

Steps toward effective information management for Traditional Owner organisations



1. Understand what data is relevant to your organisation

Each organisation deals with different types of data depending on their purpose and their operations. Identifying what types of data your organisation deals with is the first step to ensuring that this data can be collected, stored, managed and used effectively.

2. Understand how data might further the interests of your organisation

For the most part, data is only valuable if it can be used to further the interests of your organisation and Traditional Owner group. Collecting and managing data can take time and resources, therefore it is important to understand how the data you are collecting can be used to your advantage. For example, think about how your data can inform organisational strategic focus areas or land and sea management priorities. That is, what information do you need to do a better job?

Understanding how the data you collect and manage is critical. It helps to streamline your data collection needs and informs the tools that you will need to use to collect, store, manage and present your data.

3. Identify your organisation's data needs

Depending on the outcomes of the previous step, your organisation should prioritise certain datasets for collection and management. A dataset is any collection of data of a similar type, usually presented in a table (a table of common datasets for Indigenous organisations is presented below). The datasets required by your organisation are called 'data needs'. Once you have defined your data needs, you can define what data your organisation should collect.

4. Develop and implement data standards

For data to be useful, it must be captured consistently and in a way that makes sure it can serve its purpose. 'Data standards' are a set of rules and guidelines that ensures data is formatted, defined, and structured in the same way each time. These data standards also define what data collection methods should be undertaken.

5. Implement tools to collect, store, manage and present data

Effective information management tools help to ensure that data is:

- collected effectively and efficiently
- stored appropriately according to organisational and cultural protocols
- managed in a way that aligns with the interests of individuals and the organisation
- presented in a way that helps individuals and the organisation use the information to their advantage

The tools that you use need to be specific to the types of data that you are wanting to capture, analyse and present.

Tools like databases and information management systems can be helpful for this because they provide a single centralised tool for storing, managing, and combining data across different parts of your organisation and operations e.g. linking operational information (jobs) with cultural information (cultural sites).

6. Develop information management skills and capacity

Effective information management is only good if staff and members develop and possess the skills and capacity to use the tools.

These skills include basic understanding of data processes, as well as specific skills related to data collection, storage, management and reporting techniques.

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Common datasets managed by Traditional Owner organisations

Information Type	Description	Data Types Captured
Culture and heritage		
Cultural sites, areas, and boundaries	Locations, names, and boundaries of sacred or culturally significant places	Spatial data, text, documents, photographs, video recordings
Stories	Cultural (creation) stories, Traditional Owners' stories, narratives, testimonies, and recollections of historical and cultural events	Audio and video recordings, text, documents
Ceremonies and cultural practices	Information about ceremonies, rituals, songs, and associated protocols – often restricted	Audio and video recordings, text, documents
Songlines	Routes and narratives of creation ancestors across country	Spatial data, audio recordings, text, documents
Traditional Ecological Knowledge	Knowledge of plants, animals, fire management, and land management practices	Text, spatial data, audio and video recordings, photographs, documents
Seasonal calendars	Knowledge of seasons, plant and animal behaviours, weather patterns, astronomy, and connections between these elements	Text, spatial data, audio and video recordings
Language	Word lists, place names, animal and plant names, and language recordings	Audio and video recordings, text, documents
Artefacts	Ownership, history, and cultural significance of physical artefacts	Text, photographs
Families and kinship	Skin groups, family relationships, genealogies, and community membership	Text, documents, diagrams/charts
Genealogies	Family trees and lineage documentation used for land rights and cultural governance	Text, documents, photographs
Country and Landscape		
Native Title and land tenure	Native Title determinations, claims, ILUA agreements, and land tenure boundaries	Spatial data, legal documents, text
Sea Country boundaries	Boundaries for marine and coastal areas	Spatial data, text, documents
Clan estates or traditional use areas	Culturally-informed boundaries that governed how people might access and use country	Spatial data, audio and video recordings, text, documents
Environmental and biodiversity data	Flora, fauna, and other ecological data, information related to land management	Spatial data, photographs, text reports

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Information Type	Description	Data Types Captured
Land management and ranger work		
Biodiversity monitoring	Flora and fauna surveys, species occurrence records, threatened species monitoring, invasive species mapping, and population trend data	Spatial data, text, documents
Fire	Burn history maps, fire scar mapping, planned burn records, seasonal burning calendars based on traditional knowledge, and post-burn vegetation monitoring	Spatial data, text, photographs
Water quality and monitoring	Water sampling results, creek and wetland health assessments, and hydrological data	Spatial data, text, photographs
Coastal and marine monitoring	Reef health, turtle and dugong nesting/ population monitoring, sea country patrols	Spatial data, text, photographs
Weed and feral animal control	Treatment location records, species distribution mapping, control method (trapping, baiting, spraying), and outcome monitoring data	Spatial data, text, photographs
Cultural Site monitoring	Condition assessments and maintenance records for sacred sites, rock art, and heritage places – linking back to the cultural data already in your table but adding a field operations layer	Spatial data, text, photographs
Ranger patrol logs and incident Reports	Pre-start (vehicle) checks, daily patrol records, compliance incidents (illegal fishing, trespass, poaching), and operational activity logs	Spatial data, text, photographs
Organisational records		
Education, training, and certifications	Education and vocational training records, licences and accreditations held by staff	Text, documents
Employment Program Data	Job placement records, employer agreements, and employment program outcomes	Text, documents
Governance and compliance records	Meeting attendance, minutes/resolutions, membership registers, and ORIC compliance	Text, documents
Funding and grant records	Grant applications, acquittals, funding agreements, and financial reporting	Text, documents
Equipment and Asset Management	Vehicle logs, equipment maintenance records, and asset registers for boats, ATVs, and monitoring equipment	Text, documents

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Information Type	Description	Data Types Captured
Project and contract management		
Contract management	Contracts, agreements, workplans, partners organisations and suppliers	Text, documents
Project planning and scheduling	Work plans, milestone schedules, and activity registers	Text, documents
Budget and financial tracking	Project budgets, expenditure tracking, purchase orders, invoices, and forecasting	Text, documents
Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER)	Indicator frameworks, data collection and evaluation processes, evaluation outcomes, progress reports	Text, documents
Workforce management	Staff rosters and scheduling, timesheets, leave calculation and scheduling	Text, documents
Media		
Photos	Historical and contemporary photographs, artworks, and visual records	Photographs, video recordings,
Film and audio archives	Recordings of community events, performances, and oral histories	Audio recordings, video recordings