

Community Research Questions and Governance

A discussion guide for the choices that belong before a project is treated as settled.

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Generated illustration. It does not represent a real community, meeting, agreement, or knowledge-sharing event.

1. Begin without an assumed project

A useful conversation may change a research question, redirect a budget, reveal that existing knowledge is sufficient, or end a proposal. None of these outcomes is a failure. Trouble begins when a meeting is described as open while its timetable, methods, and public announcement are already fixed.

This guide supports discussion about purpose, authority, resources, information, and accountability. It is not a consent checklist, an ethical approval route, a consultation record, or a template agreement. Completing its pages confers no permission to collect, publish, photograph, travel, or act on another person's behalf.

Its principal reference is Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's [National Inuit Strategy on Research](#), which concerns Inuit Nunangat research in Canada. The strategy is not a universal protocol for all Indigenous Peoples or all Arctic places. Appropriate rights holders, institutions, and locally determined processes must define any real work.

Before using these pages: ask whether a discussion is wanted, who can convene it appropriately, and what preparation people need. Do not use an invitation to request sensitive knowledge, obtain signatures, or imply that attending signals support.

2. Separate the concern from the proposed method

Start with what someone needs to understand or decide, not with the equipment a researcher wants to deploy. A concern can be important even if the proposed measurement is poorly matched to it. It can also be outside a research team's competence or authority.

Fictional discussion scenario

A fictional coastal settlement is considering how to understand changing seasonal water conditions. An outside team proposes a sensor series. The scenario contains no real community, testimony, local observation, partnership, or funding. Its purpose is to compare possible questions without treating one as agreed.

Different questions create different responsibilities

Possible question	What would need discussing?
What does an existing public water record show?	Whether its place, timing, variables, and access conditions fit the question.
Which information would help a locally identified decision?	Who owns that decision and whether research, service provision, or another route is appropriate.
Would a new instrument add useful information?	Purpose, authority, maintenance, retrieval, data control, costs, and alternatives.

Do not ask participants to reveal locations, practices, or experiences to make the exercise feel authentic. Discuss the categories of information that might be relevant and who could decide whether they should be shared. A blank map is not an invitation to fill it.

Write the concern in ordinary language, then write the decision it could inform. Next, ask what is already known, what remains uncertain, and whether resolving that uncertainty would actually change the decision. "More data" is not a complete purpose, particularly when collection creates labour and obligations.

Keep a separate space for alternatives: use an existing record, revise the method, support locally led work, address a service problem directly, or do not proceed. Discuss what each option makes possible and what it leaves unresolved. Do not score options before participants have agreed that scoring would be useful.

3. Make authority visible

The National Inuit Strategy on Research identifies five linked priorities: advance Inuit governance in research, enhance ethical conduct, align funding with Inuit research priorities, ensure Inuit access, ownership, and control over data and information, and build capacity in Inuit Nunangat research. These are institutional responsibilities, not boxes for a visiting team to tick.

A community is not a single viewpoint, and a person's willingness to speak does not make them a representative of everyone. Discuss how appropriate institutions and rights holders determine representation, how individual participation differs from collective authority, and how absent or dissenting views will be treated. Do not appoint representatives through this worksheet.

Authority map for discussion, not a record of approval

Decision area	Who determines authority?	What remains unresolved?
Question and purpose	Identify the applicable process	Record the open issue
Methods and changes	Identify the applicable process	Record the open issue
Information use and release	Identify the applicable process	Record the open issue
Pause, dispute, or exit	Identify the applicable process	Record the open issue

Include the limits of the convenor's authority. Can the people at the table change a budget, a funder's deadline, or a repository requirement? If not, identify who can answer and avoid promising a resolution. An unresolved conflict between an institutional open-data condition and the proposed governance arrangements is a reason to revisit the proposal, not a detail for later.

Ask what happens if the purpose changes. A publication, teaching resource, commercial reuse, automated analysis, or public map can create uses not envisaged in the original question. A useful discussion identifies these possibilities without assuming that one initial agreement would cover them all.

Authority question to take away: Which decision are we currently treating as ours that must be determined elsewhere?

4. Put time and resources beside responsibility

Participation requires time, preparation, language access, appropriate payment arrangements, and room to decline. A proposal that depends on repeated unpaid explanation has shifted costs rather than removed them. Ask who is expected to organise, translate, maintain equipment, interpret results, answer questions, and remain available after a grant ends.

Do not assume one format suits everyone. Discuss whether written material, a smaller conversation, additional preparation time, interpretation, remote access, or another arrangement is preferred. Recording a meeting should not be the default. Decide whether notes are needed, who may keep them, and how their meaning can be checked without attributing unapproved statements.

Responsibility and resource conversation

Work that may be needed	Resource question	If it is not funded
Preparation and language access	Whose time and expertise would be paid?	Revise the process or timetable
Data stewardship and interpretation	Who has access, support, and durable capacity?	Reduce or reconsider collection
Maintenance and closure	Who owns continuing costs and retrieval?	Do not create an unfunded obligation

In the fictional water scenario, an outside team can fund a sensor but has no maintenance provision. Discuss whether that changes the method's value. The answer is not automatically to train a local volunteer. Training can be useful when wanted and resourced; it can also transfer responsibility without transferring authority or money.

Ask what a useful result would look like to the intended decision maker. A report, a local-language discussion, a controlled dataset, a practical service change, and a journal article are different outputs. The easiest output for a university is not necessarily the most useful one locally.

Finally, consider timing. Seasonal work, care, health, existing commitments, and governance processes are not inconveniences around the researcher's calendar. If a deadline cannot accommodate them, the proposal may need to change or stop.

5. Close the conversation without manufacturing agreement

End by separating what was explored, what remains disputed, and what anyone is authorised to do next. Silence is not agreement. A meeting summary is not an endorsement, and attendance is not evidence of collective support. Leave space for people to correct how the discussion is represented through the process they choose.

A possible discussion sequence

1. **Purpose:** clarify why the conversation was requested and whether its scope is useful.
2. **Questions:** compare the concern, possible decisions, existing knowledge, and alternative approaches.
3. **Conditions:** explore authority, resources, information control, timing, and unresolved conflicts.
4. **Return:** identify permitted follow-up, responsibility for answers, and how a summary may be shared.

This sequence is an adaptable agenda, not a prescribed meeting length or a route to approval. Local preferences may require an entirely different format. Do not collect personal details simply to populate the pages, and do not upload completed notes to a public tool without explicit authority.

A short closing note can record: the question considered; alternatives still open; decisions that were explicitly outside the meeting; information not requested or recorded; outstanding resource or governance issues; and the next contact or review arrangement, if one was agreed. It should distinguish a request for an answer from permission to start work.

Return to the original concern after that answer arrives. Has the proposal become more useful, more accountable, or simply more elaborate? Research is not the only respectable outcome. The ability to revise or decline a proposal is part of meaningful governance.

Demonstration disclosure. Still North, its staff, and the scenario are fictional. This guide reports no real community views, partnership, approval, or research activity. Read the linked ITK strategy in full; this document does not speak for Inuit or any other people.