

# So you want to map your cultural values? 10 things to look for when selecting an expert



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**Mapping cultural uses of the land and water is one of the most important pieces of research an Indigenous community can do to protect its Traditional Territory. If done well, this research can play a key role for assessing Crown consultations, in land use planning, impact assessment work, negotiations, and even in the courts.**

But how do you find the right people to make sure it is done well? Use and occupancy studies or traditional use studies are rooted in science – social science. It can be difficult to find someone who does this type of work, Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

**Here is a 10 point check-list to help you select the right experts to map your cultural values:**

**01. Ask for qualifications of the lead-researcher to make sure they have social science training or a background in the social sciences.**

Foresters, engineers, even archaeologists might be great in their respective fields, but this does not qualify them to be good in designing a successful social research instrument.

**02. Ask tough questions in a telephone or in-person interviews.**

You might ask some questions that will quickly let you know if the research team has any social science experience. Questions like: How would you define 'quality' when it comes to doing cultural research? How does one manage response burden when designing and conducting research? What is the difference between reliability and validity?

**03. Check the references of the researchers.**

Ask for references of where else they have worked on similar studies and if you can call these communities to hear first-hand of the success (or failures) of this past research.

**04. Focus on hiring a team that can conduct rigorous research.**

Many consultants and their proposals will come across as pro-Indigenous and on the side of communities trying to right the colonial wrongs. This often clouds the decision-making process for hiring the right researchers. You are hiring a research team, not Indigenous Rights advocates.

**05. Look for a research team that has extensive experience in data collection and data processing, and ask if there are examples of previous data processing methods or documentation that can be shared.**

There are two main components to cultural mapping research: (1) data collection; and (2) data processing. Rigorous methods should be applied to both. Pretty maps are certainly helpful in negotiations, but if the maps don't accurately reflect what was documented in the research, the outputs won't be worth the paper they were printed on.

**06. If you want to collect Traditional Ecological Study (TEK), design a separate TEK study, don't combine them and stay away from consultants who will try.**

Capturing traditional ecological knowledge is not part of a use and occupancy study or traditional use study. Studies that try to combine the two almost always fail at doing either very well. Stay away from consultants who make false promises of mapping everything. Cultural mapping programs need to be laser-focused in their goals.

**07. If a researcher promises a capacity building component in the research, challenge them to describe positive outcomes and trade-offs.**

Consultants will often promise a capacity building component to research. Quality research and staff training programs are two very different undertakings. They can be combined but there are trade-offs involved. If a researcher only describes positive outcomes, you'll likely want to keep looking for someone else to do the work.

**08. Watch out for promises of how new technologies can be used to innovate or simplify research.**

Technology can play an important role in the mapping of cultural values, but consultants and proposals that emphasize the tools, and not the research design, should be avoided.

**09. Be clear on what will be delivered.**

Red flags should go up if the consultant doesn't propose a well-documented methodology report with the research. Also check to see if the consultant proposes to work with you to help interpret, safeguard and use the research to support local decision making.

**10. Ask around to find communities who are actively using their cultural research in routine day-to-day decision making.**

See who they would recommend to hire for a similar study. Good research gets used. Quality research will serve a community well in a variety of activities, from assessing impacts within the Crown consultation process, to planning, negotiations and in the courts.

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