

The First Nations Principles of OCAP®

With interest in First Nations data, information, and cultural knowledge on the rise, First Nations are asserting their authority over how this information is collected, used, and disseminated.

Historically, research and data collection practices have not always been beneficial to—or respectful of—First Nations' rights or interests. The development of the First Nations principles of OCAP® in 1998 was a response to this.

Though the OCAP® principles are collectively owned by all First Nations, the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) has been entrusted with their stewardship since 2010.

What is OCAP®?



Every First Nation has the inherent right to make informed decisions about its information and how it is collected, accessed, used, and shared—the First Nations principles of OCAP® are a tool they can use to assert this right. The principles establish how First Nations' data, information, and cultural knowledge should be collected, accessed, used, and shared.

OCAP® stands for: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession.

Ownership refers to the relationship of First Nations to their cultural knowledge, data, and information. This principle states that a community or group owns information collectively in the same way that an individual owns his or her personal information.

Control affirms that First Nations, their communities, and representative bodies are within their rights in seeking control over all aspects of research and information management processes that impact them. First Nations control of research can include all stages of a particular research project, from start to finish. The principle extends to the control of resources and review processes, the planning process, management of the information and so on.

Access refers to the fact that First Nations must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities regardless of where it is held. The principle of access also refers to the right of First Nations communities and organizations to manage and make decisions regarding access to their collective information. This may be achieved, in practice, through standardized, formal protocols.

Possession While ownership identifies the relationship between a people and their information in principle, possession or stewardship is more concrete: it refers to the physical control of data. Possession is the mechanism by which ownership can be asserted and protected.

OCAP® represents principles and values that are intertwined and reflective of First Nations world views on jurisdiction and collective rights. Just as First Nations across Canada are different, so too may their application of OCAP® be different.

The Mutual Benefits of OCAP®

OCAP® is a tool that can benefit First Nations and those looking to engage or work with First Nations' research, data, information, and cultural knowledge.

For First Nations, working through OCAP® can support their path to data sovereignty, and for institutions, organizations, researchers, and academics, OCAP® can help guide ethical ways of working with First Nations who choose to share their data, information, and cultural knowledge.

The right of First Nations communities to own, control, access, and possess information about their community is fundamentally tied to their inherent rights. Along with a strong information governance framework, OCAP® is a tool First Nations can use to assert data sovereignty.

For more information about OCAP®, please visit FNIGC.ca.