the project allows you to compare any future data to the baseline data.⁴ Making these comparisons allows you to see how the plan has helped to change things in your community.

Why Is Establishing a Baseline Important?

It is important to evaluate your plan regularly to know whether it needs to be updated.⁶ Establishing a baseline is the first step to evaluate whether your community plan has been successful or not.⁵

The baseline data helps you begin to measure how your plan is able to help you achieve goals. The baseline data will give you a 'before picture' of your community to compare with after plan implementation. Without this data, it is difficult to measure the changes that occur after your plan is implemented.

Example

One of the goals of Community ABC's plan is to protect community water supplies so that the quality or quantity of potable water is not compromised.

To measure how effective the plan is, you would want to take samples of the water. It would be important to take water samples from a variety of locations and to make sure each one is clearly labeled.

The quality of the water samples would then be tested onsite or sent to a laboratory. You would need to gather samples for testing at regular intervals (e.g., once a year, or possibly once a season). You will be able to see how the water quality has changed over time by comparing the new water samples to the first water samples you collected.

In this example, the baseline data would be the first water samples that were gathered.

What Is Evaluation and Why Is it Important?

There are four processes involved with land use planning. These are pre-planning, planning, implementation, and evaluation.⁷ Each of these processes should be applied when creating a community or land use plan. As you can see in Figure 1, the manner of moving through these processes is a cycle and continues to circle back to the beginning.⁸ The cyclical nature of the planning process is important because it ensures that the feedback that is gathered is being incorporated into the plan at each step along the way.⁹

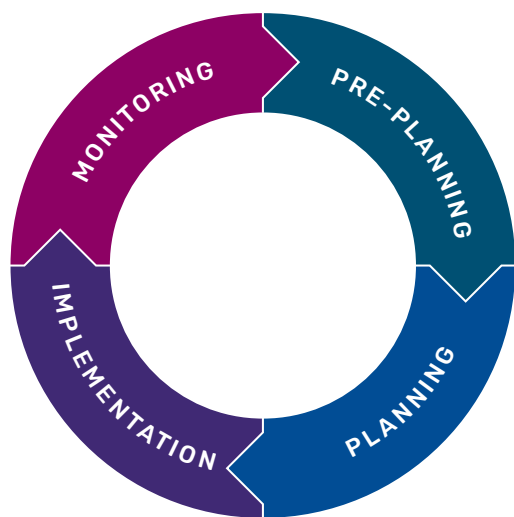


Figure 1 | Diagram of the planning process.

Adapted from (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada / Indigenous Services Canada. "CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia, Third Edition." 2013. Accessed October 24, 2016. http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/ccphb2013_1378922610124_eng.pdf. p. 14.) Used with permission.

The process of evaluating a plan consists mainly of gathering data to determine whether your plan is accomplishing what you intended it to accomplish. It is often assumed that this step is something that comes after you have created and implemented your plan. However, the evaluation process should be started as soon as you begin creating your community or land use plan.¹⁰

One way to do this is to establish early on what your process for evaluation is going to be. This includes determining what the goals of the plan are and how you are going to measure your success when considering those specific goals.¹¹

For more information on evaluation and measuring your success, see the *Monitoring Your Progress, Setting Goals and Objectives*, and *Using Logic Models for Program Evaluation* fact sheets.

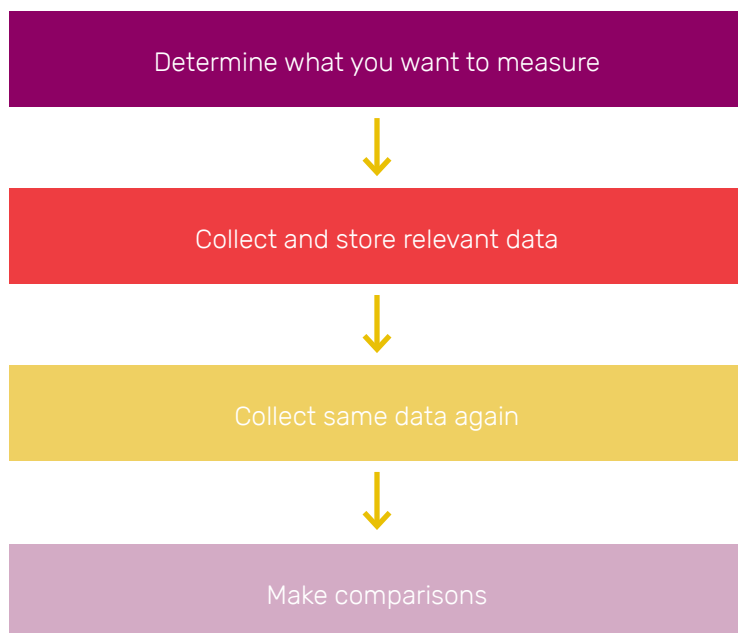


Figure 2 | This diagram outlines the steps that you can follow when establishing baseline data.

How Do You Establish a Baseline?

To establish a baseline you must first determine how you will measure the different parts of your plan.¹² For example, if one part of your plan is focused on housing, you might want to measure how many new houses are completed within a 5-year period. The baseline data for this measurement would be how many houses are present in the community before the plan is implemented.

Part of creating a baseline is collecting, organizing, and storing information that can be used later when you are collecting new data. It is important that the data you collect to establish your baseline is gathered in the same way that data will be gathered after the plan is in place.

Who collects the baseline data depends on what sort of data you are searching for. Some technical data, such as water or soil quality, will need to be gathered by experts. However, there is a lot of data that you can gather on your own. This data includes such things as surveying members on a variety of issues, counts of housing stock and repair, as well as number of students who are registered or graduating each year.

Baseline data often includes things that you can count or measure, such as the number of houses or size in metres.¹³ However, it can also include opinions and attitudes. For example, you might want to know how members feel about the community before and after your community plan is implemented. One way to find this information would be to give members a survey that asks their opinions on different aspects of the community. This would be the baseline data.

You can then give the same survey again a few years after the plan has been implemented to see if members' feelings about the community have changed. It is important to know this information as you will need community buy-in when implementing your new community plan. By comparing the new survey results to the baseline data, you will know if there are any parts of the plan that the community members do not support.

Process/Example

1 Quantitative

Community XYZ is writing their community plan. They have gathered feedback from the community members who have stated that one of their goals is to protect the natural resources on their reserve lands and traditional territories.

One of the first steps toward this goal would be to have an accurate understanding of the current state of the natural resources in the area. To do this, the community uses drone technology and land survey techniques to create a map of the various natural resources on their land. The data collected through these methods, as well as the maps, are the baseline data that all future data will be compared to.

When new data is collected, it is important that it is collected in the same way as the baseline data so that an accurate comparison can be made.

QUANTITATIVE DATA



An amount of something:
5 people

QUALITATIVE DATA



People's comments:
"I think that..."

Figure 3 | Example of quantitative data compared to qualitative data.

Examples of Baseline Data to Collect

Health + Wellness

- # of members treated in the community
- State of repair of health facilities
- # of members served by wellness programs
- Are members satisfied with service?

Education

- # of students registered in each school year
- # of graduates each year
- State of repair of educational facilities

Economic Development

- # of businesses in the community
- Revenue from businesses
- # of members employed
- Average income levels

Culture + Language

- # of people who speak the local language
- # of programs offering language training
- # of programs offering cultural opportunities

Housing

- # of members living in the community
- # of residences in need of repair
- # of members in need of housing

Environment

- Level of pollutants in the water or soil
- # of days per year with boil water advisory

2 Qualitative

Community XYZ members have identified that one of the goals of their community plan is to offer more effective healthcare programming. It is possible to measure this goal using quantitative data. An example of quantitative data is the number of members served by a program. Another example of quantitative data is the amount of money invested in the programming.

However, it is also helpful to have qualitative data. An example of qualitative data is feedback from members regarding what they think about the effectiveness of the healthcare programming. This type of data focuses on what people think and feel about the programming that is offered.

Qualitative data like this can be collected through workshops, town hall meetings, or surveys. Depending on how you gather the information, it can be recorded using scales, graphs, or by grouping quotes from members into themes.

Whichever method you choose, you should use the same method when you go back to collect data again after the plan has been implemented.

Final Thoughts

Evaluation of a community or land use plan is an essential part of the planning process. To ensure that the evaluation is effective, it is important to set up a system for evaluation when you first begin to create your plan.

Part of this system is collecting baseline data, which you can use later for comparisons. This baseline data allows you to judge whether you plan has been successful at achieving the goals it is intended to achieve.

Further Reading

BC First Nations Land Use Planning Effective Practices: A guide prepared for the New Relationship Trust

by Ecotrust Canada

This guide gives an overview of each of the four planning stages and the various steps necessary to complete each stage. The solutions given are specific to the First Nations planning context. <http://www.newrelationshiptrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/land-use-planning-report.pdf>

Gaining Momentum: Sharing 96 Best Practices of First Nations Comprehensive Community Planning

by Jeff Cook

The 96 best practices shared in the guide follow the four planning stages and offer solutions used by First Nations from across Canada. <http://www.newrelationshiptrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/comprehensive-community-planning-long-version.pdf>

Endnotes

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