

B3: OWNERSHIP, CONTROL, ACCESS AND POSSESSION (OCAP)

In the past, Indigenous people were not necessarily consulted in regards to the collection of information for the purposes of research or otherwise. Due to the lack of consultation and unclear guidelines for ownership and access, research and any consequent use of information gathered is viewed as an inherently political act. Ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) is “self-determination applied to research”. OCAP’s approach to policy offers a way out of the confusion and ethical dilemmas of existing Indigenous research and information management.¹

These principles apply to “research, monitoring and surveillance, surveys, statistics, cultural knowledge and ... all aspects of information, including its creation and management.”

Researchers and individuals from outside the Nation must adhere to the ethical guidelines for participatory research and community involvement, and the Nation needs to create ethical research policies that define the types of information activities for their community.

The following strategies are excerpted from OCAP:

- Be clear about what you want and do not want to get from research and determine priorities
- Become informed and share information about research initiatives that impact your community or constituency. Seek to improve First Nations representation in decision-making venues (e.g. university and government committees).
- Refuse to participate in processes that do not respect OCAP or First Nations protocols.
- Seek advice and support from Elders and leadership. Educate the leadership and raise the profile of research and information management issues.
- Develop culture-based frameworks, methods, tools, training, review, and reporting strategies.
- Model good research practices by following stringent ethical guidelines and community and cultural protocols.
- Build research skills among people in your community or organization.
- Access research funding sources with criteria and processes that are community/Indigenous friendly.
- Identify respectful researchers and cultivate long-term relationships with them.
- Collaborate with other like-minded Indigenous groups and communities.
- Build on successful First Nations initiatives and processes.
- Negotiate written agreements or memoranda of understanding that spell out the research relationship with your community/organization and your research partners.
- Require review prior to publication of research/information involving your community or constituency.
- Alternatively, agree to a right to dissent – an elegant solution to the conflict between academic freedom and OCAP, whereby each party can include their own interpretation in any publication.
- Contract, rather than partner with, researchers which makes clear the lines of accountability.
- Involve numerous parties in various capacities which will avoid having one party overwhelm and control.
- Develop a code of research ethics, guidelines, policies, by-laws or legislation where applicable. Once in place, ensure they are disseminated, understood, and respected.

¹ Schnarch, Brian. “Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary First Nations Research and Some Options for First Nations Communities.” *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Ottawa: National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2004)

- Set up a research review board.
- Develop information sharing strategies and agreements that maximize distribution of information while protecting sensitive information.