



Strengthening data tools for place-based initiatives

Community-centred approach to
First Nations data sovereignty





A comprehensive framework for developing data tools that empower communities, respect First Nations sovereignty, and enable community-driven decision-making through culturally-grounded, accessible technology.

Design with communities

True community empowerment begins by designing with communities rather than for them. This approach recognises that communities are experts in their own needs and contexts.

First Nations knowledge systems

- Oral histories
- Seasonal calendars
- Indigenous place names
- Cultural grounding

Co-design processes

- Community defines questions
- Community sets priorities
- Community shapes data collection

Community control

- Share with allies
- Control narrative
- Communicate with funders

Data governance and ownership

Communities must maintain full control over their data through relationship-based structures that honour First Nations protocols and community sovereignty.

First Nations knowledge systems

- Consent systems
- Access controls
- Respect protocols
- Permission mechanisms
- Sharing rules

Community-controlled infrastructure

- Ownership of data storage
- Community-managed platforms
- Local servers

Core philosophy

Enable communities to make timely decisions using their own data, share strategically with allies, and build long-term capacity that serves community-defined priorities rather than external agendas.

Technical approach

Technology should serve the community, not the other way around. Tools must be accessible, intuitive and designed to build local capacity.

Simple access

- Intuitive interfaces
- Easy data input
- Non-technical design

Local capacity

- Training and support
- Build local expertise
- Avoid external dependency

Interoperability

- Connect when beneficial
- Share on community terms
- Disconnect when needed

Connect to action

Data tools must enable communities to act on their findings in real-time, tracking progress toward community-defined goals.

Real-time access

Current information available when needed for timely decision-making

Measure what matters

Track metrics that reflect community priorities and values

Community-focused dashboards

Visual tools that monitor progress and track local goals

Storytelling capabilities

Tools to communicate community narratives and engage funders

Implementation principles

Community ownership

All data, infrastructure and decision-making power remains with the community. External partners support rather than direct.

Cultural respect

Tools and processes honour First Nations knowledge systems, protocols and ways of knowing. Cultural grounding is integrated throughout.

Sustainable capacity

Build long-term local expertise and infrastructure that reduces external dependency and empowers communities for the future.