



Understanding data from a First Nations standpoint

Resource summary

Type: Educational resource

Topic: First Nations data sovereignty
and perspectives

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Overview

This resource explores how First Nations perspectives reshape our understanding of data, emphasising relationships, responsibilities and community sovereignty over information.



Understanding data from a First Nations standpoint

Understanding data from a First Nations perspective means understanding that information isn't just neutral facts — it's tied up with relationships, responsibilities and culture. Unlike the usual Western approach of treating data as objective material to collect and analyse, a First Nations standpoint views data as connected to people, places, and stories that have been passed down for generations. How data is gathered, who gets to control it and how it's used matter just as much as the data itself.

From this perspective, data is relational. It makes sense because of its connections to community, land and culture, not just as isolated facts. There are also protocols about sharing knowledge: some information is meant to be shared widely, but other knowledge might be sacred, meant only for certain genders or specific people. This means data privacy and access work differently than in typical Western systems.

First Nations communities also emphasise that data should benefit the people it comes from. Instead of outsiders simply extracting information without reciprocity, First Nations data practices focus on community ownership and control. This means First Nations people are involved in developing research questions, collecting and analysing data, and deciding what happens with the results. The goal is typically about helping the whole community, not just individual academic or business interests.

Additionally, First Nations ways of knowing include different kinds of evidence, oral histories, ceremonies, spiritual insights and observations tied to the land that don't always fit into conventional data categories but are equally important and valid.



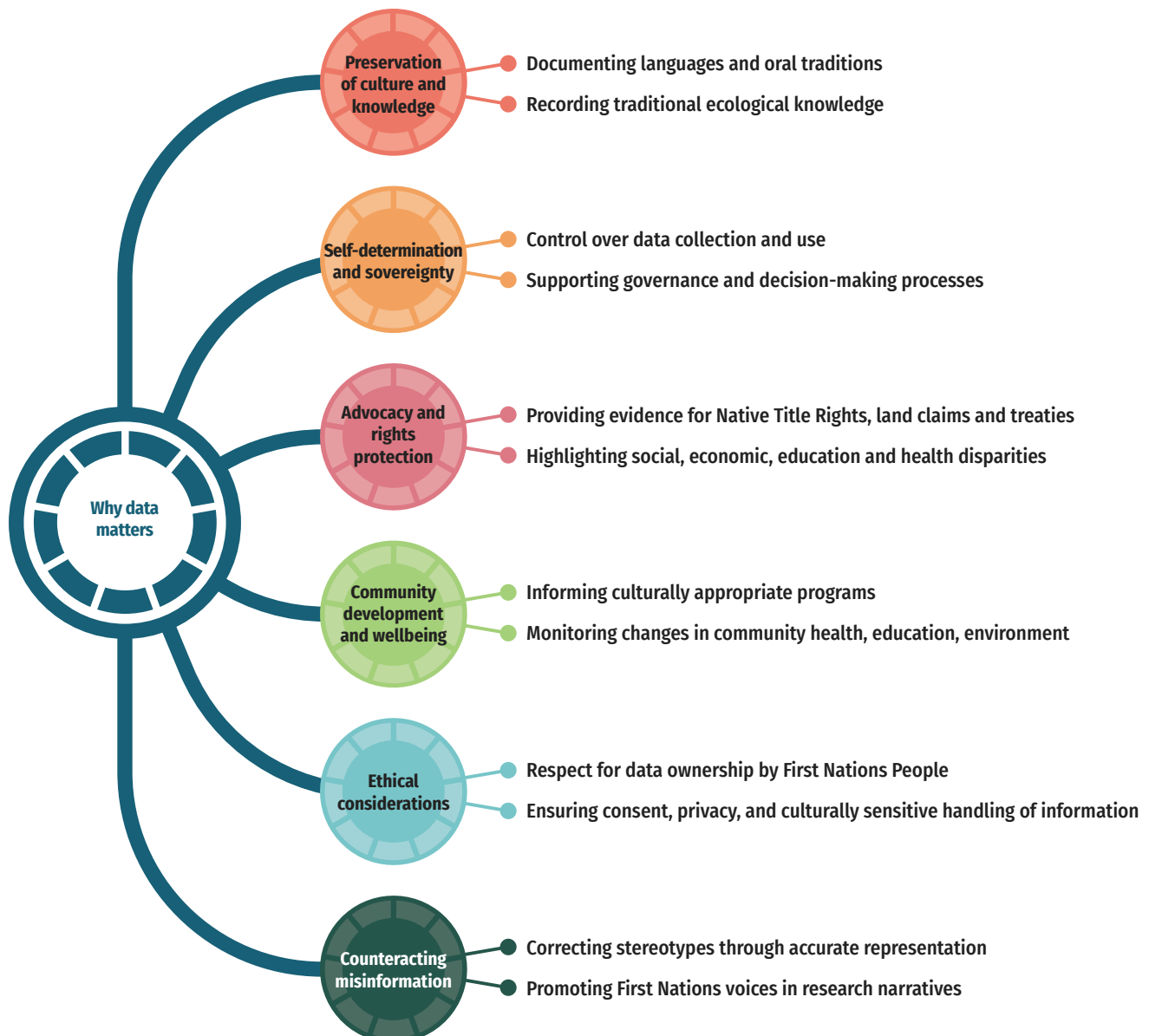
Why data matters from a First Nations perspective

Data matters significantly from a First Nations perspective because it directly impacts how First Nations communities tell their own stories, make decisions about their futures and protect their rights. For too long, data about First Nations peoples has been collected by outsiders without permission or any real benefit to the communities. Often, this data has ended up reinforcing harmful stereotypes or being used to push policies that don't actually help First Nations people.

When First Nations communities control their own data, they get to present the real picture — their strengths, needs and what matters most to them — instead of being defined by outside researchers or government statistics. Data sovereignty is about having the power to decide what information gets shared, who sees it and how it's used, similar to how communities have always had protocols about sharing cultural knowledge.

Helpful data can support First Nations communities in many ways, including healthcare, education, economic development and land rights. It provides the evidence needed for funding, policy changes and legal cases. It can also help preserve and revitalise languages, track environmental changes on traditional lands, and document cultural practices for future generations.

Ultimately, controlling data is about self-determination — ensuring First Nations peoples have the tools and information they need to make informed decisions for their communities and maintain their sovereignty in today's digital world.



How Country from a First Nations perspective fits into the data world

From a First Nations point of view, Country isn't just land it's a whole web of relationships between people, ancestors, animals, plants and places, all connected. When it comes to data, this worldview brings important considerations about how information should be handled.

First Nations communities don't see data as random bits of information that anyone can collect and use. Instead, it's knowledge that belongs to the community and comes with responsibilities. Data should be managed in ways that respect Indigenous laws and customs, similar to how Country is cared for following traditional protocols.

The concept of Country challenges conventional data handling approaches by showing that information always has context and relationships that matter. It emphasises that communities should have control over their own data. This Indigenous perspective advocates for data systems built on respect, reciprocity and community ownership, not simply extracting information for outsiders to use.

Country - relationships between people, ancestors, land and knowledge through data

