

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER? SUCCESSION PLANNING AND DATA MEMORY

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Multiple Applications



Privacy & Confidentiality



Data Management & Migration



Human Resources, Data Memory



Funding Barriers



Conclusions

- **PRIORITIZE DON'T PROCRASTINATE!**
- Community objectives, not just claims
- Respect Privacy & Confidentiality
- Plan Data Management & Migration
- Manage Human Resources & Data Memory
- Find funding
- Sleep well

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER? SUCCESSION PLANNING AND DATA MEMORY

PETER DI GANGI, SICANI RESEARCH & ADVISORY SERVICES - NCRW, OCTOBER 2022

Hello everyone,

I'm hoping to share some thoughts on what happens to all this stuff we're working on. Each of you comes from different circumstances but most of you are involved one way or another in research - either for your community, tribal council, Provincial / Territorial organization, TARR centre, etc. One common thread is that we are involved in the collection, preservation, and transmission of knowledge. This knowledge is the property of the communities and nations we work for. It's our duty to manage and preserve this knowledge, not just for today but for future generations.

Multiple Applications

What we collect - initially as part of claims development, or documenting cultural knowledge - is not just project-based. A document might be collected as part of a Specific Claim, but once that's done, it's also part of a larger body of materials that have been collected. The cumulative result can grow into a large data asset which has a number of applications, and which is also quite valuable - in terms of replacement value, but also in terms of future community and cultural development.

These data assets, if organized and managed effectively, can assist in meeting many other needs and objectives, not just claims development. For instance, curriculum and cultural development; consultations and impact assessments related to lands & resources; public education within the nation and community and also for third parties; and academic research.

Privacy and Confidentiality

It's so important to encourage and promote community use of the data assets that we've collected. But in order to do this, you will need to have in place policies relating to security, confidentiality, privacy and personal information, to ensure that access is provided in a way that protects the interests of the community and individuals.

You can't let someone walk in and take files. You can't break the confidentiality agreements that were made with people when they were interviewed. You can't break solicitor client privilege. You can't allow information to be shared that may breach community privacy standards, or the relevant privacy legislation which enabled you to access, say, membership materials. All of this requires policies and procedures. Not to be bureaucratic, but to protect individual and community interests. These must be made to outlast you!

Data Management and Migration

If you are involved in this work for any length of time, you and your organization will have built up a collection of materials and evidence - documents, maps, interviews, transcripts, tapes, hard drives, reports, legal opinions, and so on.

As the years go by and the volume of these materials increases, you need to be organized properly if you ever want to find stuff and connect newer acquisitions to materials already on hand. For digital files this means having a good directory structure, and making sure that newly acquired materials are catalogued and processed effectively and in a timely manner. For other forms of media, you need to have them organized, searchable, and locatable.

Also, you need to migrate materials to keep up with changes in software and hardware. Materials that may have been collected in hard copy have often been superseded by digital versions available online. But in some cases - for instance repositories where access is not longer viable - you may need to digitize your existing hard copies. Interviews that were done in the 1970's when reel to reel or cassette tape was state of the art need to be migrated to digital format. The same with early digital formats - remember the Mini Disk? Even SD cards are now passé.

All of this requires ongoing monitoring, assessment, planning, and action - as well as forecasting and allocating adequate human and financial resources. But it never seems to be a priority and as research managers you need to make provision for this in your work plans and budgets.

Human Resources, Data Memory

What happens if tomorrow you're gone? Would anyone be able to know how you've organized your data, where to find materials, or the status of your work? Proper organization is crucial so that others can pick up where you left off. Also proper documentation, so that those who follow you know what has been done and how it is organized. This not only assures continuity in your current projects, but it also works to ensure that the communities who you work for can have future access to the materials which have been collected on their behalf at great time and expense.

Time passes fast. It doesn't seem that long ago that I walked into the Public Archives of Canada (what it used to be called) for the first time. So it's hard to believe that now we're almost 45 years later. Perhaps in your work you rely on key experts or researchers who may be reaching the end of their shelf life. Do you have a plan for what happens if they are no longer in the picture? These things can happen suddenly. You don't necessarily have the luxury of early warning. Do you know where their files are, and how they are organized? Do you have a succession plan to ensure that if someone is no longer at their desk - for whatever reason - others can locate their data assets and manuscripts and continue the work?

This can be as simple as ensuring proper data backup and storage procedures. But it may also involve training and mentoring, or other measures. Better to be organized and planning ahead instead of being in disaster recovery mode, especially with high value assets.

Let's look at LAC - over the past 20 years there have been many changes in the organization of this institution, and also with regards to staff. We have noticed how access to the records held by LAC has been made more difficult and degraded as a result of staff turnover and the lack of corporate memory. Knowledge of the materials themselves has not been maintained and passed on, and it has a ripple effect.

I know this has been raised with LAC management repeatedly over the past 20 years, and yet today I continue to hear that LAC staff do not know the collections - because of staff turnover and a lack of emphasis on knowing the materials. I remember about ten years ago, speaking with an old hand who specialized in the LAC's manuscript collections. She had just retired. With reference to the LAC staff who followed her, she said, "It's terrifying what these people don't know". This was a predictable outcome.

It's no different within our own organizations. You need to plan ahead if you want to preserve corporate memory.

Funding Barriers

One of the problems is that existing funding and budgeting models often leave these issues out or do not attach value to them. Funding from the Department for Specific Claims development is year by year and narrowly focused on Departmental objectives - NOT First Nation objectives. And certainly not with a wider view to the value and application of these data assets, preservation of corporate knowledge, and arrangements related to data management, migration, and human resource development.

Have you every stopped and thought about how much it would cost to replace what your organization has collected over the past 5, 10, 20 or 30 years?

This shows you how short sighted and myopic federal program and funding guidelines can be. They don't seem concerned with the long term value of the assets that they themselves have spent 25, 30 or 40 years funding, or the importance of maintaining the integrity and solvency of these materials that have taken such time, effort and resources to collect. They seem much more concerned about short term priorities and their own interests. They work in silos.

So you need to think about this and secure & allocate the resources required to do these things, because they are critical. No one else will do it for you.

Conclusion

- The most important advice I can give is, prioritize and do not procrastinate! Time waits for no one. Procrastination is an enemy that can be at least as damaging to our interests as the bureaucrats.
- Organize your data assets so that they can be used and accessed by the communities you work for, for a variety of purposes.
- Develop common sense, principles-based policies and procedures to protect confidential data.
- Plan for the future, for the time when you (or your colleagues) won't be around.
- Identify & secure the human and financial resources needed to carry out this part of the work.
- Sleep well