

CREATING A COMMUNITY PROFILE

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Summary

This fact sheet describes what community profiles are, why they are useful, and how to create them.

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What is a Community Profile?

A community profile is a collection of information about your community. It describes your community's natural environment, land uses, economy, social, history, and cultural traditions. By doing so, it describes the needs, resources, and challenges of the community.¹ A community profile provides the background information needed for a planning process, such as a Community Plan. They are also used in different professions such as community economic development and natural resource management. A community profile is different from other informative community documents because it involves the community itself.

Why Build a Community Profile?

You might build a community profile as part of a planning process or to communicate with government. Having a clear purpose for your community profile helps community members know what it can and cannot achieve.

If you are building a community profile as part of a planning process, first think about your community's goals, strengths, and struggles. Consider what residents envision for the community's future. Involving community members in the process grows their understanding of your community and teaches them new skills.²

For a more in-depth look at how a community profile is used in the planning process, see *Using a Community Profile*.

The community profile can also be used to show governments and agencies that the needs of your community that are not being met. Your community profile can also be a tool to show how a new project will impact the community and the quality of life of its residents. A community profile is also useful when applying for funding or service from government departments, agencies, or non-profit organizations.³

How Do You Build a Community Profile?

Themes of Information

Community profiles have information that can be placed into four broad groups or themes.



Figure 1 | Themes of information in a community profile.

The first theme is the environment.⁴ You can include knowledge about the natural environment in the community, such as the landscape, vegetation, wildlife, water, air quality, and climate. You can also include a description of the human environment, such as the community's land holdings, decisions or directions about land use, and a description of previous land uses. Transportation, water, wastewater, energy, and communications infrastructure are also included.

The second theme covers the social aspects of the community.⁵ You can include your community's demographics, health and well-being, education, and governance. The health and well-being section covers any health issues in your community and describes the available physical and mental health resources. The education section captures the level of education achieved by community members, available education opportunities and resources, and community members' opinions. The governance and administration section summarizes government operations.

demographics
the statistical characteristics of a human population, such as age or income

The third theme covers the community's culture. Knowing the culture of the community helps people understand the current situation and make informed decisions about the future.⁶ This section includes the cultural practices, history, the use of Aboriginal languages, and sources of local knowledge.

The final theme is the community's economic profile, which outlines the current economic activities, businesses, and job data.⁷

Sources of Information

Several sources of information are useful when creating a community profile. The first one is the community itself. Community members have a wealth of information about a variety of topics. They know the community's culture, history, lands, needs, and resources.

You can gather community knowledge in a variety of ways, one of which is with a community survey.⁸ You can collect information such as community interests, and demographics. Another method to collect knowledge is by interviewing knowledge holders in the community. Similarly, you can use storytelling to gather information if your history is told orally. Finally, you can use photography and mapping to document your community's natural environment, human environment, and cultural sites.⁹

For a more in-depth look at how to do your own survey, see *Conducting a Community Survey and Analyzing Surveys*.

A second source of information is the Government of Canada's collection of data. Statistics Canada does a national census of the Canadian population every five years and collects a variety of data. While this provides a good source of data for some communities, it is only as good as the number of people who answered the questions and submitted the census. This source may not provide reliable data if participation was low, so compare it with sources of data before using it to make sure it is accurate. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada also collects data on Indigenous peoples but it has similar issues as census data.

The third data sources are your community's organizations. Your Band Office may have demographic data and your Health Centre may have health-related data. Your education department would have information on past and present students. If your community has an economic development corporation, it would hold data about the community's economy.

Who is Involved in Building a Community Profile?

While a small group of people lead the profile's creation (likely the planning team), it is ultimately a document that describes your community as a whole. Therefore, it is ideal if all community members are involved in building the community profile at some point. Some members might have an ongoing interest in the process and are involved throughout. Others might have a limited interest and only be involved for a short period of time.

When Do You Build a Community Profile?

It is not always the right time to begin to build a community profile. The Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL) created a tool known as the Community Life Cycle Matrix that helps you find out where you are on the life cycle and identify what phase you are in.¹⁰ Creating a community profile is best done in the Emergence or Vision Phase. If the community profile is being built as part of a community planning process, it is typically done so during the pre-planning phase or early in the planning phase.

Final Thoughts

Gathering background information on your community is a critical step in the planning process, and a valuable process itself. At the same time, it can be a difficult and overwhelming task. This fact sheet, along with the additional resources listed below, helps guide your community through the process of building a community profile.

Further Reading

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)

CIER is a national, First Nations-directed non-profit organization that provides sustainable solutions to First Nations seeking to address environmental issues. It provides training materials for communities developing a Community Plan.

<http://www.yourcier.org/comprehensive-community-planning-training-program-materials.html>

The Centre for First Nations Governance

This is a non-profit organization that seeks to support First Nations as they develop effective self-governance.

<http://fngovernance.org/>

Statistics Canada

This is a federal government agency that collects statistics on the Canadian population. The data is searchable and can be limited by geographic area. The 2016 census data can be found at:

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/rt-td/index-eng.cfm>

Endnotes

- 1 Murray Hawtin & Janie Percy-Smith, *Community Profiling: A Practical Guide*. (2nd ed.) (Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2007).
- 2 Murray Hawtin & Janie Percy-Smith, 2007.
- 3 Murray Hawtin & Janie Percy-Smith, 2007.
- 4 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.
- 5 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, 2008.
- 6 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, 2008.
- 7 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, 2008.
- 8 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.
- 9 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, 2008.
- 10 Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership, "Communities Life Cycle Matrix," *Centre for First Nations Governance*, n.d., Accessed October 23, 2016, http://fngovernance.org/resources_docs/Communities_Life_Cycle_Matrix.pdf