

# ᐱᐱᑭᑦᐱᑦᐱᑦᐱᑦᐱᑦ **Aajiiqatigiingniq** an Inuit Research Methodology



Indigenous methodologies are based on cultural practices, beliefs, and ways of being that are integral to research methodology (Smith, 1999). The epistemological foundations of Indigenous research require a deep understanding of language, belief-based methodologies and cultural practice, and a conceptual understanding of cultural terminology. In working with Elders on research issues important to our community, we have explored what research grounded in Inuit worldview would look like. For our purposes, participatory and qualitative consensus approaches are most appropriate. They also are in line with Inuit cultural practices, although the precise approach used is specific to the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principle of *aajiiqatigiingniq*.

Elders identified that whenever there was something serious to be discussed, *aajiiqatigiingniq* was used. The process was one of solution-seeking and consensus-building. The word *aajiiqatigiingniq* is about building agreement together through a group process. For Inuit the process of *aajiiqatigiingniq* is fully inclusive and participatory. The solution seeking process itself relies on being in trusted relationship with others engaged in the process; communicating respectfully, openly and honestly; and having the right motivation in order to seek solutions which will improve the common good. The method is iterative and progresses over these stages: meaning making to achieve shared understanding of the issue; sharing real life experiences to help situate the topic; seeking innovative solutions to resolve the issue; commitment to supporting the agreed to actions to achieve resolution. For Inuit, everyone in this process attends as a participant with equal status and voice. It would be unacceptable to have participants at the discussion who are not fully committed to and actively contributing to solution seeking. From this perspective, it is important that everyone be recognized as an integral contributor to the process and not as an objective observer of it.

As a research process, *aajiiqatigiingniq*, is a trusted cultural form of consensus-building. It does require that the researcher enter the process from a place of respect and trust and that the researcher be participant in the process to the extent that they are fully participant in all stages of the process and have committed to supporting outcomes that will seek to improve the common good.

## The *Aajiiqatigiingniq* research process can be described as having 4 stages:

**1.** The most critical is the first stage which centres around coming alongside participants to build the trusted relationship and shared understandings of the contexts. This is a process that cannot be overlooked or rushed through. Researchers must become trusted as strong listeners, open and thoughtful negotiators and respectful of all those who are participating in the process. This initial engagement of participants is described in the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principle of *piliriqatigiingniq* or coming together in an equal and collaborative relationship to meet commonly described goals or tasks through a collective working relationship.

It is important to note that the *piliriqatigiingniq* relationship is grounded in equal voice, negotiation and open view sharing, in exploration that sets goals and guidelines for how a task progresses and is viewed as successful. This stage of the process is about informed and shared engagement that results in trusted and respectful relationship amongst all participants. It also is critical to setting the contexts for a trusted and respectful research process going forward.

**2.** The second stage of the methodology requires developing a shared understanding of terms, and of the contexts of the research. This can be described as *inuuqatigiitsiarniq* or a place where iterative discussions lead to relational consensus building around the research itself — the definitions and terminologies to be used, identification of collective goals, the key issues to be investigated, identification of experts/informants and agreement as to the process moving forward. This is also a time when all of this information is shared and promoted across the community so that there is a collective awareness of the issues and the process being proposed and that by sharing the background information, every community member is then able to consider the topic through the lens of personal experiences and ideas. In this way, the process of research is shared beyond those who are selected informants. This is an approach which seeks to raise critical consciousness across the community and build critical mass through engagement around the issues. It also sets the stage for meaningful knowledge translations of the data results. For Inuit, knowledge can only be described as such if it is used to improve the lives of others. If one has “knowledge” but does not share it or use it for the common good, then it is seen to have no value. In this light, all research must result in direct application to improving the lives of the people who contributed to the knowledge development. This understanding is critical to the design of all research being carried out with Inuit populations, but should be essential in all research anywhere.

**3.** The third stage is the actual data collection with informants who now understand the definitions and parameters of the research and are willing to engage because they share the goals of the project and have lived experiences and personal data they wish to contribute. This ensures that the data collected is authentic. *Aivaqatigiit / uqamanggatigiit* are ways of respectfully communicating to express ideas and engage in heavy discussions on a topic. These discussions should be collected in oral formats as much as possible to ensure accuracy and ease of communication and because this is the most respectful and trusted form of communication for Inuit. Personal data most often takes the form of narrative, open storytelling or sharing of lived experiences. Survey or closed question formats are not as successful in collecting authentic information.

**4.** The final stage of the research involves the coming together of the participants in a process to share back the data that has been collected and to use the IQ process of *qanurtururangniq* to review, assess and validate the data collectively. This again is a consensus building process through which key themes are identified and interpreted from the data, contexts common to these themes are discussed and collective decision about how to apply this research is arrived at through *isumaliuqatijiitsinirningniq* — a way of arriving at collective decisions that can be used to improve the common good.

There is a commitment as part of this process to share the information generated back to the community and to make specific commitments to actions and next steps. In this way, knowledge translation is about taking action and initiating changes based on the research findings.

The *aajiiqatigiingniq* consensus research method is being used and promoted by the Aqqiumavvik Society in all of our projects. We will be tracking the effectiveness of this process as an Inuit-specific research methodology going forward.

## Aajiiqatigiingniq Research Model

### 1. Building relationships / meaningful community engagement / *piliriqatigiingniq*

- Exploring the contexts
- Negotiating research questions and parameters
- Seeking shared understandings/ starting points
- Respectful, open trusted communication

### 2. Building understanding / *inuuqatigiitsiarniq*

- Iterative narratives / relational consensus
- Discussions with experts / informants
- Raising critical consciousness
- Community outreach / awareness
- Agreements for moving forward

### 3. Lived experiences / personal data collection / *aivaqatigiit / uqamangatigiit*

- Respectful methodologies / options
- Authentic narrative / story / voice
- Audio / video as authentic choice for data collection (oral)

### 4. Validation / relational consensus building / *qanurtururangniq*

- Sharing back data building
- Seeking collective experience / voice
- Interpreting themes
- *Isumaliuqatijiitsinirningniq* / collective decision building
- Making commitments to actions / next steps