What Researchers Need From Métis Communities
Increasing Metis Research

Introduction

The information in this fact sheet is the result of a think tank on Métis research held in Kelowna, British Columbia March 15th and 16th, 2010. The think tank brought together more than 20 Métis researchers, academics, and students, as well as representatives from Métis governing organizations and national research ethics organizations. The purpose of this gathering was to explore the need for research in Métis communities from a Métis perspective. One topic discussed was: What do researchers need from Métis communities to encourage research to be undertaken with these communities? This fact sheet documents responses to this question and represents the collective knowledge of the Métis researchers that participated.

Why do communities need to know what researchers need from them to help the research process? Métis peoples and communities are understudied in Canada. Although Métis people make up approximately 33 per cent of the Aboriginal population, according to the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2012) a small fraction of research in Canada is Métis-specific, and Métis are not proportionately represented in pan-Aboriginal studies (Young, 2003, p.xx). In order to receive federal funding for research, Canadian researchers must follow the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010).

The TCPS2 lays out the direction for research ethics and has a chapter specifically on Aboriginal research which contains rules for: engaging community; engaging community organizations; directions for determining and respecting community protocols; the need for research agreements; collaboration and mutual benefits; the need to build research capacity in the community; the role Elders should play; how to ensure privacy and confidentiality; how to approach interpretation and dissemination; how intellectual property rights apply to Aboriginal research; and proper collection of biological materials. In order to encourage new research in Métis communities, Métis need to know how to best assist researchers with things like local protocols, preferred research direction and topics, and appropriate application of research ethics, to name a few. This fact sheet is intended to be used by Métis communities to help them assist researchers and, therefore, increase research into Métis perspectives on health and well-being.

This chart depicts the five categories of assistance that communities can provide for researchers:

Research Direction	Communication Assistance	Local Protocols	Community Support and Commitment	Research Capacity and Ethics
Identify what the community needs/wants from research.	Person to act as link/bridge to the community and its leaders.	Share local cultural protocols.	Be open to research – there are respectful researchers out there.	Métis communities have the capacity to be engaged – on the back of volunteers.
Expression of needs.	Formal and informal introductions.	Specific entrance process needed.	Cooperation & hospitality.	A community coordinator.
Knowledge of Métis history & knowledge of community.	Métis communities – introduction/orientation to community of interest.	Guidance & boundaries.	Be present and facilitate the work.	Facilitate research capacity - locals trained in research.
	Invitation from GMOs – to start the dialogue.	Guidance on protocols and customs.	Commitment to complete the project.	Guidance committee in community.
	Someone involved in the research that is grounded in that community and its culture.	Identification of protocols – knowledge holders.	Mutual commitment to resolve issues as they arise.	Identify early adopters & work with them to further capacity.
	Open communication.	Guidance/tolerance.	Elders support.	Métis code of research ethics.
	Interpretation & Interpreters.		Continuing commitment.	
	Ongoing communication		Participation from all levels.	Métis advisory ethics board – Elders, academics & other interested parties.
			Need communities to take active role in research.	

Research Direction

Researchers expressed a need for guidance in choosing the direction for research and for determining research topics. Communities can help researchers with the appropriate direction for research. People in the community know better than researchers what their needs and their knowledge gaps are. Taking time to meet with researchers who are calling for community input will go a long way toward getting research done on topics that are important to the community. Another strategy is for a community to express their needs to the general research or academic community. An expression of needs could attract researchers to a Métis community that otherwise may not have attracted research interest.

Métis community members hold important background knowledge about the history of the community. Helping researchers to understand this knowledge and history, and how this impacts research direction, ensures the production of quality research that accurately reflects the reality of the Métis community.

Communication Assistance

Researchers need help communicating with the community. Academic and governmental researchers are required by the TCPS2 to consult with the Aboriginal communities they plan to study. If they have difficulties setting up communication with a community they may instead go do research in another community where communication has been established through previous research. Communication assistance can come in two broad forms: initial assistance building relationships and getting to know the community; and ongoing assistance with maintaining accurate and appropriate communications.

Initial contact with a community can come in many forms. Researchers may contact governing Métis organizations such as the Métis National Council or one of the Métis provincial organizations. However, it may be more appropriate for initial contact and communication to occur at the local level. Where this is the case, it is helpful for communities to let researchers know who their first point of contact is. This could be a person with knowledge of the community, who is grounded in the community, and familiar with its culture. This person can act as a bridge between researchers and community leaders. Providing researchers with a first point of contact will make doing research in Métis communities more attractive to researchers.

Once a first point of contact is established, it is helpful for the community to maintain communication with the researchers. One way this can be done is by setting out a scheduled system of ongoing communication where the community can voice any concerns they may have about the research, and researchers can update the community on their progress. Communities can also help researchers with interpreters, where appropriate, and with interpretation of community norms, wants, and needs. Maintaining consistent two-way communication requires commitment from researchers and communities to be successful. This will ensure that both sides get what they want out of the research process and that appropriate results are seen from the work.

Community Support and Commitment

It is equally important for a community to support and be committed to a research project as it is for a researcher to be supportive of the community and committed to the project. The think tank participants consistently spoke of a need for both support and commitment from the community throughout the life of a research project. There are many ways that communities can be supportive of proposed research.

Being open to research in the community will be very supportive. Openness to research, with a willingness to embrace the process and potential positive outcomes, will attract researchers to Métis communities. There are respectful researchers out there. If they are making the effort to engage in meaningful and respectful research, accepting them and supporting them will produce quality research that can benefit the community.

Support and commitment from both sides in this research relationship are needed for quality research. Any relationship will have problems that need to be addressed. However, a mutual commitment between researchers and communities to resolve these issues as they arise will help the research go smoothly and ensure that the process is respectful.

Local Protocols

Researchers need help from community knowledge holders with community protocols and practices, should they exist. Local protocols and practices are knowledge held in the community about how to appropri-ately interact with individuals and the community as a whole. Researchers believe that through consultation with key knowledge holders they can learn to apply proper local protocols and avoid any misunderstandings that could damage the relationship between community and researchers. The following are some ways that community can assist in guiding researchers through local protocols and practices.

Identifying local knowledge holders to ask them to share the local protocols is a task that communities could assist researchers with. Researchers will also need to know if there are any specific processes regarding entrance to, and acceptance in, the community. Once entrance has occurred and introductions are made, researchers will need ongoing guidance on protocols and customs as well as guidance on any boundaries that they may not understand. Lastly, tolerance of researchers' ignorance of local protocols will be helpful and assist them in learning to respect them in the long run. The community has the best knowledge of local protocols, and helping researchers with them would facilitate quality research in Métis communities.

Research Capacity and Ethics

Engaging in ethical research, as defined by their academic institutions and funding sources, is necessary for researchers. Communities with the capacity to engage in research, and those with established ethical protocols, will make them more attractive to researchers for this reason. However, it is an unfortunate reality that most Métis communities lack research capacity, established administrative infrastructure, research experienced human resources to partner with,

and ethical protocols. Establishing research capacity and ethical protocols may need to be a joint effort; with researchers providing capacity dollars and research training, and communities providing local knowledge and knowledge holders.

Researchers' needs for doing research in Métis communities, related to capacity and ethics:

• Researchers need local community members to conduct interviews and engage in other parts of the research process. Training for this may be necessary. It is possible that this could be provided by researchers and paid for as a part of their research funding. Over time, this will become less necessary as community capacity grows.

• Establishing a community coordinator and/or a guidance committee in the community will help to move research forward and provide researchers with a first point of contact. These positions may be paid or voluntary, depending on whether or not there is money in research grants for these types of positions.

• If there are not any established ethical guidelines for research, it is beneficial to draft some that reflect the community's views on research, consent, and ethical communication. The Métis Centre's Principles for Ethical Métis Research provides a framework that can be tailored to a given community's purposes and local context. Creating local guidelines could also be accomplished by forming a Métis ethics advisory board. This board could be made up of Elders and other members of the community, as well as potentially include academics and other interested parties.

References

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