

FROM CAMPS TO COMMUNITIES: NEETS' AII GWICH' IN PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT IN A PRE- AND POST-SETTLEMENT CONTEXT

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in, whose traditional territory is located in the northeastern interior of Alaska, and their experiences with planning and development. Prior to settling into permanent villages, the Neets'ąıı lived in widely scattered camps moving in relation to seasonal subsistence resources. Equipped with extensive knowledge of their country, Neets'ąıı people knew at any given time where the best places for certain animals and resources were and thus would camp closer to those areas. According to Neets'ąıı oral history, life in the “those days” was preoccupied with basic survival. Planning ahead, being prepared, and adapting to changing conditions were some of the key strategies that enabled the Neets'ąıı to survive from one generation to the next in one of the harshest climates in the world.

The past 170 years has brought unprecedented change to the Neets'ąıı. The socio-economic and political context which historically defined the experience of the Neets'ąıı shifted dramatically as a result of colonization, the establishment of permanent settlements and the ensuing need for community infrastructure. Today, the Neets'ąıı are centralized in two villages, Vashraıı K'ıı (Arctic Village) and Vııhtıı (Venetie), located within the boundaries of the 1.8 million-acre Venetie Indian Reserve. The transition from Neets'ąıı camps to permanent communities has introduced many new needs including landfills, roads, power generation, etc. Whereas Neets'ąıı ancestors traditionally used planning as a survival strategy, their descendants today use planning to attract external investment for much needed infrastructure. This dissertation explores the ways in which the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in have engaged in planning and development in a pre- and post-settlement context.



## Table of Contents

	Page
Title Page .....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Figures .....	ix
List of Tables .....	xi
List of Appendices .....	xiii
Preface.....	xv
Chapter 1: <i>Tr'ookit (The Beginning)</i> .....	1
Permanent Settlement of Villages.....	6
Transference and Division of Land.....	7
Institutionalization of Community Development .....	9
The Challenge(s).....	12
A Case Study: The Neets'ajj Gwich'in.....	16
Research Questions .....	18
Assumptions and Limitations .....	19
Chapter 2: <i>Yeenii Deegweeya' Datthak Gwidehtly'aa NaI'in Haa Gwik'yaljik</i> .....	23
Indigenous Planning Theory .....	23
Neets'ajj Gwich'in Literature .....	28
Chapter Reflections.....	35
Chapter 3: <i>Gwik'eehaldal Gwankaiihtii</i> .....	37
Positionality .....	37
Contextualizing Research Among the <i>Neets'ajj</i> .....	40

Research Design.....	44
Relational Accountability .....	46
Research Questions.....	48
Data Collection .....	49
Interviews.....	49
Visual Methods.....	50
Participant Observation.....	50
Data Analysis.....	51
Triangulation.....	52
Bringing the Research Home.....	53
Chapter 4: <i>Geegarinkhii T'ee Gwik'it T'igwii'in</i> .....	55
Gwich'in Planning Terminology .....	55
<i>Neets'ajj</i> Planning Model Characteristics.....	57
Seasonal .....	58
Gilbert family seasonal movements.....	58
<i>Khaiits'à'</i> (Fall-time).....	59
<i>Khaii</i> (Winter-time) .....	61
<i>Shreenyaa</i> (Spring-time).....	64
<i>Shin</i> (Summer-time).....	64
Strategic .....	67
Disciplined .....	69
Chapter Reflections.....	70
Chapter 5: <i>Ch'ijuk Gweedhaa</i> .....	73
From Camps to Semi-Permanent Settlements .....	74
Sheenjik Village.....	76

<i>Vashraqij K'oo</i> .....	77
<i>Zheh Gwatsal</i> (Christian Village) .....	78
<i>Vijhtajj</i> .....	78
From Semi-Permanent to Permanent Settlements .....	80
<i>Vijhtajj</i> .....	80
<i>Vashraqij K'oo</i> .....	84
Chapter Reflections.....	88
Chapter 6: <i>Kwaiik'it Gwich'in Eenjit Gwintl'oo Geegoo'aii</i> .....	89
Values Based Decision-Making.....	89
<i>Neets'ajj</i> Community Development Values .....	93
<i>Yeenii Gwiindhat Datthak Diinan Tra'ahil'ee Ts'à' Gwinzii K'eerahitii</i> .....	94
(Post)colonial <i>Neets'ajj</i> Land Use Planning .....	94
<i>Jii Kwaii K'it Gwizhit Jidii Datthak, Zheh, Taii Deegwiindhan Gwik'it Gwariltsaii</i> .....	101
(Post)colonial <i>Neets'ajj</i> Infrastructure Development .....	102
According to a statement in .....	105
(Post)colonial <i>Neets'ajj</i> Housing Development.....	106
<i>Dinjii Zhuu Tr'inlii Ts'a' Ch'ee't'ineegwiindhan Nileenjit Tr'ii'ii Ts'à' Chan Nilerahil'ee. Jidii Datthak Haa Nihts'ariinyaa</i> .....	109
Equity in Development .....	110
Equity in Employment .....	111
Chapter Reflections.....	113
Chapter 7: <i>It'ee Jyaa Dagwahtsii Gwizhrih, Jidii Gagwadhal'e', Jidii Gwal'in, Jidii Gwadoiik'ii, Datthak Geegihe' Et'ee Daanagwaljik</i> .....	115
Key Findings.....	115
Planning is a <i>Neets'ajj</i> Tradition.....	115
Settlement is an Ongoing Transition.....	117

Modern Village Development has Decreased Self-Reliance and Increased Dependency.....	120
Self-Determined Village Development Holds More Community Benefits.....	122
Conclusion .....	124
Bibliography .....	127
Appendices.....	133

## List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Map of Gwich'in language region.....	1
Figure 2: Pre-contact spheres of influence and control .....	3
Figure 3: Denali Commission funding from Fiscal Years 1999–2017.....	11
Figure 4: Praxis.....	45
Figure 5: Qualities of emancipatory action research .....	46
Figure 6: Highlights from GTC traditional knowledge policy .....	48
Figure 7: Triangulated sources .....	52
Figure 8: Seasonal planning model .....	59
Figure 9: Seasonal cycle of resource harvest activities, Viihtajj, 1970–1982.....	66
Figure 10: Seasonal cycle of resource harvest activities, Vashrajj' K'qq, 1970-1982.....	66
Figure 11: Sheenjik Village circa 1945 .....	77
Figure 12: Spectrum of village development decision-making.....	123
Figure 13: 10 critical questions for indigenous people. ....	124





## List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Dates of Contact Among Alaska Natives .....	4
Table 2: Denali Commission Funded Projects in Vashraǰǰ K'qq (Arctic Village) and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ (Venetie) .....	10
Table 3: Three Major Frustrations With the Planning Profession .....	26
Table 4: Chronology of Literature With Significant Focus on the Neets'aǰǰ Gwich'in .....	30
Table 5: Gwich'in Planning Terminology Samples .....	56
Table 6: Population of “Chandalar Bands” in 1933 .....	79
Table 7: Population, 1920–2010 .....	80
Table 8: Gwich'in Values & Principles .....	92
Table 9: Gwich'in Values .....	92
Table 10: Distribution of Votes to Establish the Venetie Indian Reservation .....	96
Table 11: Federal Funding Received by Villages, 1998–2003 .....	104



## List of Appendices

	Page
Appendix A: Interview Questions .....	133
Appendix B: Map of Tribal Conservation Districts.....	135
Appendix C: Ni'inlii Declaration.....	137
Appendix D: Guideline for Researchers Conducting Traditional Knowledge Research in the Gwich'in Settlement Area.....	139
Appendix E: Gwich'in Tribal Council Checklist for Researchers.....	145



## Preface

*Shalak naqj, shijyaa naqj - shoozhri' Charlene Stern oozhii. Shitsuu Maggie Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa shoozhri' iltsaii, Khaih Zhuu shahnyaa. Vashrajj K'qq gwats'an ihlij. Shiyehghan naqj Peter Stern ts'à' Florence Newman goovoozhrii. Shitsii ts'à' shitsuu haa James ts'à' Maggie Gilbert goovoozhrii. Berkeley, California chan shitsii Alfred ts'à' shitsuu Barbara goovoozhri'. Shizhuu chan Grayson oozhii, Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa zhit Ditsii Yeet'ii oozhii.*

My relatives, my friends - my name is Charlene Stern. My grandmother, Maggie, gave me the Gwich'in name, *Khaih Zhuu*. I am from Vashrajj K'qq (Arctic Village). My parents are Peter Stern and Florence Newman. My maternal grandparents are James and Maggie Gilbert. My paternal grandparents are Alfred and Barbara Stern from Berkeley, California. My son's name is Grayson. His Gwich'in name is *Ditsii Yeet'ii*.

In 2001, I enrolled in the Indigenous Studies doctoral program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) yet my journey in higher education began nearly a decade earlier at Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies in Bellingham, Washington. At Fairhaven, I met two professors, Dan First Scout Rowe and Dr. Larry Estrada, who sparked my interest in community development work. After earning a bachelor's degree in American Cultural Studies in 2002, I decided to pursue graduate school at the University of New Mexico School of Architecture and Planning. As a student in the Community and Regional Planning Program, I was introduced to Dr. Theodore (Ted) Jojola who is a leading scholar in the field of Indigenous Planning. Under Dr. Jojola's mentorship, I became interested in Alaska Native planning traditions and decided to focus my graduate research on the experiences of my home community of Vashrajj K'qq.

After receiving my master's degree in 2005, I spent the next seven years providing technical planning assistance to tribal and municipal governments in rural Alaska. In my travels to over 25 villages, I witnessed firsthand local leaders struggling to navigate the new terrain of village development often with mixed results. Some villages had waited over 20 years for a much needed project to rank high enough on a funder's priority scale to receive attention. Other

villages proved luckier and were virtual hot beds of investment. A logical question this raises is, “What made the difference?” More often than not, the difference in results was due to a combination of factors including luck, timing, location, political advocacy, fiscal climate, grant writing expertise, and/or administrative capacity. Much to the dismay of practitioners and funding agencies alike, there is no definitive recipe or equation for success when it comes to village development. Overtime, funding ebbs and flows, capacity waxes and wanes, programs come and go, leadership changes and priorities shift. For most rural communities in Alaska, village development continues to be a “sink-or-swim” affair.

Part of this challenge is due to the fact that more so than ever before in history, Alaska Native settlements are reliant upon external investment in basic community infrastructure. This dependence has often shifted the locus of power over community development decision-making away from the local level. Today, village infrastructure is for all intents and purposes at the mercy of private, state and federal funding availability. In good times, this arrangement has led to boom cycles of investment in village clinics, multipurpose buildings, bulk fuel tank farms, new airports, and the like. In bad times, it has led to bust cycles that left villages competing with one another over limited funding to support much needed infrastructure. With no foreseeable changes in this power relationship in sight other than declining funding, the sustainability of villages is in many ways dependent upon their success at learning and mastering the modern politics of community development.

In my current capacity as a tenure-track faculty member in the Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development at UAF, I have the privilege of teaching classes aimed at preparing the next generation of community development practitioners. Each semester presents an opportunity to interact with students that call into class from across Alaska and beyond to

discuss current and emerging issues in rural development. Two common denominators for most of my students are that they care deeply about their communities and they desire to see improvements in the quality of life, access to resources, basic infrastructure and/or delivery of services. Some come from villages at imminent risk of permanent displacement due to climate change impacts. Others originate from communities that may lack running water or where residents pay \$9 for a gallon of gas. Every region is different and each village is unique. Despite the cultural and geographic diversity, what my community of Vashrajj̄ K'q̄q̄ and others in rural Alaska share in common is the challenge of strengthening their sustainability amidst ever-increasing costs, dwindling state and federal resources, rapid environmental changes, and inequitable power differentials. Indigenous communities in the Arctic are progressively becoming more vulnerable as a result of climate change and other global factors. Our leaders today are not only challenged with how to make our villages more sustainable, but also how to influence national and international policies that impact our lives in very real ways. Despite often being oppressed, marginalized and/or disproportionately impacted by “modern” developments, Indigenous people the world over have a great deal to contribute to the movement towards global sustainability. Alaska Natives possess thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and experience governing our communities and stewarding the land and resources in ways that provide for the needs of present and future generations. We continue to exist today as products of our ancestors' wisdom and effort and it is precisely because of that relational responsibility that we must carry their *kò'* (fire) forward.



I would like to extend a sincere *hai' choo* (meaning “thank you very much”) to all those who made this journey (and the dissertation that resulted from it) possible. *Hai' choo* to my research partners: Reverend Trimble Gilbert, Sarah James, Florence Newman, Gideon James, Robert Frank, Dave DeLong, Franklin Tritt, Jonathon John, and an additional participant that preferred to stay anonymous; to the Arctic Village Council, the Venetie Village Council, and the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government; to *shizhehk'aa naqij* (my family); to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; to *gee ch'ooahtan* Dr. Michael Koskey, Dr. Beth Leonard, Dr. Terry Chapin, and Dr. kas aruskevich; and to *K'eewaadhat* (Creator) for all these great blessings. We honor you in all that we do.

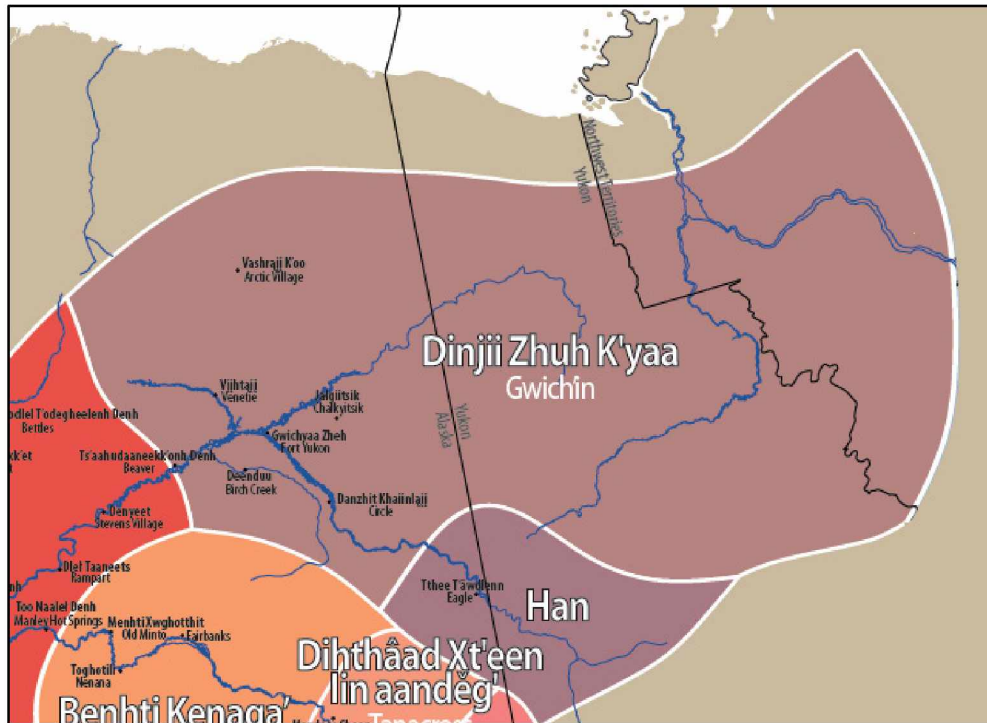
## Chapter 1

### *Tr'ookit (The Beginning)*

*Our people are tribal people whose identity is based upon survival.*

—Arctic Village Council, *Nakhai' T'ini'in*

The focus of this study is on the Neets'ąįį Gwich'in. The Neets'ąįį are a subset of the larger Gwich'in Nation whose territory extends from what is now known as the northeastern Interior of Alaska to the Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada. At present, the Gwich'in occupy twelve villages located along the Yukon, Chandalar, Porcupine, Black, Arctic Red, Mackenzie, and Peel Rivers and their tributaries.



*Figure 1.* Map of Gwich'in language region. This map, which was reproduced from the Doyon Foundation (2011) website, is a translation of the English version of the map created by the Alaska Native Center in Anchorage, AK.

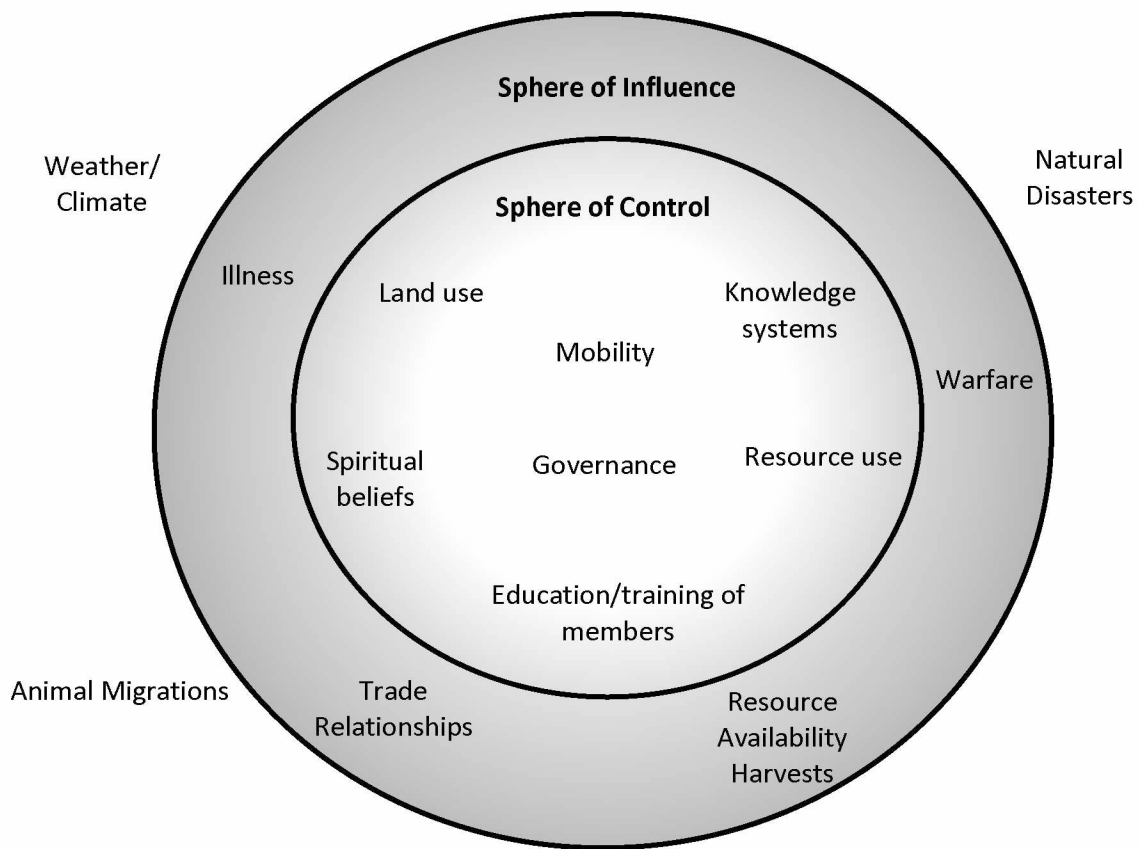
The term Neets'ąjį Gwich'in refers to the descendants of those families who traditionally occupied the territory south of the Brooks Range between the Chandalar and Coleen Rivers. The Neets'ąjį have a relatively short existence as permanent settlements but a much longer history living a lifestyle of constant movement "hunting, fishing and trapping on lands which we used and controlled for countless generations" (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 2). Prior to Western contact, the Neets'ąjį, like other Indigenous peoples of Alaska, exercised high degrees of control and influence over most aspects of their lives (see Figure 2). Within their immediate sphere of control (i.e. things that they could determine the outcome of) was the ability to govern and make decisions according to traditional Neets'ąjį laws as illustrated by the following quotation:

The elders of Arctic Village, as told to them by their parents and grandparents, do not remember any outsiders ever occupying our land or controlling our people. We have always, for countless generations, governed our own people our own Indian way, according to Gwich'in traditional customs. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 36)

Other aspects of life that they may not have been able to directly control, such as occurrences of illnesses or changes in resource availability, the Neets'ąjį sought to exert influence as a means to maximize positive outcomes. External to both of those spheres were natural processes and events that were beyond human control or influence. For example, the Neets'ąjį had little choice but to cope with natural disasters or climactic change, yet they did so through the adoption of various mitigation measures such as relocating their camps.

From an Indigenous planning perspective, this period in Neets'ąjį history would be considered part of the *Classic Tradition*. Māori Scholar, Hirini Matunga (2013), describes this era as one in which "Pre-contact, pre-colonial approaches to managing the environment and interactions between humans and the natural world were based on traditional knowledge,

worldviews, and values” (p. 10). By living in the manner that they did and in accordance with traditional values and ancestral teachings, the Neets’ąjį Gwich’in inherently exercised principles of sustainability, sovereignty and self-determination. The unfolding of colonization in Alaska beginning in the mid-1700s catalyzed a series of events that would fundamentally shift these traditional spheres of control and influence over time. As various colonial powers asserted greater claims to the lands and resources upon which the first peoples historically depended, the ability of groups such as the Neets’ąjį to exercise power and self-determination over many aspects of their lives became greatly challenged.



*Figure 2.* Pre-contact spheres of influence and control.

Due to the expansive geography and remoteness of Alaska, dates of first contact varied widely among Alaska Native groups (see Table 1). The extent to which individual groups of

Gwich'in were impacted by early contact with Europeans also varied. First contact is generally believed to have occurred in the Canadian portion of Gwich'in territory during Alexander Mackenzie's expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 1789. Following that expedition, trading posts began to emerge in the region including the establishment of the Hudson Bay Company in Fort McPherson in 1840 and in Fort Yukon in 1847. The first recorded mention of the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in was, in fact, made by a Hudson Bay Company fur trader named Alexander Hunter Murray whose account was published in the *Journals of Yukon, 1846-48*.

Table 1

*Dates of Contact Among Alaska Natives*

Area	Date of contact
Unangan/Aleut (southwest)	1750–1780
Sugpaiq/Alutiiq (southcentral)	1760–1790
Yupit (southwest)	1780–1840
Tlingit/Haida (southeast)	1785–1800
Eyak (southcentral)	1790s
Athabaskan (interior)	1800–1870
Inupiat (northwest & north slope)	1850–1870

*Note.* Source: Sandberg (2013) revised from Langdon (2002).

As transformative as early contact was for the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in and other Alaska Native people, it was merely the beginning of the process of colonization that has been enacted in many forms since. Despite the belief of some that colonization was a singular event in past history, it is in fact an ongoing process that has become manifested in the systems and power structures of society. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird (2005) define colonization as both the “formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies) that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, lands, and resources” (p. 2). The term postcolonial has gained popularity among Indigenous

scholars and critical planning theorists to describe a present and/or future state that moves us beyond colonialism towards greater self-determination. Critical planning theorist, Libby Porter (2010) suggests, “The predicament of (post)coloniality in settler states is to simultaneously occupy positions that are both *within* the enduring structures of colonialism and ‘located beyond’ or ‘after them’” (p. 40). Mi’kmaq scholar, Marie Battiste (2000), uses the term in a similar, yet different way, “to describe a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality. The term is an aspirational practice, goal, or idea that the delegates used to imagine a new form of society that they desired to create.” (p. xix).

I have chosen to frame this research within a (post)colonial discourse for two primary reasons. First, everything I know and have ever learned about the Neets’ąıı Gwich’in is filtered through the experience of colonialism. It is not simply an awareness that Indigenous peoples can cognitively shut on and off but rather is an ever-present part of our consciousness that shapes the ways in which we understand and experience the world. Second, by contextualizing Neets’ąıı planning and development in a postcolonial context, it rightfully acknowledges the extent to which colonial relations have impacted our collective experience to date but also opens the door for us to envision a time when our people will move beyond what we perceive to be our current predicament. While it is beyond the scope of this research to explore all the ways in which colonialism is implicated in the current dilemma of villages in Alaska, the following section includes a discussion of three key developments that include the permanent settlement of villages, the transference and division of land, and the institutionalization of community development.

## **Permanent Settlement of Villages**

In the article, *Schools, Settlement, and Sanitation in Alaska Native Villages*, author Gigi Berardi (1999) states, “Over centuries, Alaska Natives in isolated villages were able to survive in coherent, viable communities in high-latitude areas due to their traditional seasonal mobility. Such mobility allowed for the best uses of resources critical for subsistence harvest” (p. 330). This was certainly true in the case of the Neets’ąjį Gwich’in, who for most of their history moved their camps in relation to the changing seasons and availability of resources. Though not all Alaska Native groups were as highly mobile as the Neets’ąjį, in general, traditional settlements were seasonal or semi-permanent in nature. The history surrounding the permanent settlement of Alaska Native people and the subsequent development of present-day villages is extremely varied. According to Berardi (1999), “As contact with external cultures increased in Alaska a variety of military, commercial, and administrative influences – varying in impact depending on the geographic area – came to have important roles in consolidation of traditional settlements and seasonal camps into larger, permanent villages” (p. 331).

The transition towards settlement was not merely a physical change for Alaska Native people but rather a social, political, economic, spiritual, and cultural redefining of their lives. Additionally, for most Alaska Native villages, settlement only occurred within the past 50 to 100 years making it a not-so-distant event in local history. Within the Yukon Flats region, significant drivers of permanent settlement included the establishment of the trading post in Fort Yukon (1847), the discovery of gold (1892), and the institutionalization of schools (early/mid 1900s). To a large extent, gold mining activity in the late 1800s/early 1900s helped to catalyze the settlements of Birch Creek, Circle and Beaver, whereas the construction of a Bureau of Indian Affairs school was a primary driver in the case of Chalkyitsik. During the 1930s, for example, most Draanjik (Black River) Gwich’in lived in Salmon Village. Low water prevented a boat

carrying school construction supplies from reaching that destination so a school was built instead at the present site of Chalkyitsik.

As settlements in rural Alaska became more permanent, new needs emerged that necessitated greater investments in new technology and infrastructure. According to Berardi (1999), “Villages were not located with public works and expanding populations in mind” (p. 332). In some cases, the local geology proved unsuitable for infrastructure development either because of poor soil conditions or vulnerability to floods. Sudden increases in population density also put new strains on the natural environment, often creating conditions that contributed to poor sanitation and disease that then prompted further “interventions” such as clinics/hospitals, running water, and other modern infrastructure. While some of these interventions undoubtedly improved certain aspects of local life, they also required an infusion of resources from external agencies/organizations. Over time, a pattern of dependence was created which has actually resulted in villages becoming less sustainable and less self-reliant.

### **Transference and Division of Land**

When the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, the federal government acquired 375 million acres of land and charged the military with administrating the new territories. According to Teresa Hull and Linda Leask (2000), “For nearly 20 years after the U.S. acquired Alaska, Congress excluded it from the public land laws—meaning no one could get title to land” (p. 2). This all changed in 1884 with the passage of the Organic Act which opened the territory to mining laws and established a structure of civil government. The actual government footprint, however, remained relatively small, posing few immediate changes to daily life in remote regions of Alaska. In the Yukon Flats, the most immediate outcome of U.S. control of Alaska was the expulsion of the Hudson Bay Company in favor of the Alaska Commercial Company,



which assumed operation of the trading post in Fort Yukon. Beyond homesteading and other land-granting programs, the first significant transfer of land in Alaska did not occur until 1958 when Congress passed the Alaska Statehood Act giving the state rights to approximately 104 million acres of federal land in addition to the authority to manage fish and wildlife.

In the years between statehood and the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay (1969), the state's lack of a revenue source meant that over 50% of state revenues came from federal funds (Turo, Marr, & Thomas, 2016). State access to future petroleum revenues, however, depended upon resolving the issue of Indigenous land claims in Alaska. After years of contentious negotiation, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 extinguished aboriginal title in Alaska in exchange for 44 million acres (which actually represents a loss rather than a gain of traditional territory) and \$962.5 million in compensation. The surface and subsurface rights to the 44 million acres was not conveyed to tribal governments but rather to for-profit Native corporations.

Today, land ownership in Alaska generally falls into four broad categories: federal land (69%), state land (28%), Native corporation land (12%), and private land (1%) ("ANCSA Regional Association," 2017). Modern village development is very much predicated on the availability of land and the right of local entities to control its use. Even in the smallest of rural communities, it is not uncommon to encounter multiple landowners, which often complicates the process of obtaining site control for development purposes. A significant difference in the development experience of the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in, as compared to most other Alaska Native communities, is their ownership of 1.8 million-acres under tribal control, to be discussed more in the findings section.

## **Institutionalization of Community Development**

Other than tribes, virtually no other forms of local or regional governments existed in Alaska until the late 1950s. According to Gordon Harrison (2012), “At the time of the [Constitutional] convention, local government institutions were quite underdeveloped in Alaska. Scattered around the territory were small cities, and a few independent school and public utility districts” (p. 165). Article X of the State Constitution was written with the purpose of providing for maximum local self-government with a minimum of local government units. By vesting the powers of local government in boroughs and cities, the Constitution introduced new layers of government which eventually would become significant players in local and regional planning and development. There are currently 163 municipalities in Alaska (144 cities and 19 boroughs) with an estimated 97% of Alaskans residing within an organized municipality (Alaska Municipal League, n.d., p. 7).

The evolution of modern community development in Alaska occurred on a much later timeline than elsewhere in America. For example, rural electrification of the Tennessee Valley occurred in the 1930s/40s nearly three to four decades before it did in rural Alaska (1968-85). Various pots of federal and state funding subsidized early community development projects throughout the state however, a significant development occurred in 1998 when Congress established the Denali Commission. The intent of the Commission was to serve as an “independent federal agency designed to provide critical utilities, infrastructure, and economic support throughout Alaska” (“Denali Commission,” n.d.). Modeled after the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Denali Commission became the mechanism by which federal funds were directed towards infrastructure projects in Alaska. Former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, who chaired the Senate Appropriations Committee, was instrumental in the formation of the Commission and was well known for using earmarks as a way of funneling congressional

appropriations for Alaskan projects. In just a few short years following its formation, the Commission became the largest single distributor of capital funding in Alaska, and as such, its policies regarding planning and development in villages had far-reaching impacts. Table 2 details several projects that the Commission funded between the two communities of Vashraq̃i K'oõ and Ṽijhtaq̃i.

Table 2

*Denali Commission Funded Projects in Vashraq̃i K'oõ (Arctic Village) and Ṽijhtaq̃i (Venetie)*

Project	Denali Commission funding	Other funding
Arctic Village Bulk Fuel Facility	\$1,651,516.31	\$453,120.77
Arctic Village Power System Upgrade	\$1,967,597.88	\$450.12
Arctic Village Clinic Design	\$118,676.72	
Arctic Village Rural Teacher Housing	\$363,387.00	
Arctic Village & Venetie Airport Improvements	\$333,840.41	\$13,997,427.91
Venetie Primary Care Clinic Construction	\$25,945.88	
Venetie Primary Care Clinic Construction	\$478,113.00	\$663,725.00
Venetie Bulk Fuel Facility	\$224,815.32	\$32,660.92
Venetie Washeteria Equipment Purchase	\$137,488.14	
Venetie Clinic Design	\$98,678.40	
Venetie Clinic Design Review & Update	\$33,983.89	
Venetie Primary Care Clinic Construction	\$920,789.00	\$663,725.00
Venetie Primary Care Clinic Construction	\$353,404.60	\$663,725.00

*Note.* Source: Denali Commission Project Database. Table constructed by the author using data from the Denali Commission's (2018) Project Database System.

In the early days of the Commission, communities were not required to have written plans to be considered for funding. That policy changed in 2006, when community plans became a form of evidence to document local support for projects. This simple policy change on the part of a leading funder created powerful new incentives for comprehensive village planning. Despite the fact that Alaska Natives had been planning their lives for generations, these written plans involved new terminology, processes for public comment, and technical skills. This led villages

to often turn to their regional non-profit organizations, boroughs, or private consultants for technical assistance with the development of these extensive documents.

As of May 2017, the Denali Commission had invested a total of \$1,263,260,000 in Alaska between the following program areas: energy reliability and security; bulk fuel safety and security; transportation system improvements; village infrastructure protection; special/pass thru initiatives; healthcare; housing; workforce development; sanitation; and general economic development (Denali Commission, 2017, p. 9). The downward trajectory of federal funding began in 2009, after which the Alaska legislature became a more significant source of capital project funding (Foraker Group, 2015).

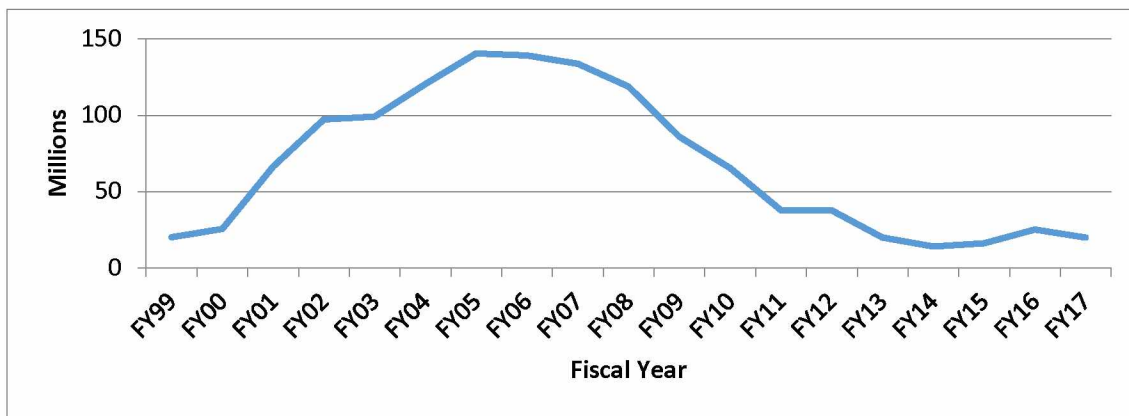


Figure 3. Denali Commission funding from Fiscal Years 1999–2017. Adapted from Denali Commission (2017, p. 8) Adapted from *Strategic Plan FY 2018–2022* (p. 8), by Denali Commission, 2017, Anchorage, AK: Author. Copyright 2017 by Denali Commission.

Each year, Alaskan communities would prepare their capital improvement project lists and begin the arduous process of lobbying their representatives to advocate for the inclusion of their projects in the Capital Budget. Declining oil revenues eventually flattened out this source of funding, leaving communities with even fewer options for financing community development projects.

## **The Challenge(s)**

In Alaska today, there are 229 sovereign tribal governments, which represent roughly forty percent of all federally recognized tribes in the United States. Regional Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) are among some of the largest landholders and most profitable businesses in the state. Over the past five years, regional ANCs produced an annual average of \$8.6 billion in revenue and \$215.6 million in profits (“ANCSA Regional Association,” 2017). In terms of demographics, Alaska Natives/American Indians comprise approximately twenty percent of Alaska’s population (“First Alaskans Institute,” n.d.) and twenty-five percent of the K-12 student population. One would think that, given this substantial presence, villages in Alaska would be well positioned to exert high degrees of control and influence over that which they determine to be critical to their livelihoods. Ask any Alaska Native leader today, however, and most will tell you that there are in fact many spheres in which they lack any or enough power to affect desired change. Whether the topic is education, land management, jurisdiction, or fish and game regulations, a common theme of tribal discussions in Alaska is the need for more influence over decision-making processes and policies that impact the lives of village residents and the future of rural Alaska as a whole. One arena in which these power struggles has, and continues to, play out in is the field of village development.

Imagine for a moment that you are an elected leader of a small community in rural Alaska. You have a handful of staff and limited funding with which to fulfill any number of obligations to community residents including land management, housing development, water/sewer services, landfill maintenance, and the list goes on. Your infrastructure is aging, your population might be out-migrating, and you have two or three years in office to build productive relationships with legislators, funders, and agencies that hold the keys to community

development resources. At this point, you are probably wondering where do you even begin? The challenge is daunting, and the stakes are high.

The current state of village development is problematic for a host of reasons. First and foremost, tribes in Alaska have experienced a devastating erosion of their customary spheres of control and influence. In the rural development classes that I teach, my students are tasked with comparing what it is they know about pre-contact spheres of control and influence with what they observe today. In most every instance, the spheres appear shockingly different with Alaska tribes now possessing only a fraction of control over most aspects of life. This may seem ironic given their federal recognition, any ground that Alaskan tribes have gained (or regained) since contact has been a struggle. Historically, the State of Alaska has not recognized tribal sovereignty. According to Thorton et al. (2016), “The state has mostly viewed Native sovereignty through a zero-sum lens: it sees any increase in Native authority as diminishing state sovereignty” (p. 294). This certainly proved to be the case in the 1990s when the State of Alaska spent over one million dollars in litigation contesting the concept of Indian Country in a series of cases that led up to the 1998 Supreme Court ruling in *Alaska v. Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government*, in which the State ultimately prevailed.

With few exceptions, most rural villages in Alaska today find themselves in a precarious position due to their disproportionate dependence on external resources as discussed by Thorton, et al.:

With the exception of ANCSA corporations, which possess considerable financial capital and natural resources, most other Native institutions possess little capital beyond human and socio-cultural resources, and are thus often dependent on federal or state funds to carry out projects from year to year. This means that these institutions must continually

respond to the priorities and initiatives of the state and other funding sources in order to survive. Ironically, this results in Native institutions becoming more dependent on, and isomorphic with, bureaucratic state and federal governments, and disconnected from their more holistic goals of self-determination (2016, p. 290).

Interestingly, as community development funding has become increasingly scarce and competitive at both the state and federal levels, changing demographics have also strengthened the base of political power in Alaska's more urban regions. From a village perspective, this often translates to having to meet the burden of defending the delivery of basic services that are taken for granted in other regions of the state. Take for example the recent debate surrounding small schools. For years, smaller rural villages have often struggled to meet the minimum student count (10) required to maintain full funding for public schools. In 2015, a Wasilla legislator moved to propose legislation that would have doubled the minimum student threshold of students (20) thereby putting approximately sixty schools at imminent risk of closure. Such examples validate the position of Thorton et al. that, "At the state level, Native villages, even those with formal tribal recognition from the federal government, do not always have the political muscle to influence public policy in an increasingly urban-oriented state legislature" (2016, p. 289). To the extent that such power dynamics remain unchallenged, the future of rural Alaska will continue to be subject to the whims of public opinion and policy-makers.

Another aspect of modern village development that creates its own set of tensions is the 'siload' nature of government funded/regulated community development. For example, if villages are embarking on a housing development, at some level they are likely going to be working with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, their local or regional tribal housing authority, the landowners, and/or others stakeholders. If the development is related

to road infrastructure, villages may have to interface with the Federal Highway Administration, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the State of Alaska and/or the Federal Aviation Administration (in the case of airport runways). If the development is related to water and sewer, it is highly likely that Alaska Village Safe Water, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and/or the regional Native non-profit organization will have some role to play in the project planning. Understanding how to navigate the various systems, requirements, timelines, and regulations of multiple agencies/entities has become a time-consuming, albeit necessary, part of the village planning and development process.

A reoccurring question in both the practice and study of community development is who gets to control the process of development and to what extent are there opportunities for public involvement? Such issues become paramount in the case of tribal communities where development has too often followed what Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt (2007) described as the “standard approach”:

The standard approach to development of Native nations has five primary characteristics: (1) decision-making is short-term and non-strategic; (2) persons or organizations other than the Native nation set the development agenda; (3) development is treated as primarily an economic problem; (4) Indigenous culture is viewed as an obstacle to development; and (5) elected leadership serves primarily as a distributor of resources. (p. 8)

For Cornell and Kalt, “The critical issue is not the source of funds and capital but who is in the driver’s seat, setting the direction development efforts take” (2007, p. 11). They argue that for too long the standard approach to development has put “Native nations in a dependent and reactive instead of self-determined and proactive, mode.” (p. 11). In this research, self-



determination and sovereignty are two distinct, yet, related concepts that repeatedly emerged in the literature review and the interview transcripts. In the words of former Vashraǰǰ K'qq chief, Evon Peter, “self-determination and sovereignty equate to the total freedom of an individual or group of peoples, such as tribes and nations, to make decisions on their own behalf without subjugation to another sovereign” (2009, p. 179). As the findings of this research will demonstrate, Vashraǰǰ K'qq and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ have often exercised principles of self-determination and sovereignty as a means to reclaim control and influence over that which is most important to the Neets'ǰǰ way of life. For this reason, they serve as an interesting case study to explore the changing nature of planning and development pre- and post-settlement.

### **A Case Study: The Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in**

Given the diversity of Alaskan villages and their experiences with development, it would be virtually impossible for a single case study to meaningfully represent a collective experience. A case study allows for an in-depth examination of a particular “case” (a single person, group or event) which often carries value in the field of community development in terms of identifying wise practices. The experiences of the Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in, as compared to other Alaska Native groups, are unique in some important respects. Most notably, the Neets'ǰǰ hold fee simple title to 1.8 million-acres that make up the Venetie Indian Reserve and have rejected both municipal governments and Native corporation structures. Today, the communities of Vashraǰǰ K'qq and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ are independently governed by their respective tribal governments, Arctic Village Council and the Venetie Village Council. The land base is jointly managed by yet a third entity, the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government. Over time, Vashraǰǰ K'qq and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ have experienced their share of both positive and negative developments ranging from the successful construction of a record-setting 60+ homes (between the two villages) to various infrastructure

projects that serve as powerful reminders of poor planning and design. At the onset of this research, I sensed that there was an interesting story to be told and, fortunately, that turned out to be the case.

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First and foremost, this study is intended to help document Neets'ąıı planning knowledge and changes in local planning practices over time. Each generation of Neets'ąıı people has stories to tell that are unique to the political, social and economic conditions of their time. Today, the Neets'ąıı are at a critical turning point. Within our communities are elders/cultural bearers who grew up in the traditional camp lifestyle and have firsthand knowledge of doing things the Neets'ąıı way. Also present is a subsequent generation of Neets'ąıı that have shared in the experience of being sent away to boarding school, participating in the Relocation Program<sup>1</sup> or serving in the Alaska Territorial Guard<sup>2</sup> and then reintegrating back into the community after time spent away. Many tribal members of this generation are also fluent speakers of *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa* (Gwich'in language) and were among the initial leaders to participate in modern community development projects in Vashraqıı K'qq and Vııhtaqıı. The opportunity for this research to contribute towards documenting multigenerational stories and perspectives on Neets'ąıı planning and development has been my driving motivation for this research.

A secondary interest in this research is to promote greater awareness of Alaska Native planning traditions and practices. As a Professor of Rural Development, I am continually challenged by the lack of scholarship on Alaska Native planning. In my *Strategic Planning and Decision-making* course, students are encouraged at the very onset of the semester to challenge

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<sup>1</sup> The Indian Relocation Act of 1956 was a federal law intended to encourage Alaska Native/American Indians to relocate to urban environments for job training opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> A military reserve force component of the US Army that operated from 1942-1947.

any preconceived notions that planning and development practices were introduced to Alaska by settlers. Rather, we examine everyday practices such as hunting, “putting up fish,” whaling and potlatches as examples of complex planning activities that require significant forethought, skillful preparation, and ongoing strategy adjustment. As students encounter one example after another of Alaska Native planning traditions, they begin to reconceive of such practices as human activities that are embedded within all cultures, including their own. Empowering students to view their ancestors, their relations, and themselves as adept planners fosters an altered epistemology (i.e. a changed way of making sense of the world) that is critical to becoming agents (rather than objects) of change (Green & Haines, 2016, p. 8). Elsewhere in the world, Indigenous peoples are actively reclaiming their planning traditions which is leading to shifts in how they build homes, design spaces, and position themselves in working with outside agencies. There is no reason the same cannot be true for Alaska.

### **Research Questions**

This research builds upon my personal ties as a tribal member of the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government, my expertise as a professional planner, and my master’s thesis entitled, *Planning a Village in Social Transition: a Case Study of Arctic Village, Alaska*. It represents a continuation of my journey to better understand the changing nature of Neets’ąıı planning and development practices. My primary objectives are to identify how planning was practiced by the Neets’ąıı Gwich’in prior to the establishment of permanent villages and how those practices changed post settlement. The following questions guided this research:

1. What are the characteristics of a Neets’ąıı Gwich’in planning model?
2. Why and how has that planning model changed over time?
3. What are key Neets’ąıı community development values that have persisted?

For current and future generations of Neets'ąıı Gwich'in, the future depends in large part upon our capacity to *shrigwirilii* (meaning “we get ready”) to navigate the complex planning challenges that lie ahead. A principle that the Neets'ąıı live by is that “Our past is what will help our people survive in the hard times, which we believe will be upon us some day” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 2). It is my hope that insights from this study may prove useful to future generations of Neets'ąıı as well as other similarly situated Indigenous communities.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

An underlying assumption of this study is that the existing system of village development could be improved to create better outcomes for rural tribal communities such as Vashraıı K'ıı and Vııhtıı. As a planner, I have worked on the ground with tribal leaders that are planning in the face of power on a daily basis. These leaders are fully conscious of the fact that their villages require substantial investments that in most cases are financed by government and private grants. While grants are a common source of community development funding in general, the magnitude of rural Alaska's dependence on grants is disproportionately high. The challenge for villages moving forward is not just who is going to pay for much needed infrastructure but also who is going to be in the driver's seat.

Another fundamental assumption of this study is that Neets'ąıı people are the experts of their own knowledge system, culture, history, and communities and therefore are in the best position to make decisions regarding them. Over the years, the Neets'ąıı have become a subject of study primarily stemming from the interest of non-Gwich'in researchers writing for outside audiences. In that process, many aspects of Neets'ąıı culture and life-ways have been described, analyzed, interpreted or misinterpreted, and judged often to be found wanting in some way. The Neets'ąıı have also experienced their share of overexposure as an outcome of their ongoing

efforts to protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas development. Since 1988, people from all over the world have become aware of the Gwich'in and their interest in defending the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. While this mass educational effort was part of the strategy to build support, it has also resulted in many individuals and groups visiting Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ, interviewing community members, and documenting their stories through photographs, film, and published narratives. Maintaining some level of control over what information is shared about the Neets'ǰǰ, who can share it and how it is to be shared has been an ongoing challenge for a small, remote community with limited resources and often more pressing priorities. Developing a tribal research policy will be an important future step for Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ to better monitor what research is being conducted in the region.

There are a number of limitations to this study that are worth mentioning. First, while I had initially intended to focus equally on both Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ, most of the tribal members who participated in this research were from Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ. Additionally, as I got further into the histories of settlement and subsequent physical development of the two communities, I realized that simply tracking the chronology of one village is an ambitious task. As much as Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ are connected by family ties and a shared history/language/culture, they also are different communities with distinct experiences that are beyond the scope of this research to examine thoroughly. After much consideration, I made the decision to focus more on Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ. Further research is needed to expand upon Vǰǰhtaǰǰ and will be dependent upon the interest of the Venetie Village Council.

Another limitation that I encountered during the study was the realization that, no matter how many community members I interviewed, it would be challenging to capture the full range

of Neets'ąįį stories and perspectives on planning and development. During the data collection process, it became apparent that much of the local knowledge regarding the physical development of Vashraįį K'ųų has become fragmented over time. Various elders, leaders, and former consultants have maintained differing levels of involvement in local projects, some developing an expertise in housing construction and others in power generation systems. In total, I interviewed nine individuals including seven elders, a chief, and the tribal housing project manager. There were many other knowledgeable individuals and community members that could have added to this body of research and hopefully will do so in some way in the future.

A final limitation that challenged me from the onset of this research is my lack of fluency in *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*. I anticipated that this would be an issue based on the fact that Neets'ąįį planning knowledge is embedded within the first language of our people. A fluent speaker of *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa* would have the ability to “talk planning” in a context that is much more natural to elders without the interference of English. Were I a fluent speaker of *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*, I would be better equipped to ground this research within a uniquely Gwich'in worldview that is best understood in the original language of our people. I daydream of the ability to visit and drink *lidii* (tea) with Neets'ąįį elders asking questions, listening to stories, and responding to them all within the language. In this scenario, we would not be confined by the English language and the ways in which it compartmentalizes our complex ways of knowing into terms like “planning,” “resiliency,” and “subsistence.” For these reasons, I made the commitment to enroll in Beginning Gwich'in at UAF and, though I am still in the early stage of learning *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*, it was important to me that this manuscript utilize the language as much as possible. Thanks to the mentorship of several fluent speakers, each chapter in this dissertation is organized according to a concept in *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*.



## Chapter 2

### *Yeenii Deegweeya' Datthak Gwidehtly'aa Nal'in Haa Gwik'yajjik*

In the Gwich'in language, the phrase, *yeenii deegweeya' datthak gwidehtly'aa nal'in haa gwik'yajjik*, refers to a process of looking backward at events of the past and learning from them. In this chapter, I review two bodies of literature that relate to the topic of Neets'ąjį planning and development. While little has been published to date that focuses specifically on this subject, a review of Indigenous planning theory and Neets'ąjį Gwich'in literature helps to contextualize this research in current knowledge. The first section focuses on a review of Indigenous planning literature which offers an overarching framework to examine Neets'ąjį planning knowledge and development practices. The second section provides a historical review of the existing literature on the Neets'ąjį Gwich'in with specific emphasis on narratives that were authored or co-created by Neets'ąjį people.

### **Indigenous Planning Theory**

*If Indigenous peoples were planned into oppression, equally they can be planned out of it.*

—Hirini Matunga, *Theorizing Indigenous Planning*

Planning is both an academic discipline and a field of practice. Each year, universities across the country orient thousands of aspiring planners to the profession. In that induction process, students are often exposed to dominant discourses that trace the emergence of planning in the U.S. to the turn of the twentieth century. According to Leonie Sandercock (1998), “The official, or modernist, version of planning history is the story of planning by and through the state, part of a tradition of city and nation-building” (p. 2). As this version of the profession’s



history and identity is retold and later reinforced through the professional certification process, it becomes normative to the point of marginalizing any alternative understandings including those of Indigenous people. As a former planning student, my exposure to this dominant narrative was fortunately tempered by the work of critical planning theorists such as Sandercock and Libby Porter. A brief discussion of select works from critical planning literature is included in this section to contextualize the more recent advancement of Indigenous planning scholarship.

Critical planning theory emerged largely in response to the homogeneous and hegemonic nature of dominant planning ideology. Early planning historians tended to uphold planning as a rational activity very often ignoring its complicity in colonization and neoliberalism. In 1998, a book entitled, *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, critically examined this representation of planning history through feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern lenses. According to Sandercock:

There is a fundamental critique embedded in drawing attention to some of the glaring absences in mainstream accounts of planning history. These absences are not innocent. They are systematic exclusions. They emerge from prior ontological and epistemological positions-concerning the subject and object of planning, concerning the writing of history, concerning the relationship of planning to power and the power of systems of thought. To understand these systematic exclusions, we need theory (1998, p. 13).

Also included in this edited volume was a chapter by Dr. Theodore (Ted) Jojola who has, and continues to be, a key figure in the development of Indigenous planning scholarship. As a tribal member of the Pueblo of Isleta, Jojola writes from an insider perspective about the role of clans in community development and the role of consensus modeling among tribal confederations. With a specific focus on Pueblos Nations, Jojola demonstrates how these two long-standing

roles, in fact, equate to “what are considered to be community and regional planning traditions within dominant mainstream society” (Jojola, 1998, p. 100).

In the book, *Unlearning the Colonial Culture of Planning*, scholar Libby Porter (2010) affirms the position that planning is not neutral but rather a cultural practice that is specific to a particular peoples’, life views, times and spaces (p. 2). The rendering of planning in mainstream culture tends to mask its culturally specific positionality, which is undeniably Western. In retracing the genealogy of modern planning, Porter exposes its colonial underpinnings and the many ways in which it has been used as a tool to appropriate land and resource from Indigenous peoples as demonstrated by the following quote.

The early formative activities of planning were a part of the politics of (dis)possession in colonies. And those formative activities, the moments of planning’s modern emergence, were located in those same politics of (dis)possession. Planning is constitutively and culturally colonial. (pp. 75-76)

Within the past two decades, there has been a surge of publications that have helped to create much needed space for postcolonial discourses in planning. In 2004, an article entitled, *Interface*, was published in a mainstream planning journal. *Interface* included contributions from four practitioners/researchers around the themes of ‘indigenous knowledge, indigenous rights and sovereignty, and the role of non-indigenous planners/researchers’. Sandercock, a non-Indigenous critical planning scholar, describes at least three major frustrations of Indigenous people with the planning profession.

The three assumptions in Table 3 are problematic for Indigenous communities for multiple reasons. The first assumption serves to discount the countless forms and expressions of Indigenous planning (community, regional, or otherwise) that existed prior to Western contact.

The second assumption is a direct challenge to the claims of Indigenous peoples to places of ongoing culture, physical, spiritual, economic, social and/or political importance regardless of land ownership status. According to Sandercock (2004), the third assumption is particularly problematic in the sense that it mistakes inclusion and participation as the “real issues” when, in fact, for Indigenous people, the more fundamental concerns are about sovereignty and rights. *Interface* contributors and planning scholars, Michael Hibbard and Marcus Lane, argue that, “The demand of indigenous people for sovereignty emerges, in part, because of the failure of state-directed planning to accommodate, respect and give expression to their interests” (2004, pp. 97-98). While they readily acknowledge that “Planning has often served indigenous people poorly” (p. 103), they also contend that “planning, rightly done, has been a key factor in strengthening indigenous control of their environments and in resolving the contested sovereignty claims of indigenous groups and the nation-states in which they are resident” (p. 98).

Table 3

*Three Major Frustrations With the Planning Profession*

Assumption	
1	The widespread assumption in the Western planning community that traditions of community and regional planning were invented in the West during the past century.
2	The even more widespread societal assumption that, since Indigenous peoples have been dispossessed of and displaced from their tribal lands over the past few centuries, they have also lost their knowledge about those lands.
3	The assumption on the part of progressive non-Indigenous planners that, in order to rectify past wrongs, planning practices must become more inclusive, more participatory, opening themselves to the inclusion of Indigenous peoples (p. 95).

In the article, *Developing an Effective Approach to Strategic Planning for Native American Indian Reservations*, author Dr. Nicholas Zaferatos contends that, “Planning in

reservation communities is fundamentally a political process that seeks to advance the autonomy of tribal nations through the exercise of political sovereignty” (2004, p. 88). He identifies multiple ways in which principles of self-determination can, and should, inform the three dimensions of tribal planning (political, cultural, and territorial). Zaferatos profiles the success of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community of Puget Sound in advancing their community development objectives by expanding their powers of self-governance. Challenged by operating within a multijurisdictional environment, the Swinomish took bold steps starting in the late 70s/early 80s to regain control of reservation resources and to expand their land use regulatory authority. Part of the Swinomish’s strategy involved both strengthening their internal governance tools as well as repositioning themselves externally in regional affairs. While tribes such as the Swinomish have always possessed the inherent powers described above, Zaferatos contends that, “Over the past several decades, tribes have achieved renewed powers with which to attain their goals by reawakening many aspects of their formerly dormant inherent sovereignty” (p. 93).

In a subsequent publication written by Jojola (2008) entitled, *Indigenous Planning-An Emerging Context*, he describes the early experiences of tribes with comprehensive planning by agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Jojola cites the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975 as a primary catalyst for increasing the opportunities for tribes to assume (or reassume) planning authority. He describes how, over time, tribal communities experimented with various adaptive approaches to comprehensive and strategic planning often with mixed results. Jojola traces the development of Indigenous Planning as a theory of action to a convening of students, which occurred at MIT in 1992. He states, “Indigenous planning represents both an approach to community planning and an ideological movement. What distinguishes indigenous planning

from mainstream practice is its reformulation of planning approaches in a manner that incorporates ‘traditional’ knowledge and cultural identity” (2008, p. 42). Central to this paradigm shift is also the recognition of Indigenous worldviews. Jojola argues that worldviews “are rooted in distinct community traditions that have evolved over a successive history of shared experiences” (p. 42). Though Indigenous worldviews differ across tribal groups, he argues that, in general, “World-views are endowed with ideals that integrate the past with the present and are associated with cultural identity, land-tenure, and stewardship. These planning values have become the hallmark of tribal survival” (p. 45).

In 2013, the book, *Reclaiming Indigenous Planning*, was published which included contributions from numerous authors with the expressed goal of advancing “Indigenous planning as a necessary field of scholarship and planning practice” (p. xix). In the first chapter titled, *Theorizing Indigenous Planning*, Matunga outlines a conceptual framework for understanding Indigenous planning. He argues that, “for planning to be Indigenous, Māori, Aboriginal, or First Nations, it is reasonable to assume it will be done according to Indigenous analyses, frameworks, values, and processes” (p. 6). Further, he contends that the ‘naming’ of Indigenous planning needs to reflect the people or community, their space, place, environment, and resources, their knowledge, values, concepts, and worldviews, their practices, approaches, methods, and institutions. This research is the beginning of exploring such a ‘naming’ in the context of the Neets’ąįį Gwich’in.

### **Neets’ąįį Gwich’in Literature**

The living history of the Neets’ąįį Gwich’in is embedded within *googwandak* (our stories) that have been passed down between generations for as long as anyone can remember. Gwich’in people, in general, are natural storytellers, and for many decades outside researchers

have busied themselves with documenting our stories, traditions, hardships, and ways of life that seemed to them to be quickly disappearing. The existing literature on the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in has overwhelmingly been dominated by non-Gwich'in authorship, and the outcome has been a mixed bag. Though some of the literature offers interesting insights into Neets'ąıı culture and experiences post-contact, it invariably requires critical reading and careful consideration of the author, their intended audience, and the extent to which Neets'ąıı people were involved in the co-creation of documented knowledge. Table 4 represents a chronology of existing literature with a *significant focus* on the history and culture of the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in. The publications highlighted in grey are those that involved Neets'ąıı people to a higher degree in the co-creation of knowledge. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list. For example, it does not include works that more generally reference the Neets'ąıı or the communities of Vashraııı K'qq and Vıııhtąıı. Also not represented are the many publications that either focus on the 1998 Supreme Court ruling in *Alaska v. Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government* or on the efforts of the Gwich'in to protect the birthing place of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

It is not my intention to examine the literary contributions of all the publications listed in Table 4 but rather to focus on those that have particular relevance to Neets'ąıı planning and development and that meaningfully involved locals in the co-creation of knowledge. In this regard, a few publications stand out which are discussed in greater detail below.

Table 4

*Chronology of Literature With Significant Focus on the Neets'qij Gwich'in*

Publication date	Author	Title
1936	Cornelius Osgood	<i>Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin</i>
1963	Frederick Hadleigh-West	<i>The Netsi Kutchin: An Essay in Human Ecology</i>
1965	Robert A. McKennan	<i>The Chandalar Kutchin</i>
1975	Cyndie Warbelow, David Roseneau, Peter Stern	<i>The Kutchin Caribou Fences of Northeastern Alaska and the Northern Yukon</i>
1981	Katherine Peter	<i>Neets'qij Gwiindaii: Living in the Chandalar Country</i>
1982	Edward Sapir	<i>John Fredson Edward Sapir Haa Googwandak (Stories Told by John Fredwon to Edward Sapir)</i>
1983	Richard A. Caulfield	<i>Subsistence Land Use in Upper Yukon-Porcupine Communities, Alaska;</i>
1983	Richard A. Caulfield; Walter J. Peter; Clarence Alexander	<i>Gwich'in Athabaskan Place Names of the Upper Yukon-Porcupine Region, Alaska: A Preliminary Report</i>
1985	Clara Childs Mackenzie	<i>Wolf Smeller (Zhoh) Gwatsan: A Biography of John Fredson, Native Alaskan</i>
1991	Arctic Village Council	<i>Nahkai' T'ini'in "Do It Yourself!": A Plan for Preserving the Cultural Identity of the Neets'aii Gwich'in Indians of Arctic Village</i>
2001	Craig Mishler	<i>Neerhiinjik: We Traveled from Place to Place</i>
2002	Jack Campisi	<i>The Neets'aii Gwich'in in the Twentieth Century</i>
2003	Steven C. Dinero	<i>"The Lord Will Provide": The History and Role of Episcopalian Christianity in Nets'aii Gwich'in Social Development--Arctic Village, Alaska</i>
2005	Albert E. Tritt	<i>Arctic Village Journals, 1886-1955</i>
2005	Charlene Stern	<i>Planning a Village in Social Transition: A Case Study of Arctic Village, Alaska</i>
2008	Craig Mishler & William E. Simeone	<i>Tanana and Chandalar: The Alaska Field Journals of Robert A. McKennan</i>
2013	Venetie Village Council	<i>Venetie Community Development Plan, 2013-2018.</i>
2013	Steven C. Dinero	<i>Indigenous perspectives of climate change and its effects upon subsistence activities in the Arctic: the case of the Net'saii Gwich'in</i>
2014	J. Michael Holloway	<i>Dreaming Bears: A Gwich'in Indian Storyteller, A Southern Doctor, A Wild Corner of Alaska</i>
2016	Steven C. Dinero	<i>Living on Thin Ice: The Gwich'in Natives of Alaska</i>
2017	Matt Gilbert	<i>Sitting at their Feet: Gookwaii eeghai dhidii A Youth Gwich'in Athabaskan's Memoir</i>

The *Arctic Village Journals, 1886-1955* are a collection of writings by the late Reverend Albert E. Tritt that are housed within the UAF Alaska and Polar Regions Department. A rich compilation of documents that includes Tritt's correspondence with Episcopal church officials, household population records, etc., the collection is the oldest written account of Neets'ąıı life by a Neets'ąıı person. Ordained as a deacon in the Episcopal Church, Tritt's first-hand accounts of early community life in Vashraııı K'oo and his travels around the region serve as a priceless record of an important period in Neets'ąıı history. His discussion of early efforts to form a school in the Vashraııı K'oo area was particularly useful in Chapter V of this manuscript. Commenting on the intrinsic value of these journals, the late Neets'ąıı scholar Lincoln Tritt stated, "Having this direct connection with our past gives us the advantage of evaluating practices that are introduced into our society" (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 55).

Another source of literature which offers an insider perspective on Neets'ąıı culture and history was compiled by Katherine (formerly Joseph) Peter. Koyukon Athabascan by birth, Katherine was raised among the Gwich'in and later married Stephen Peter of Vashraııı K'oo. Katherine was literate in both English and *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*, which was instrumental in her role as a teacher, translator and author. While working for the Alaska Native Language Center at UAF, Katherine authored a series of books which ranged in content from documenting traditional stories to chronicling her life experiences. The primary text utilized in this manuscript was *Neets'ąıı Gwiindaii: Living in the Chandalar Country* (K. Peter, 1992), which she wrote to detail her life among the Neets'ąıı during the period 1936-1947. Her first-hand account, which is narrated in both *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa* and English, offers insight into her role as a teacher at a time when the model of educational delivery better accommodated the traditional Neets'ąıı lifestyle of moving from camp to camp.



In the early 1980s, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence conducted research in five Upper Yukon-Porcupine communities that resulted in the publication of two technical papers. Technical Paper Number 16 entitled, *Subsistence Land Use in Upper Yukon-Porcupine Communities, Alaska*, documented the nature and extent of land use for the harvest of wild resources in Birch Creek, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, Vashraǰǰ K'oo, and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ. Local resource experts assisted the author, Richard A. Caulfield, in the data collection process while Katherine Peter helped with the translations. The research offers a snapshot in time of local and regional subsistence land use practices some of which are discussed further in Chapter IV. A related report entitled, *Gwich'in Athabaskan Place Names of the Upper Yukon-Porcupine Region, Alaska: A Preliminary Report*, was completed by Richard A. Caulfield, Walter J. Peter and Clarence Alexander. The research focused on the identification of Gwich'in place names that informed the development of several maps.

In 1985, a former Alaska teacher by the name of Clara Childs Mackenzie published the book, *Wolf Smeller (Zhoh Gwatsan) A Biography of John Fredson, Native Alaskan*, which details the life and accomplishments of the Neets'ǰǰ leader who lived from 1896-1945. While Mackenzie herself is not Gwich'in, her research included interviewing Fredson's friends, family, and leaders from Vǰǰhtaǰǰ to inform his biography. In telling his life story, the book details Fredson's contributions to the establishment of a school in Vǰǰhtaǰǰ (1937) and the creation of the Venetie Indian Reservation (1943). *Zhoh Gwatsan* has, and continues to, serve as an important record of the historical developments that occurred during Fredson's lifetime many of which continue to shape Neets'ǰǰ land use, ownership and management practices.

In 1991, the Arctic Village Council produced a document entitled, *Nakhai' T'ini'in: 'Do It Yourself', A Plan for Preserving the Cultural Identity of the Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in Indians of*

*Arctic Village*. Funded through a grant from the Administration for Native Americans, *Nakhai' T'ini'in* documents the stories and history as told by elders of Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ.

For the first time, our elders words are in a book written by Gwich'in Indian people.

Questions were asked in Gwich'in about social and political issues of the past, present and future, and we got answers, as well as possible solutions for our own people to solve our own problems, in our own Indian way, not someone else telling us what to do and how to do it. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 10)

From a scholarship perspective, *Nakhai' T'ini'in* raised the bar for research conducted in Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ in two important ways. First, community members were extensively involved in the process of data collection and transcription alongside project investor, John Alfonsi. Caroline Frank and Mary Groat (formerly Tritt) conducted the actual recorded interviews with elders communicating as much as possible in *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*. Two other tribal members, Sarah James and Brenda Gilbert, also conducted interviews and later transcribed and translated the recordings. In regard to the chosen methods of data collection and analysis, the Plan states, “The Project Investigator assumed the Gwich'in in Arctic Village knew what information was most important to be translated and transcribed, based upon the agreed-upon topical categories” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 9). In the history of Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in literature, perhaps the only other researcher to have as extensively involved tribal members in the data collection and analysis processes was ethnographer Craig Mishler. A unique feature of *Nakhai' T'ini'in* was the fact that the intended audience was the Neets'ǰǰ people themselves.

Another significant contribution to the existing literature on the Neets'ǰǰ was a book entitled, *Neerihinjik: We Traveled From Place to Place*. *Neerihinjik* is a compilation of Gwich'in stories by Johnny and Sarah Frank of Vǰǰhtǰǰ and Gold Camp. Though Craig Mishler

is credited with editing the book, he acknowledges the many individuals who supported the research in various capacities, including several members of the Frank family and other community members. Mishler's research with the Frank family dates back to 1972 and the resulting book was reported to be the product of more than thirty-five hours of tape recordings. *Neerihinjik* is divided into three parts including: traditional stories, life histories, and tribal history and lifeways. Unique features of the publication include the side-by-side inclusion of *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa* and English translations of the content as well as the inclusion of both a male and female Gwich'in perspective. Early research on the Neets'ąjį, and the Gwich'in more broadly, was largely conducted by Caucasian males who tended to focus more on the men and the masculine aspects of our culture. While Neets'ąjį women, and their roles, were referenced, it was not until more recently that the voices and experiences of women became more pronounced in the scholarship.

The most recent publication which substantially incorporates perspectives from the Neets'ąjį community is the *Venetie Community Development Plan, 2013-2018* (Venetie Village Council, 2013). Prepared by the Venetie Village Council with assistance from the Tanana Chiefs Conference Planning Program, the document serves as Vįįhtąjį's first ever written community plan. The planning process reportedly began in 2012, and input was gathered via a series of community meetings and informal interviews. The document outlines numerous priorities however, the top four of which included the following: *an energy efficient community and facilities; design, finance, and construct a permitted landfill; develop Venetie Village Tribal Codes and Ordinances; and Venetie supports its kids and youth and is a place that has opportunities for young people* (Venetie Village Council, 2013, p. 39). These priorities offer

important insight into the contemporary needs and desires of V̇ijhṫij̇ in a post-settlement context.

### **Chapter Reflections**

This research is intended to build upon and advance two bodies of knowledge including Indigenous Planning theory and Neets'̇ij̇ Gwich'in literature. As discussed in this chapter, both fields of scholarship have emerged in part as a response to a colonial legacy of research that marginalized Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and contributions. In recent decades, Indigenous planners and their allies have been instrumental in both challenging the “official” planning history but also promoting awareness of Indigenous planning capacities. That work is helping Indigenous people to reposition themselves within the profession as well as in tribal development decision-making more broadly. The literature surrounding the Neets'̇ij̇ Gwich'in has experienced a similar evolution from research that was primarily driven by the interests of non-Gwich'in academics to research that is now being undertaken by, or in meaningful collaboration with, tribal members. Those interested in advancing these fields of scholarship in the future will ultimately inherit the responsibility of continuing to push back on research that is not in alignment with or that does not further the interests of Indigenous people.



## Chapter 3

### *Gwik'eehaldal Gwankaiihtii*

The phrase, *gwik'eehaldal gwankaiihtii*, refers to a process of seeking to learn or find answers. From a Gwich'in perspective, authentic learning typically involves an experiential process. To learn to hunt effectively, one must go out on the land with experienced hunters. To learn to speak *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*, one must “exercise their tongue,” as *shahan* (my mother) always reminds me. My immersion in this research, and the learning that occurred as a result of it, took place over a seven-year period. In this chapter, I summarize the design of my research. Included in this discussion is a reflection of my own positionality relative to the research, a contextual analysis of research among the Neets'ąjį Gwich'in, and a synopsis of my chosen data collection and analysis methods.

### **Positionality**

In the book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, asserts, “In positioning myself as an indigenous woman, I am claiming a genealogical, cultural, and political set of experiences” (1999, p. 12). As a Neets'ąjį Gwich'in woman/planner/scholar, my relationship to this research is both multi-dimensional and multi-generational. My great-grandfather, Gilbert Joseph, was born among the Deg Hit'an people of the Lower Yukon. In 1892, he left Anvik to work for a steamboat operation that eventually brought him to Fort Yukon where he met my great-grandmother, Maggie Divi. Gilbert was a key figure in the journals of the Reverend Albert E. Tritt, with whom he worked closely to help construct the first church in Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ in 1918. Gilbert's son, the Reverend James Gilbert (my grandfather), was born in 1910 and was later elected chief of Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ in 1940. James

married my grandmother, Maggie Gilbert, in 1931 and together they raised their two children as well as two surviving children from her first marriage. My mother, Florence, was born in a canvas tent somewhere in the vicinity of Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ during the winter of 1938.

In Gwich'in culture, it is customary to name your parents and grandparents when introducing yourself as a way to communicate your genealogy to others. When I identify as the daughter of Florence Newman and Peter Stern, or as the granddaughter of James and Maggie Gilbert, Gwich'in people have an immediate reference point for who I am and where I come from. What significance does that positionality hold in terms of this research? First, I was raised in a home of fluent speakers of *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*. Though I am not a fluent speaker myself, hearing my mother and siblings use the language on a daily basis gave me an early awareness of how our people naturally talk among each other. We tell *gwandak* (stories) through our language. We joke, tease, and express love through our language. In fact, most older Gwich'in people still refer to one another as *sheejii* (older sister), *shijiiu* (younger sister), *shoondee* (older brother), and *shachaa* (younger brother) as a way to reinforce a sense of family that transcends all other differences. Of the nine participants in this study, eight were fluent *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa* speakers and, although the interviews were conducted in English (due to my personal limitations), the style and pacing of conversation, which included storytelling, was uniquely Gwich'in.

As a child, I spent each summer and holiday season at home in Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ where I visited with *shitsii* (my grandfather) and other elders who have since passed on. My best memories are visiting Mary Enock or Moses and Jennie Sam who always showered me with attention and old-fashioned hard candy. I grew up watching our men hunt *vadzaih* (caribou) and *dinjik* (moose), trap *thaa* (ground squirrel), and catch *luk* (fish) while our women cooked and made *nilij gqij* (dry meat). As a teenager, one of my first jobs was working as a cashier for the

tribally run Midnight Sun Native Store in Vashraq̃i K'q̃q̃. While in college, I interned for the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government where I spent the summer conducting Housing Improvement Program (HIP) surveys. After graduating with my bachelor's degree, I began working for the Gwich'in Steering Committee where I helped to write grants, lobby Congress, and solicit support from other tribal nations. Two years after receiving my master's degree, I was called to serve on the board of the Gwich'in Council International, which represents the Gwich'in Nation at the Arctic Council level. All of these personal and professional experiences have directly shaped the person that I am today and my perspective as a tribal member, planner and researcher.

Being an inside researcher in the context of the Gwich'in carries meaning and cultural responsibilities that are distinct from the experience of outside researchers. In my case, it means that this research is not merely about studying some subject in which I am interested, but rather it is about using this dissertation as an opportunity to contribute to the preservation of my home community's history and experiences. The participants are not merely "informants" but are, in fact, long-time mentors, relatives, and leaders most of whom I have known since birth. In this process, they have chosen to entrust me with their stories, cultural knowledge of place, and perspectives on planning, which is a responsibility that I take very seriously. Not everything that our people might share while being interviewed is for public consumption. As Indigenous researchers, we understand that Western research culture emphasizes the need for a "problem statement" that has too often pathologized tribal communities. In hopes of "diagnosing" their problems, outside researchers often operated from a deficit perspective narrowly focusing on the fears and frustrations of tribal members. While Gwich'in people have always spoken with a certain frankness about issues of concern, they do so with the hope that our leadership and



communities will act, not so that others outside of our communities can sit in judgment, theorize about our situation and/or publish our affairs to external audiences. Another key difference that I confront as a tribal member (and as the mother of a tribal member) is that my family has a personal stake in the future of Vashraǰǰ K'qǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ. Collectively, we have a vested interest in ensuring that our tribal governments are functionally strong, that our land base and resources are protected, and that our culture and language persist for the benefit of future generations. Many of the participants in this research have dedicated their lives to ensuring that these aims are always and forever at the forefront of community decision-making.

### **Contextualizing Research Among the *Neets'ǰǰ***

As mentioned in Chapter Two, much of the literature on the Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in was written by non-Gwich'in people writing for non-Gwich'in audiences. Many of these individuals advanced their professional careers based upon their research on the Neets'ǰǰ, gaining notoriety as experts on our people and culture. Some have even gone so far as to proclaim themselves to be “honorary members” of our community. In most cases, genuine attempts were never made to bring this research back to Vashraǰǰ K'qǰ or Vǰǰhtaǰǰ, and especially not in a form that would be considered accessible or usable to most tribal members. The positioning of Neets'ǰǰ people within the very research that was used to (re)construct their history and define their experiences is an expression of Western imperialism. Historically, dominant research practices have served to disempower not only the Neets'ǰǰ but Indigenous peoples in general as demonstrated in the following quote by Smith (1999).

The power of research was not in the visits made by researchers to our communities, nor in their fieldwork and the rude questions they often asked. In fact, many individual non-indigenous researchers remain highly respected and well liked by the communities with

whom they have lived. At a common sense level research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument. It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs. (p. 3)

Until relatively recently, engaging Gwich'in people in the broader research process (including the design, drafting of research questions, data collection, analysis, and/or the writing) was unheard of unless they were needed as translators. Certainly, there have been almost no examples of Neets'ąjį people receiving equal co-authorship when collaborating with a non-Gwich'in researcher. Rather, their role was typically limited to that of subjects, informants, interpreters, translators, and/or transcribers who were lucky to be mentioned in the acknowledgements section of a publication.

The legacy of research surrounding the Neets'ąjį Gwich'in is riddled with all manner and severity of ethical issues including at least two extreme cases that involved blood sampling, physical measurement and scientific experimentation. In 1933, anthropologist and Dartmouth faculty member, Robert A. McKennan, chartered the first-ever flight to Vashraįį K'ųų to conduct fieldwork among the Neets'ąjį Gwich'in. Funded by the Social Science Research Council and the National Research Council, McKennan spent approximately one month in the area of Vashraįį K'ųų before traveling south to Viįhtąjį as well as other Gwich'in villages. McKennan's interest in physical anthropology led him to collect measurements and blood samples from several dozen Neets'ąjį Gwich'in males (Mishler & Simeon, 2006). Despite the fact that his field notes reflected an awareness of the invasive nature of these practices, McKennan was persistent about collecting samples. Referring to an interaction with Neets'ąjį Gwich'in men, McKennan wrote in his journal:

Elijah [Henry] and Paul were in my cabin early in the afternoon and taking my courage in my hands I broached the matter of measuring. It proved easy enough so I proceeded to clean them up and later did the same thing on Isaac and Joseph. (Mishler & Simeon, 2006, p. 172)

McKenna's (1965) research was later published in a technical paper entitled, *The Chandalar Indians*, however little was ever done with the samples that had been collected.

In a separate incident, several Neets'ąjį Gwich'in were involved in a scientific experiment conducted by a U.S. Air Force research facility called the Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory (AAL). From 1951 to 1967, the AAL conducted a series of studies to improve the military's understanding of human acclimatization to the Arctic. One study, commonly referred to as Iodine 131, sought to measure the effects of cold temperatures on thyroid activity by using a radioactive medical tracer. AAL researchers administered capsules of radioisotope iodine 131 to 121 human subjects and then measured levels of radioiodine uptake in their thyroid, blood, urine, and saliva. Among the human subjects were 102 Alaska Natives from the communities of *Ulguniq* (Wainwright), *Kali* (Point Lay), *Naqsraq* (Anaktuvuk Pass), *Gwichyaa Zhee* (Fort Yukon) and *Vashraįį K'ųų*. While some villages were only visited once or twice, *Naqsraq* and *Vashraįį K'ųų* were visited three times, receiving the highest doses of radioisotope (the two villages were also involved a second control experiment involving potassium iodine). In *Vashraįį K'ųų*, a total of eleven men, women, and children were subjected to the testing without their informed consent. A full report of the AAL study was published in 1993, which showed that the women of *Naqsraq* and *Vashraįį K'ųų* who had received multiple doses had the greatest risk of developing thyroid cancer (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 1996). The unethical research practices by AAL researchers at the hand of the U.S. government impacted

my own family who were among the human subjects unknowingly exposed to radiation. For many years, *shitsuu* (my grandmother) Maggie struggled with thyroid issues before eventually requiring a thyroidectomy. My mother required the same procedure after being diagnosed with thyroid cancer several years ago.

The two examples above represent the most extreme cases of research abuse involving the Neets'ąjį people and cast a dark shadow on the history of research in the region. Not all of the existing research however was as blatantly unethical. Much of it, in fact, was conducted by well-meaning researchers who were not perhaps fully aware of the extent to which their privileged positions and Western ideology played into their research.

According to Smith (1999):

Many researchers, academics and project workers may see the benefits of their particular research projects as serving a greater good 'for mankind', or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community. But belief in the ideal that benefitting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much as a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training. It becomes so taken for granted that many researchers simply assume that they as individuals embody this ideal and are natural representatives of it when they work with other communities. (p. 2)

In the case of Vashraįį K'oo and Vįįhtąįį, many outside researchers who studied the Neets'ąjį could arguably fall into the description above. Others, however, were more genuinely interested in helping the communities to document local knowledge, place-names and life histories. The most unfiltered sources of information that resulted from these efforts are the audio-recordings conducted with Neets'ąjį elders that are available through the UAF Project Jukebox and the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections and Archives. These primary accounts,

which capture our late elders in their own words, are now proving invaluable to the growing number of Gwich'in scholars who are breaking new trail in Gwich'in research.

### **Research Design**

This research is informed and shaped by several different theoretical frameworks including critical community development theory and emancipatory action research.

*Critical Community Development Theory.* According to community development scholars, Gary P. Green and Anna L. Haines (2016), the fact that community development is interdisciplinary has many advantages but also presents some “analytical problems.” They argue that, “It lacks a common language, a conceptual framework, and a set of agreed-upon issues or problems. Community development also is frequently driven more by practice than theory” (p. 1). Author Margaret Ledwith (2016) further points out that, “Community development has, for many years, suffered from a dislocation of its theory from its practice” (p. 2). In her book, *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire into Practice*, Ledwith argues that this dislocation has contributed to the development of a “placatory practice” which primarily focuses on making life a little easier for communities but that lacks a “transformative agenda.” She credits the work of Brazilian popular educator, Paulo Friere, with challenging the pedagogy of community development to become more radical and transformative beginning in the 1970s.

Ledwith (2016) states, “At the heart of Friere’s critical pedagogy is the development of critical consciousness which occurs when life situations are connected with socio-economic contradictions” (p. xi). Applying this theory to present-day village development requires us to question dominant narratives that seek to pathologize rural Alaska for struggling with food insecurity, high costs of living, unsustainable infrastructure, social ills, out-migration, etc. An examination of the root causes of these issues exposes the systematic ways in which

colonization, economic neoliberalism, racism, and power have all acted in tandem to create the conditions that have become so problematic for villages today.

According to Ledwith (2016),

In practice, one of the biggest challenges to igniting the community development process is to find a way through the hopelessness that oppression usually brings. Subordination robs people of self-belief. The challenge of community development is to create the conditions for people to become confident and autonomous, able to act together to bring about change. (p. 21)

As practitioners, this process starts with self-reflection which forces us to be more fully conscious of the ways in which our own beliefs and attitudes inform our praxis, the unity of theory and practice.



*Figure 4. Praxis.*

According to Ledwith (2016), “This process builds theory in action and action as theory in a cycle that is rooted in everyday experience, quite different from theory that is abstract, fragmented and decontextualized from people’s lives” (p. 45). In the fields of planning and community development, most of the work that practitioners engage in stems from the needs, desires, and concerns of everyday people. A community or organization concerned about the

impacts of environmental degradation, for example, might engage in applied research to access information that could inform decision-making and strategy development. A practical goal of this research is to help inform future planning and development efforts in Vashraji K'oo and Vijihtaji and, as such, Ledwith (2016) suggests that, "It is vital to use an approach to research that shares the same value base as community development" (p. 148). To that end, she offers an alternative approach termed, emancipatory action research (EAR) the qualities of which are described in Figure 5.

- Equalizing power in its process by working with and not on people
- Using methods that liberate, not control, so the traditional 'Objects' of research become 'Subjects' co-creating new knowledge from lived experience as a valuable truth
- Co-creating new knowledge that is beyond the written word through story, dialogue, photographs, music, poetry, drama and drawings
- Contextualizing personal lives within the political, social and economic structures that discriminate
- Demonstrating an ideology of equality in action using demonstrable skills of mutual respect, dignity, trust and reciprocity
- Dislocating the researcher as external expert to become a co-participant
- Supporting co-participants to become co-researchers in mutual inquiry
- Creating the research process as a participatory experience for all involved so that the research process becomes empowering in its own right, as well as achieving a social/environmental justice outcome through collective action for change based on new understandings of the world. (Ledwith, 2016, p. 150).

*Figure 5.* Qualities of emancipatory action research.

This research aligns with many of the qualities of EAR both in terms of departing from previous research practices that disempowered Neets'aji people but also acknowledging the right of the Neets'aji to insist upon a higher degree of relational accountability.

### **Relational Accountability**

Over the past several decades, Indigenous scholars have made vast strides in articulating an Indigenous research agenda and citing the need to decolonize Western research practices.

Bagele Chilisa (2012) describes decolonization as, “a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference” (p. 14). As her description illustrates, the decolonization project goes beyond a critique of Western research. For Indigenous scholars, decolonization is a necessary step towards the advancement of Indigenous research paradigms and methodologies. Not all researchers working with Indigenous communities however are aware of the importance of decolonizing research practices. For tribal communities, this underscores the importance of adopting and implementing research protocols that will protect their interests throughout the research process. The Gwich’in Tribal Council (GTC), which represents beneficiaries of the Gwich’in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in the Mackenzie Delta of the Northwest Territories, Canada, adopted such a policy specifically for Gwich’in traditional knowledge (see Appendix D). Researchers interested in documenting Gwich’in traditional knowledge within the GTC settlement region must first sign a research agreement and provide copies of their consent form and questionnaire. The policy also includes detailed guidance on ways to engage Gwich’in governments and community members in various phases of research. A few highlights of this policy are included in Figure 6.

GTC’s policy requires that all researchers working with Gwich’in traditional knowledge return to participating communities to present findings specifying that, “Research results should be presented or displayed in the Gwich’in communities in culturally relevant and creative ways” (“Gwich’in Social & Cultural Institute,” 2018). While the policy is particular to their settlement region, the document serves as an important precedent for other Gwich’in tribes interested in protecting their traditional knowledge.



- Utilize collaborative research methodologies that involve direct community benefits.
- Set up an initial meeting with the Chief and Council.
- Budget pre-meeting expenses to present proposed research to Chief and Council in person.
- Request names of possible community participants from the Chief and Council.
- Consider hiring a community assistant.
- Share project information on local radio stations prior to project start up
- Upon completion of research, provide copies of the interview transcripts, recordings or other research materials and final copies of the research to GTC and participating First Nations.

*Figure 6.* Highlights from GTC traditional knowledge policy.

At this particular point in time, neither Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ nor Vǰǰhtaǰǰ have a tribally sanctioned research policy in place; however there are customary protocols that while unwritten, are equally as binding from the perspective of the community. For example, the first point of contact for prospective researchers interested in working with Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ is the Arctic Village Council or the Venetie Village Council in the case of Vǰǰhtaǰǰ. When I was initially considering undertaking this research, I discussed the idea with members of the Arctic Village Council and submitted a more formal letter to the Venetie Village Council. As an extension of this protocol at the regional level, I also contacted the executive director of the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments, a tribal consortium that consists of ten villages including Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ. All entities have been supportive of this research and the overall intent of capturing tribal perspectives on three central research questions.

### **Research Questions**

The framing of this research was guided by three broad questions: a) What are the characteristics of a Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in planning model? b) Why and how has that planning

model changed over time? and c) What are key Neets'ąıı community development values that have persisted? Focusing on these select few topics has helped to provide some boundaries around what is otherwise an extensive body of Neets'ąıı knowledge and experiences.

### **Data Collection**

My primary data collection methods included individual interviews, visual research, and participant observation, each of which is discussed in more detail below.

#### **Interviews**

In total, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine individuals who possess knowledge of Neets'ąıı planning traditions and development projects in Vashraıı K'ıı and Viıhtıı. The majority of the interviews were conducted during the summer of 2014. I first traveled to Vashraıı K'ıı where I interviewed five elders, a member of the Arctic Village Council, and the tribal housing project manager. On my way back to Fairbanks, I stopped in Viıhtıı to interview two additional participants. Most of the interviews took place within a home environment often with other community members present. The one exception was an interview conducted at the local tribal office as a matter of convenience for the participant. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an explanation of the overall research and the written consent form. All participants were offered the option to remain anonymous or be named in the study. Only one of the participants preferred to stay anonymous and any direct quotes from that interview are attributed to him/her as "tribal member." Interviews were kept as informal as possible with semi-structured questions (see Appendix A) that allowed for emergent topics and two-way discussion. Upon the approval of participants, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed by GMR Transcription for efficiency and accuracy.

## **Visual Methods**

Prior to traveling to Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ, I obtained access to several maps including those with Gwich'in place names, a map of the Venetie Indian Reserve, and a map of the Native allotments in the region. During interviews with elders, I displayed the maps to provide a geographic reference for discussions related to Neets'ǰǰ patterns of movement in a pre-settlement context. Different families from Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ traditionally had their own customary use areas for hunting, trapping, and fishing, which they moved between. Knowledge of these customary use areas is well known among older generations of Neets'ǰǰ people and, during my interviews, elders regularly referenced such places as we looked at maps. Initially, I had planned to include a discussion of different family use areas around Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ but later decided that the choice to document such knowledge in a public manner is best left up to individual families.

## **Participant Observation**

As a qualitative research method, participant observation traditionally referred to outside researchers immersing themselves in the culture that they were studying. For Indigenous researchers, the method takes on a somewhat different meaning. As a tribal member, my travels to Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ often involve much more than data collection. For example, a colleague and I travelled to Vashai K'ǰǰ to conduct research on a separate project during the 2016 Biennial Gwich'in Gathering. Upon our arrival, we were asked to assist with emceeding the three-day event, something unlikely to happen to outside researchers. In addition, during the proceedings a young Gwich'in leader issued a call to action that resulted in the development of a policy document entitled the *Ni'inlii Declaration* (see Appendix C for further details), which a group of us helped to co-create and present to the chiefs and tribal members in attendance. The

Declaration represents a commitment of Gwich'in from Alaska, the Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada to work together towards a common, self-determined vision for the future. Examples such as those discussed above, are illustrative of the community roles and responsibilities that Indigenous researchers carry which go beyond our own research agenda.

### **Data Analysis**

The first step of the analysis process involved organizing the data from interview transcripts. After thoroughly reading through the transcripts, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was developed with multiple tabs. During the first pass-through of the data, information was grouped according to its relevancy to the three research questions. For example, any data that related to changes in the Neets'ajj Gwich'in planning model was organized under the same tab. This initial framework helped to broadly categorize the data in preparation for coding.

According to W. Lawrence Neuman (2007), "Coding data is the hard work of reducing mountains of raw data into manageable piles" (p. 330). The process of coding is similar to the affinity (or nominal) technique that planners often use to help groups refine their ideas. After an initial observation and analysis, related ideas are grouped together into clusters at which point headings are identified that best describe each cluster. The organization and reorganization of information helps groups to identify themes and build a theory of change. In this study, open coding (i.e. the process of identifying and labeling themes) was performed during the second pass through of the data. During this process, reoccurring concepts began to emerge which formed the basis of preliminary codes. For example, when discussing village development, many participants made some reference to "local control," which became a preliminary code.

## Triangulation

Once all the interview data was coded and core themes were identified, the themes were then triangulated with other sources of information. Triangulating themes across multiple sources enabled me to track Neets' qij planning knowledge across at least three generations providing an important temporal context.

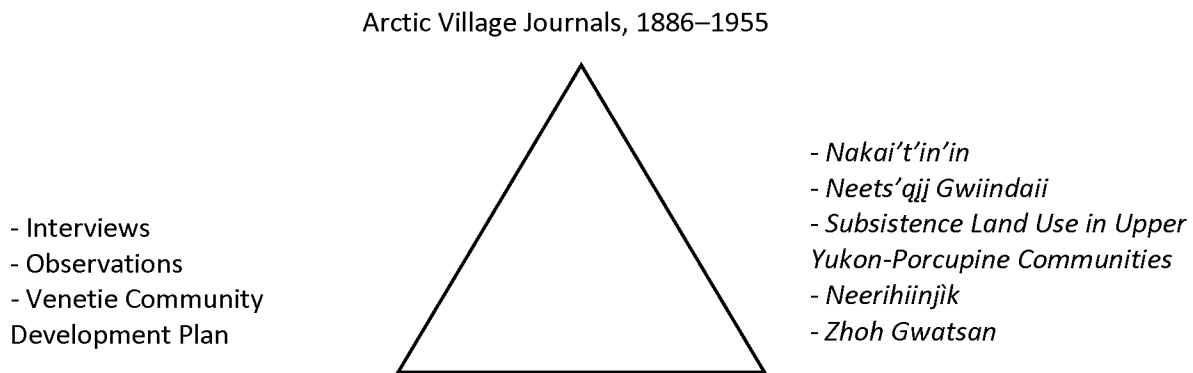


Figure 7. Triangulated sources.

*The Arctic Village Journals*, for example, was a firsthand insider account of Neets' qij life between 1886-1955. The lived experience of a subsequent generation of Neets' qij was at least partially documented in the following publications: *Neets'qij Gwiindaii: Living in the Chandalar Country* (K. Peter, 1992); *Nakhai' T'ini'in* (Arctic Village Council, 1991); *Subsistence Land Use in Upper Yukon-Porcupine Communities* (Caulfield, 1983); *Neerihinjik* (Mishler, 2001); and *Wolf Smeller (Zhoh Gwatsan) A Biography of John Fredson, Native Alaskan* (Mackenzie, 1985). Such works capture a range of information and place-based knowledge from generations of Neets' qij that experienced life in both a pre- and post-settlement context. A more recent publication, *Venetie Community Development Plan, 2013-2018*, was helpful in the analysis process in terms of corroborating data that emerged from my interviews and observations. By triangulating key themes from this study with other information sources that focused on different

periods and experiences in Neets'ąjį history, it became clear that there was significant continuity in Neets'ąjį perspectives on planning and development between multiple generations. For example, references to Neets'ąjį land values can be traced from the earliest to the most recent publications on the Neets'ąjį.

### **Bringing the Research Home**

For most Indigenous scholars, the “giving back” of research (and the expertise we develop in the process) is a lifelong commitment that involves more than sending copies of the final publication to participating tribes. Since beginning this research seven years ago, I have informally shared updates with various tribal leaders and members who have been very supportive in seeing this study to completion. In 2016, I collaborated with two other Gwich'in scholars on a presentation entitled *Diiḡwizhi' Geerahtan 'Teaching our Knowledge': Innovative Indigenous Governance and Leadership for a Rapidly Changing World* (Stern, et al., 2016). The presentation offered an opportunity to share the preliminary findings of our individual research projects to a predominantly Gwich'in audience. While such opportunities were virtually unheard of in the past, they are likely to become more commonplace in the future. For the past five years, the Gwich'in Tribal Council has sponsored an annual event, The Next 40 Academic Conference, to encourage more Gwich'in to pursue post-secondary education. In 2019, the conference is scheduled to take place at UAF. Fifty years ago, few would have anticipated that the Gwich'in would be positioned to be hosting their own academic conference, yet that is exactly what is occurring.

In the near future, I am looking forward to helping put this research into action through greater involvement with the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government (NVVTG). In January 2018, NVVTG convened a meeting in Fairbanks and extended an invitation to several

tribal members, including myself, that had pursued a college education. During the two-day meeting, we listened to tribal leaders discuss their concerns and hopes for the future. The leadership then appointed four of us to a technical working group to assist NVVTG in navigating future decisions related to the land and economic development. This call to action has since resulted in my participation at a tribal meeting in Viihtajj (February 2018) and a T'ee Drin Jik Tribal Conservation District (March 2018). Bringing this research home and putting what I have learned to work for the benefit of Vashrajj K'oo and Viihtajj will, from this point forward, be my life's work.

## Chapter 4

### *Geegarinkhii Tl'ee Gwich'it T'igwii'in*

In Gwich'in, *geegarinkhii tl'ee gwich'it t'igwii'in*, refers to a process by which something is discussed, then acted upon. In Chapter Four, I describe findings related to the first research question: What are the characteristics of a Neets'ąjį Gwich'in planning model? The following chapter is organized into two sections: part one explores Gwich'in planning terms in *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa* as a means to better understand how planning is conceptualized from within the culture and then expressed through the language; and part two explores how the Neets'ąjį generally organized and planned their lives prior to disruptions associated with permanent settlement.

#### **Gwich'in Planning Terminology**

*So I don't know how to answer your question about how we plan ahead. Just things happened at a certain time. We know it's going to happen.*

—Tribal member, personal communication, June 19, 2014

From the onset of this research, I was all too aware that trying to talk “planning” with Neets'ąjį elders in ways that seemed natural to our people was going to be a challenge given my lack of fluency in the language. Recognizing the current limits of my own fluency, I drew upon several sources to conduct a basic analysis of Gwich'in planning terms. Two of those sources included Gwich'in dictionaries, the first published by Archdeacon Robert McDonald in the 1800s and the second compiled by Katherine Peter (1979). An important point to mention is that the history of literacy among the Gwich'in stems back over a century. In 1862, Robert McDonald, who was an Anglican missionary from Canada, moved to Fort Yukon with the goal of attracting Gwich'in into the faith. According to Patrick Moore (2007), “McDonald offered the



Gwich'in more than religious instruction, since learning to read and write enhanced their ability to manage their accounts and interpret the symbols of the dominant Euro-Canadian society" (p. 49). With the help of Gwich'in people, McDonald developed an orthography that was used to translate religious texts and to teach literacy ("Yukon Native Language Centre," 2018). Moore argues that many Gwich'in in both Alaska and the Northwest Territories were literate in their own language (Tukudh) by the late nineteenth century as a result of McDonald's efforts. Over time, four other Gwich'in writing systems were introduced. A comparison of documented planning-related terms in Tukudh and Modern Gwich'in orthography is included in Table 5.

Table 5

*Gwich'in Planning Terminology Samples*

Tukudh	English translation	Modern Gwich'in	English translation
<i>Kookooli kwilhtsi</i>	Adapt	<i>Yeendaa ji'</i>	In the future
<i>Vah</i>	Cooperate	<i>Jii nan kak tr'adaqatl'oo</i>	Going by the writings of the country (law)
<i>kwittridtigwilhyin</i>		<i>vinjik gweedhaa</i>	She / he is making a plan
<i>Yinjikwitizhit</i>	Design	<i>Gwikih daj' yijniigwahtsik/</i> <i>Gwikih daj' yinjigwiltsqij</i>	plan
<i>Nizhit-trunahyin</i>	Long-sighted	<i>Shrigwili</i>	Prepare
<i>Ndokwedhah tihsiyin</i>	Persevere	<i>Nihdeek'it nineegiidal</i>	They rotate, change places
<i>Yinjikwahsti</i>	Plan	<i>Kwaiik'it</i>	Settlement/village
<i>Trochilzyin kkwa</i>	Unprepared		

*Note.* Sources: McDonald (1911) and K. Peter (1979).

While an analysis of documented Gwich'in planning-related terms yielded some interesting insights, it was a more-or-less static representation of concepts that were removed from the contexts that give them meaning. A more dynamic analysis resulted from working with *shahan* (my mother), a Neets'ąı̨ elder and fluent language speaker, to identify common

planning-related phrases within the actual contexts that they are used. The first realization that emerged during this analysis was that there are endless references to planning activities in *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*. The words themselves, however, derive their meaning through their connection to a particular context and/or action. For example, before my grandparents would move camp, *shitsii* (my grandfather) would say, “Juk drin tr'aheenjyaa” (today we are going to move). That single statement would signal to the family that preparations would need to be underway such as disassembling the canvas tent, soaking the dog packs in water, packing essentials into the toboggan, hitching up the dogs and more. Where they were moving to, for what purpose and for how long was largely informed by a cyclical planning model that remained intact until the establishment of more permanent settlements beginning in the 1930s.

### ***Neets'ąjį Planning Model Characteristics***

*Our people are tribal people whose identity is based upon survival.*

—Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 20

For most of our history, Neets'ąjį people lived in scattered camps moving in relation to seasonal resources. Traditional housing models such as *neevyaa zhee* (caribou skin tents) and, later, canvas tents were designed to be transportable enabling families to move between customary use areas. Life “in those days” cycled through periods of abundance and scarcity. A prominent theme of Neets'ąjį oral history is the struggle against starvation. The difficult truth of our existence is that no amount of preparation always guaranteed survival. Sudden or unexpected hardships frequently claimed the lives of Neets'ąjį individuals, as well as entire families.

According to *Nakhai' T'ini'in* (“Do It Yourself!”), “The early days of our people were harder, the lifestyle was one of constant movement for hunting, fishing and trapping on lands which we used and controlled for countless generations” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 2). In this pre-

settlement context, the Neets'ąıı lived by a planning model that could be characterized as a) *seasonal*, b) *strategic*, and c) *disciplined*.

## **Seasonal**

The pattern of life for Neets'ąıı people in a pre-settlement context generally followed the four seasons: *shin* (summer-time), *khaiits'ą* (fall-time), *khaii* (winter-time) and *shreenyaa* (spring-time). This seasonal framework is consistent with the ways in which Neets'ąıı elders describe how decisions were made about when and where to move camps, as well as what activities consumed their time and energy at any given point during the year. According to *shahan* (my mother), "They get ready for the summer and then fall-time, they get ready for the winter. Spring-time, that's when they get ready for summer. Different season...they plan ahead. Everything they do they plan it ahead of time (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014). A second tribal member also described just how second nature these planning practices were among older generations saying, "They knew what to do at a certain time, you know? They didn't have to think about it." (Tribal member, personal communication, June 19, 2014). It is important to mention that not all camps followed the same patterns of movement. Different families had their own customary use areas for hunting, trapping, and fishing, which they moved between. The following section details the seasonal movements of my own family, the Gilberts, as an example of how the Neets'ąıı planned their movements prior to the establishment of permanent settlements.

**Gilbert family seasonal movements.** The lineage of the Gilbert family extends back countless generations and spans several culture groups. *Shitsuu* (my grandmother) Maggie was the daughter of Laura and Dyahch'ı' Kaii but was raised by *vitsuu* (her grandmother) Tree'nahtsyaa upon Laura's death. Tree'nahtsyaa herself had witnessed periods of starvation

during her lifetime and therefore placed a high importance on transferring survival knowledge to her children. As a young woman, Maggie married Titus Peter with whom she had six children: Joanne, Martha, Jonas, Linus, Kias, and Naomi. Upon Titus's death, Maggie married James Gilbert (1931) at which time they began their lives moving between customary use areas in the Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ region with their two children, *shahan* Florence and *shee'ii* (my uncle) Trimble. The following section is a detailed account of the family's seasonal movements between customary use areas.

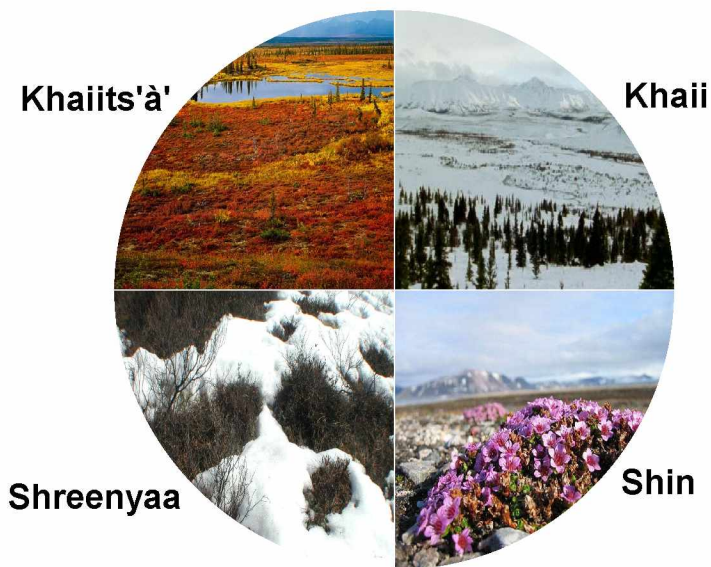


Figure 8. Seasonal planning model.

***Khaiits'à'* (Fall-time).** *Khaiits'à'* generally refers to the months of *Khii Rii* (August) and *Dinjiik Rii* (September) which have always been an especially critical season for the Neets'ǰǰ. The fall harvest of *vadzhaih* (caribou) enabled families like the Gilberts to process and store meat for the coming winter.

In the fall time, they wait for caribou to come this way and my dad always looked up that way toward Old John Mountain, on the left side of that Old John Lake. And when he see caribou coming, then they all get ready and they'd go up and they'd camp up there. That's where they hunt for caribou. (F. Newman, personal communication, June 16, 2014)

The family would travel a well-worn trail to Dachanee Mountain to set up camp along the timberline. The timberline was a strategic location due to the availability of *tryah* (wood), *chuy* (water), *thaa* (ground squirrels), and also the abundance of *tsii vii* (trees) which offered protection against the wind. Once *shitsii* (my grandfather) harvested what he determined to be a sufficient amount of *vadzaiih* and *thaa*, the family would construct a temporary meat rack to make *nilij gqij* (dry meat). They would also put a certain amount of raw meat aside to be hauled in dog packs to a glacier near Vashraqij K'oo. At the glacier, *shitsii* would chop a layer of ice from the surface before lowering the fresh meat inside and recovering it with ice to preserve it for the months ahead. The family would stay at camp until their meat was dry at which point they would transport it back to Vashraqij K'oo to be stored in their cache.

When the family was not preoccupied with harvesting *vadzaiih*, they would make camp in three possible locations: Old John Lake or up the East Fork of the Chandalar River to places locally referred to as First or Third Tower. At Old John Lake, the family would primarily fish for trout whereas most of the harvesting that occurred at First and Third Tower was for whitefish using *da'anlee* (fish traps). The majority of the harvest was processed into *luk gqij* (dry fish) to also be preserved for longer periods of time. As *khaitts'á* progressed, the family would closely monitor a certain red berry referred to as *dziindee*. When the *dziindee* ripened to a particular shade, it served as a natural indicator signaling that the best time to harvest *divii* (mountain

sheep) had arrived. At that point, *shitsii* and other men would make the long journey north to Red Sheep Creek where they would collectively harvest *divii* as described by *shee'ii* Trimble.

Way up by Red Sheep Creek, they go up that way and get a lot of sheep and they make skin boat and come back down with boat. Just a lot of meat... sheep meat and dry meat. A lot of ground squirrel, and they even get those groundhogs up that way. Those we don't have around here but they can go way up the Brooks Range. They walk a long ways just to get those groundhogs and sheep (T. Gilbert, personal communication, June 16, 2014).

Besides accumulating food, another important aspect of the *khaiits'à* harvest was the tanning of *vadzaih thaa* (fur) into parkas, *kwaiitryah* (boots), blankets, etc. Hides tanned during this time of year yielded the ideal amount of hair to insulate clothing which could withstand below freezing temperatures for extended periods of time. While the women were busy sewing new gear for their families, Neets'ajj men would construct new toboggans and make snowshoes which they depended upon for transportation during *khaii*.

***Khaii (Winter-time).*** *Khaii* was the longest season of the year stretching from *Vadzaih Rii* (October) through *Ahtr'aii Shree Tsal* (February). According to *shahan*, the movements of camps during winter months were less predictable as compared to other seasons largely due to the scarcity of food.

Wintertime, they live out in the country where there is just nothing, absolutely nothing but solid snow. The work so hard to survive. The people up in the Arctic Village area they know their country, they know their water, the creeks, rivers, and lakes. They have Gwich'in names for all the creeks, rivers, lakes and mountains in the Arctic Village area. They know their country so good that fall-time they make big plans not just for that day

or for the future, but all winter long. Winter is long and they plan ahead for that. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

She continued on to say:

They know their country so well that they know where to get different kinds of animals. If they want to get trout, they go up to Old John Lake and get big trout. Right to the side there's a lake called Red Fish Lake, that's where they go for red fish. If they want to get big white fish, they know where to get it and they walk many miles to that place. They stay there, put net in and dry them. I remember they had a big bundle of dry fish that was for winter – for us and the dogs. Then they go up to the mountain and kill a lot of caribou. That one is for winter too. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

The food that was stockpiled from *khaiits'à'* would only carry families so far due to having to share with others that had been less fortunate in their harvests as well as with their dog teams which consumed a significant amount of food.

Wintertime we use dog team. They haul all our property, big loads on the toboggan. They pull that around in rough country, up mountains and down hills. Real rough country they pull all our stuff through. That's why they take good care of dogs. They take care of us and we take care of them. If we don't have much food, then we have to share our food with the dogs because that's how important they are to us. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

During *khaii* in particular, Neets'ąıı families lived under the constant threat of starvation. A strategy that the Gilbert family, and others, often employed during these harsh months was to consolidate camps.

When it's really cold, that's when we're all together. Like Grandma Alice and her husband, Gabriel, and their son Paul. The reason why we're together is because it's too cold and we don't want somebody to get stuck out there with no food. (F. Newman, personal communication, June 10, 2014)

Living with the persistent threat of food shortage, families often spent much of *khaii* on the move sometimes between customary use areas and sometimes to more random locations that proved prosperous during a particular season as *shee 'ii* Trimble describes.

When there is no caribou in Arctic, sometimes they move toward Christian Village and Salmon Village. That's a good place to hunt right there so they spend winter down there. They just move anywhere the caribou are. Sometimes, they're together – maybe three or four families. I don't know how they communicate... maybe with a messenger. When there is caribou here, they let the other group know so they move in. (T. Gilbert, personal communication, June 16, 2014)

The holiday season was another time when different camps convened together. Families would often conserve a portion of their dried *datsan* (ducks), *luk* (fish), and *vadzaih* (caribou) harvest to share with one another during *Drin Tsal* (Christmas) and *Drin Choo* (New Year).

I remember just once in a great while a whole lot of families gather in one place for the holiday and they have a big potlatch. It's a good time to visit each other and they talk about what they do and they know all the country's name... the hills, the creeks. 'That's where we were and that's where we catch this'. They have a great story to tell one another and we just sit around and listen. That's why we remember all the names for the creeks, hills, and lakes. It's just like a map. They know this country so good that when



they say where they were at, we know where it is because that's how they communicate.

(F. Newman, personal communication, June 10, 2014)

***Shreenyaa (Spring-time).*** *Shreenyaa* generally began in *Ch'izhin Zhrii* (March) and lasted through *Gwiluu Zhrii* (May). Once open water began forming on the surface of lakes, the Gilbert family would move to either *Hangaraataii* or *Taii'eetak*, two lakes where they traditionally harvested *dzan* (muskrat), *dats'an* (ducks), and *luk* (fish).

Springtime in March, we go up to First Tower, that place they call *Kaiidzuy zhit gwitsik* right on this side it's a *Hangaraataii*. Then there's on the hill where my little sister was buried up further, there's a big hill there that that place we call it *Taii'eetak*. Those two places, we have allotment there...not *Hangaraataii*. We used to go there and stay there all spring and that's where we always go for muskrat, ducks and some animals. That's where we always go. Mostly we stayed at *Hangaraataii* and *Taii'eetak* for muskrat and at the same time we go to *Kaiidzuy Zhit Gwitsik* for fish. That place was a good place for fish and we would go and camp there and get a lot of fish. (F. Newman, personal communication, June 10, 2014)

*Dzan* was both an important food source but also was the primary currency in the Yukon Flats at the time. *Dzan dhaa* (fur) were dried, stretched and then brought back to Vashraji' K'oq to await the eventual arrival of a pilot named Cliff Fairchild who transported the skins to Fort Yukon to be sold. The income generated from the sales would enable Neets'ajj families to purchase supplies and staples such as coffee, sugar, and kerosene lamps.

***Shin (Summer-time).*** *Shin* referred to the months of *Vanan Ch'iighoo* (June) and *Luk Choo Rii* (July). June 7<sup>th</sup> was a particularly important date for the Neets'ajj signifying both the end of *dzan* trapping and the time of the year that many animals were breeding. One would think

that warmer temperatures during *shin* would alleviate some of the issues with food scarcity that the Neets'ąjį experienced in *khaii* however June and July often proved to be difficult months. For several weeks, families abstained from hunting or trapping as a traditional conservation strategy for managing resources.

When animals have little ones they don't bother them. That animal got little babies in the ground somewhere. We can't kill it because they got a lot of little ones down there waiting for them to come back. They're like that to all the animals. Around June, we just can't kill nothing because they know that they all got babies. Even ducks, we don't kill them. Even if we're hungry, we don't bother them. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

Instead, Neets'ąjį subsisted off foods that they previously dried or stored in addition to fishing and picking *jak* (berries). Preserving berries for long periods of time was a challenge which the Neets'ąjį overcame by storing them inside a specialty made skin bag or in the stomach of a caribou and then freezing them in the glacier.

In June, it's no good to travel...lots of water. They wait until July and then they're fishing. The month of July is a really hard time...no fish so sometimes they go out to get sheep and they move the family up here [motions on map]. So, July, they spend their time up here, and then they know the caribou is coming back, and then they all move back to Arctic Village in August (T. Gilbert, personal communication, June 16, 2014).

At this point in the year, the whole cycle would begin all over again. Though many other tribal groups within the Yukon Flats region followed a similar seasonal planning model, there were key differences mostly stemming from the variability of local resources. Groups that lived along major rivers such as the Yukon, for example, relied upon salmon more so than the people of

Vashraġġ' K'qq and Vġġhtaġġ. In 1983, Richard A. Caulfield led a research effort on subsistence harvests in five communities including Vashraġġ' K'qq, Birch Creek, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, and Vġġhtaġġ. The study yielded some interesting information regarding which communities had a greater or lesser reliance on particular resources. It is important to note that the data was collected between 1970-1982, which was post-settlement. Figures 9 and 10 offer a comparison of annual cycles of resource harvesting activities in the communities of Vashraġġ' K'qq and Vġġhtaġġ. An analysis of the harvest data between the two villages shows a pattern of overlapping dependence on certain animals however, there were key differences in harvesting by time of year and by primacy as a primary or secondary activity.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Łuk			Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	
Dinjġk	Light grey	Light grey	Dark grey						Dark grey	Light grey	Light grey	Light grey
Vadzaih	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Light grey				Light grey	Dark grey			
Divii								Light grey	Light grey		Dark grey	Light grey
Geh	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Light grey				Light grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey
Thaa				Light grey	Dark grey	Dark grey		Dark grey	Light grey			
Waterfowl					Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey			
Dzan			Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey							

Figure 9. Seasonal cycle of resource harvest activities, Vġġhtaġġ, 1970–1982. Dark grey indicates primary activity; light grey indicates secondary activity. Adapted from Caulfield (1983) Annual Cycle for Venetie (p. 178).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Łuk			Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey			
Dinjġk	Light grey	Light grey	Dark grey					Light grey	Dark grey	Light grey	Dark grey	Light grey
Vadzaih	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Light grey				Light grey	Dark grey			Dark grey
Geh	Dark grey	Light grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Light grey			Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey
Thaa				Light grey	Dark grey	Light grey		Light grey				
Waterfowl				Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey			
Dzan		Light grey	Dark grey	Dark grey	Dark grey							
Shoh				Dark grey	Dark grey							

Figure 10. Seasonal cycle of resource harvest activities, Vashraġġ' K'qq, 1970-1982. Dark grey indicates primary activity; light grey indicates secondary activity. Adapted from Caulfield (1983) Annual Cycle for Arctic Village (p. 98).

Although the movements of Neets'ąıı camps generally followed seasonal patterns, the wisdom of knowing where to go was informed by a variety of factors including knowledge of the land, animal migrations, plant/berry growth cycles, weather prediction, etc. which is where the second characteristic of the planning model comes into play.

### **Strategic**

The ability to survive in a harsh, northern environment required good decision-making. Making rash or reckless decisions was a surefire way to starve, fall victim to accidents or any number of other potential disasters. Survival depended not only upon one's skill and knowledge of the land, but also the ability to weigh risk. Neets'ąıı men and women were trained from an early age to mitigate risk as much as possible through preparedness but also through emergent decision-making. While most families operated from a seasonal blueprint, plans had to be continually adjusted to account for changes in weather, resource availability and other external factors as illustrated by the following quote.

They really watch weather. That's a main thing they watch. They're just like a good weatherman because they live out there and they know when it's gonna start snowing and they even know next few days if it's gonna rain. They even know that next week it's gonna be windy just like somebody is telling them. They know what kind of weather and they always plan ahead. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

She continued,

They watch all the animals and animals give them message. If there's gonna be no food ahead of them, one of the birds will tell them. Sometime they make all kinds of sounds and they sing for something. Like camp robber tells them if they're gonna kill caribou. He'll be sitting out in a tree and just make a noise like you're cleaning skin and they're

just all happy and smiling. They said ‘camp robber told us we’ll get something pretty soon’ and they keep watching and later, sure enough they get something. That’s why when they cut up caribou and they see camp robber they’re gonna cut a big piece of meat and give it to the camp robber and say “thank you for telling us we’re gonna get caribou.”

(F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

During an interview with Vashraqi’ K’qq elder, Sarah James, she described her family’s daily routine moving camp during *khaii*. In this account, *viti*’ (her father) and *voondee* (her older brother) would strategically scout out the country ahead of the family deciding which path to take and breaking trail.

They [the men] go ahead of us with just a snowshoe. They’re checking their traps that they put down the night before and also breaking trail. They break trail that night, check the traps, pick up the trash and then they make more new trail. Right there, they make a mark and that mean we have to settle there for the night. Like me, when I get up in the morning, my dad is already gone. My mom is already cooking, and they ate and left. And then everybody take the tent down and load up the toboggan. We all walk behind the dog team. Every one of us got snowshoe. That’s how we follow the trail that they made the night before so its kind of harden overnight. While we’re doing that, at noon time we stop somewhere and make tea and have snack or something. That’s the only time my mom make me cup of tea with sugar. Then we move on and come to where my dad and Abraham make mark so all of us use our snowshoe as a shovel to clear the snow. We really have to be careful how we do it to not mishandle our snowshoe. My sister would chop down tree and I would bring them into the tent. By that time we got the branches and Lillian is the one that weave them on the floor and I help with that. Then they put the

stove in and get the wood in and start cooking dog food. My mom start cooking and then I help with that. Then Gideon and Albert start cutting wood and we start piling for overnight. When my mom is done cooking, we eat and after, the dog food is cool enough to feed. By that time I am tired and go to sleep. My dad and them come in and they go to sleep. Same thing next day. (S. James, Personal Communication, July 2014)

Traveling with a large family added to the weight of responsibility that fell upon Neets'ajj parents when making decisions related to moving camp. Everyday decision-making, such as in the previous example, had to be strategic in order to maximize people's energy, time and resources but executing those decisions also required disciplined action which is the third characteristic of the Neets'ajj planning model.

### **Disciplined**

Author Jim Collins defines a culture of discipline as, "Disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and who take disciplined action-operating with freedom within a framework of responsibilities" ("Jim Collins," n.d.). During both my interviews, as well as those documented in *Nakhai' T'ini'in* (Arctic Village Council, 1991), Neets'ajj elders spoke at length about a culture of discipline which was fostered through intense survival training beginning at a young age as demonstrated by the following quote:

We follow our parents no matter where they go. Sometimes we're tired and we're crying 'cause we're just tired but we still have to keep on going. When we get to a good place, then we rest up there. They get a lot of whitefish and then we eat good. That's what we went there for and that's all we do. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

Discipline came in many forms including how much water young men would be allowed to consume, the proficiency of their survival skills, and adherence to traditional laws and practices surrounding the stewardship of resources. In the following quote, *shahan* describes learning the importance of balancing immediate human needs with a longer-term commitment to ensuring sustainable resources for future generations.

They said that “we need those animals so we have to take care of it and it’s for the future so they’ll be more and more” and that’s what they tell us. That’s how we were raised. Even my mom when we go pick berries somewhere, she told us not to walk on blueberry bushes. “Don’t break that bush because it gives us berries every summer. If you break it then you kill it and it won’t grow anymore berries. (F. Newman, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

### **Chapter Reflections**

An analysis of the data from my interviews, triangulated with information from *Nakhai’ T’in’in* (Arctic Village Council, 1991) and *Subsistence Land Use in Upper Yukon-Porcupine Communities* (Caulfield, 1983), revealed a planning model with three primary characteristics a) seasonal, b) strategic, and c) disciplined. As was demonstrated in this chapter, the Neets’ąįį historically planned their lives according to four general seasons. Each season posed unique challenges that often required Neets’ąįį families to continually evaluate and adjust their plans. Sometimes this meant camping together and other times apart. Sometimes it meant moving to areas that were known to be productive in terms of harvesting and other times it meant taking calculated risks in terms of where and when to move. The ability to navigate such decisions required a pattern of thinking and action that was both strategic and disciplined. In this context, the Neets’ąįį could ill afford to make decisions that were not strategic. Survival depended upon

adapting to changing conditions and knowing when to conserve or expend energy, time and resources. Most planners today would agree that good strategy-making is critical; however effective implementation requires disciplined action. The Neets'ąįį lifestyle fostered a culture of discipline that emphasized survival training and also the ability to balance the needs of the present with those of the future. Traditional planning practices such as those described in this chapter were an intrinsic part of Neets'ąįį survival in a pre-settlement context. As the lifestyle of the Neets'ąįį began to shift in response to the establishment of more permanent settlements starting in the 1930s, their planning model became less seasonal, but equally strategic and disciplined, which is the focus of the next chapter.





## Chapter 5

### *Ch'ijuk Gweedhaa*

*Today, you stay within one place, so you don't know about life out there. For me, I get the urge to go out there. I got the knowledge of that life, land and lifestyle.*

— Isaac Tritt Sr. (Arctic Village Council, 1991)

In Gwich'in, the phrase *ch'ijuk gweedhaa*, generally refers to a period of change. In Chapter Five, I describe findings related to the second research question: Why and how has the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in planning model changed over time? Based on the data, much of this discussion focuses on the role of the school system in catalyzing the transition from camps to semi-permanent then permanent settlements. The need for Neets'ąıı children to attend school nine months out of the year was identified as a key factor in disrupting the seasonal nature of the Neets'ąıı planning cycle described in the previous chapter. While schools were a common driver of village consolidation across Alaska, a key difference in the context of the Neets'ąıı was that it was the people who initially worked towards bringing Western education into the region. For many years, the Neets'ąıı managed a model of educational delivery that was consistent with the traditional Neets'ąıı lifestyle of moving from camp to camp. These early efforts to acquire Western knowledge required local planning efforts that were both strategic and disciplined. As time progressed, however, a more modern, bureaucratic educational system began to take shape which demanded greater adjustments on the part of the Neets'ąıı and their lifestyle. The following chapter discusses the evolution of semi-permanent and permanent settlements among the Neets'ąıı and the role of the school system in transforming their planning model.

## From Camps to Semi-Permanent Settlements

As discussed in Chapter Four, the Neets'ąıı have a long history of regularly moving between key locations throughout their vast territory. To accommodate their itinerant lifestyle, the traditional housing model of the Neets'ąıı was a transportable shelter made from timber poles and caribou skins similar to those used by the Gwichya Gwich'in as described by Heine et al. (2001).

The shelter of the families who lived in the mountains and made their living by following the caribou herds, had to meet several requirements. First, it had to be highly portable. Second, it had to be light enough to be transported by pack dogs, by dog team, or by women pulling a sleigh. At the same time, it had to be sturdy enough to provide protection from the cold temperatures of mid-winter. The caribou skin winter tent, *dizhoo niivaa* [dazhoo niıvyaa], met all of these requirements. (pp. 101-102).

With the fur trade, new technology was introduced to the region, which included canvas tents. According to Robert Wishart and Peter Looovers (2013), “The canvas tents replaced the skin hut tents that were used for times of travel and short stays” largely because they were “relatively easy to put up, portable, and warm when coupled with small steel wood-burning stoves” (p. 57). As the pattern of life began to shift for the Neets'ąıı around the twentieth century, more enduring housing structures (i.e., log cabins) began to appear in select locations marking a visible shift to more semi-permanent settlements.

According to Jack Campisi (2002), two developments helped to set the stage for semi-permanent settlements among the Neets'ąıı. These included the introduction of rifles (which served to individualize hunting practices) and the emergence of several leaders following the death of Chief Peter around 1890. Campisi argues that the change in hunting techniques coupled with disagreements among Chief Peter's successors led to the reorganization of the Neets'ąıı

community into several distinct groups who founded semi-permanent settlements at select locations including Vashraǰǰ K'oo, Viǰhtaǰǰ, and Zheh Gwatsal (Christian Village) (pp. 163-164). Fredrick Hadleigh-West (1963) offered a different perspective on the drivers of Neets'ǰǰ settlement focusing more on the changing economy of the region.

It would appear that the seeds for permanent settlement were pre-existent in the culture, however, in the form of the well established pattern of settling about successful caribou pounds [fences]. The greatest urge to permanent settlement came about from the introduction of new ideas from the south, but aided importantly too by acquisition, around the turn of the century, of a partial money economy. (p. 223)

The extent to which these factors contributed individually and/or collectively to the shift to semi-permanent settlements continues to be debatable. What is clear is that around the turn of the twentieth century, certain locations became more prominent in terms of supporting several Neets'ǰǰ families at a given time. When Robert McKennan conducted fieldwork among the Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in in 1933, he described them as “living in three separate bands, each having a semi-permanent settlement consisting of cabins and tent frames” (1965, p. 19). He further stated, “The settlements were not inhabited throughout the year but did serve as bases and storage places. From them, the Indians ranged out over the surrounding territory following the seasonal round of their hunting, trapping, and fishing activities” (p. 19). A similar pattern of seasonal movement between semi-permanent settlements and seasonal camps was reported to have continued through the first half of the century, as described by Caulfield (1983).

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the Neets'ǰǰ Gwich'in continued a highly mobile way of life, utilizing semi-permanent settlements such as Arctic, Christian,

Venetie and Sheenjek villages as well as seasonal camps at places such as Old John Lake, Wind River, T'sukqo, Caribou House, T'eet'ree, and the Koness River. (p. 92)

While it can be said that there were, in fact, many semi-permanent settlements located throughout Neets'ąıı territory, I have chosen to focus on four, which were regularly referenced during interviews. Those included Sheenjik Village, Vashraıı K'qo, Christian Village, and Vııhtąıı, which are described in more detail below.

### **Sheenjik Village**

Sheenjik Village was a semi-permanent settlement located on the west bank of the Sheenjek River approximately 70 miles from Vashraıı K'qo. According to Caulfied (1983), “the settlement offered access to prime trapping, fishing, and hunting areas and was accessible by boat to Fort Yukon” (p. 92). In *Nakhai' T'ini'in*, Gideon James recalled the seasonal pattern of movement between Sheenjik and Vashraıı K'qo stating, “...those people moved back and forth from here to Sheenjik. Usually, people moved back over there to trap during winter, then come back over for summer, around March or April” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 1). Sheenjik was a popular location through the 1930s and early 1940s. A visual depiction of the settlement is included on the following page. *Shee'ii* (my uncle) Kias Peter Sr. drew the visual in 2001 to document the presence of Neets'ąıı families at Sheenjik Village circa 1945. Around this general period, the settlement experienced a severe flood event that prompted the relocation of Neets'ąıı families back to Vashraıı K'qo. Gideon described the event by stating, “The village that used to be there got eroded away by erosion from riverbanks, but the trails are still there” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 1 of Gideon James interview). Although some men continued to seasonally trap in the Sheenjik area, the semi-permanent settlement became less and less used overtime.

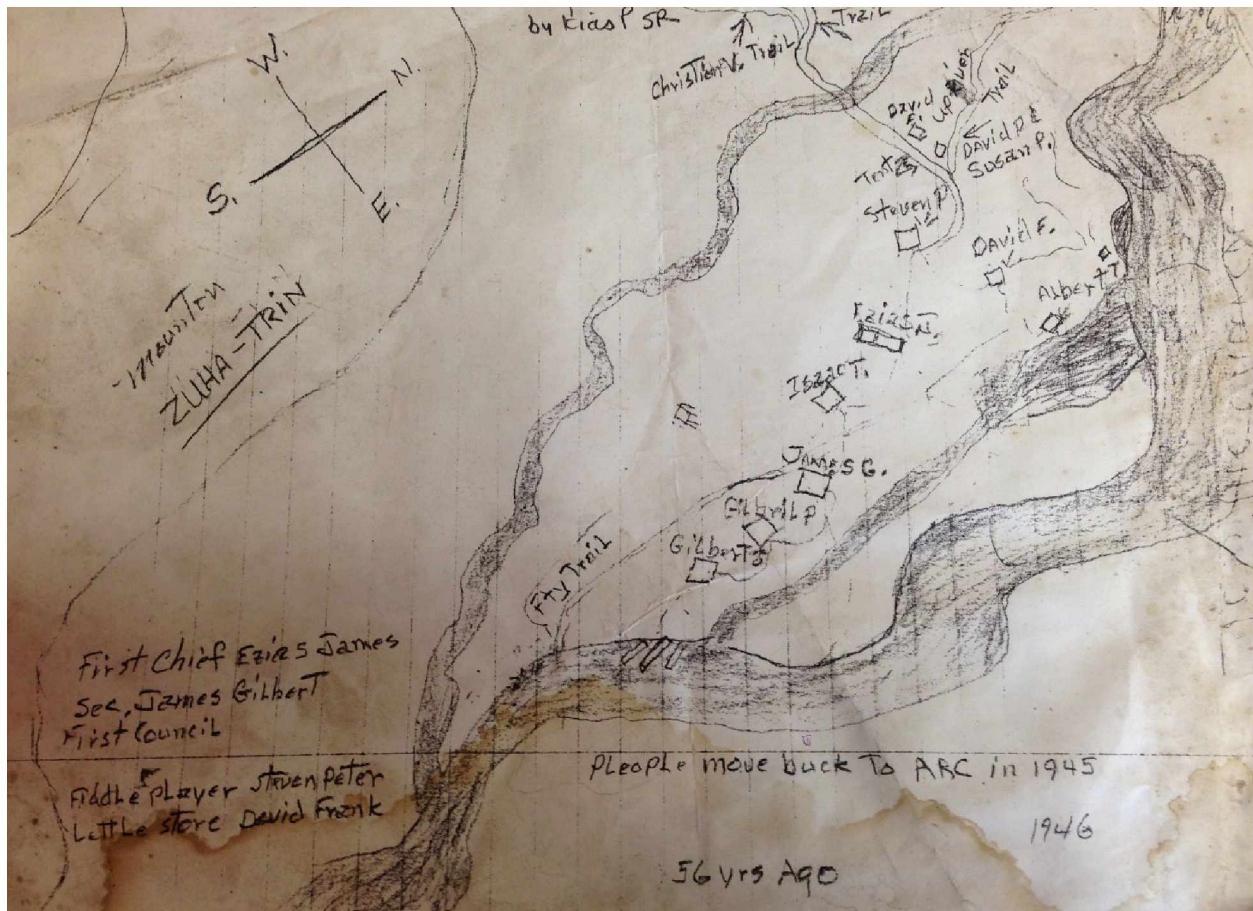


Figure 11. Sheenjik Village circa 1945. Source: Kias Peter Sr.

### *Vashraqii K'oo*

Before it evolved into a more-permanent settlement, Vashraqii K'oo (meaning “creek along a steep bank”) was known as a traditional fishing spot.

According to *shitsii* (my grandfather) James Gilbert:

In the old days, Arctic Village was used for fishing place for people that migrate in the area. They also have food cache near this area. Chief Christian suggested they build a house. The house was used for food storage and dancing. They started to build other houses and this made a permanent settlement. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 3 of James Gilbert interview)

The cabin that he referenced was built in 1909 and reportedly belonged to Christian John, otherwise known as Christian *Choo* or Chief Christian. Born in 1866, Chief Christian rose to leadership based on his skills as a trader and hunter. He was a regular figure in the accounts of the Reverend Albert E. Tritt whom he reportedly often had disagreements with. Tension between the two leaders eventually drove Chief Christian to move with his supporters to a new settlement at Zheh Gwatsal (Campisi, 2002).

### ***Zheh Gwatsal (Christian Village)***

Named after its founder, Christian Village was a semi-permanent settlement located south of Vashrajj K'oo. According to McKennan (1965), Zheh Gwatsal was first established by Chief Christian around 1901 and then reoccupied around 1930. When Hadleigh-West conducted fieldwork among the Neets'ajj in the 1960s, he recorded a family of five living at Zheh Gwatsal but indicated that at one point, the population had “ranged as high as twenty-two” (1963, p. 17). He also noted, “Undoubtedly a contributing factor to the stability of Arctic Village as opposed to Christian was the building there in 1918 of an Episcopal chapel” (p. 225).

### ***Vijhtajj***

Described in early literature as Old Robert's Village or Chandalar Village, Vijhtajj was founded in 1895 by Neets'ajj leader, Old Robert. In an interview with Vijhtajj elder Robert Frank, he discussed a few of the strategic reasons that drove the location of the settlement.

Vijhtajj...that's a big wide trail down to Laurel Village and straight up. It used to be a little valley like that and this is where that animal crossing, moose, caribou and everything. That Old Robert is the one that settled here first. (R. Frank, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

Similar to Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ, the first cabins constructed near Vǰǰhtaǰǰ (meaning “a place where trails meet”) were primarily used during the coldest winter months. Most residents continued to spend other seasons at camp. In 1905, 25 or 30 residents and six cabins were reported at Vǰǰhtaǰǰ (“Community and Regional Affairs,” 2018). Repeated flooding eventually drove the community to relocate in 1976 to a nearby bluff, which is the present-day site.

Despite the emergence of various semi-permanent settlements, the Neets'ǰǰ planning model changed little in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Most families, in fact, continued to move frequently between trap-lines and hunting and fishing camps. Table 6 represents the distribution of the Neets'ǰǰ population as recorded by McKennan in 1933.

Table 6

*Population of “Chandalar Bands” in 1933*

“Band”	Men	Women	Children	Total
Arctic Village Band	10	8	18	36
Christian’s Band	6	5	14	25
Chandalar Village Band	17	14	32	63
Yukon River (between Chandalar River & Fort Yukon)	3	3(?)	6	12
Fort Yukon	13	8	23	44
Circle	5	4	8(?)	17

*Note.* Source: McKennan, 1965, p. 20.

The process of settlement among the Neets'ǰǰ was a gradual one that began with a select few semi-permanent camps. Overtime, some of those camps were abandoned due to flooding or the changing needs of the Neets'ǰǰ population. Based on my interviews as well as key literary sources, the introduction of the Western education system within the region was a key driver in the permanent settlement of Vǰǰhtaǰǰ and Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ.



### From Semi-Permanent to Permanent Settlements

According to Campisi (2002), the population base of Vĳĳhtajĳ and Vashraĳĳ K'qq began to stabilize following the establishment of schools, the development of regular air service, the availability of snow machines, and the expansion of public services that provided local employment opportunities. Table 7 demonstrates the gradual consolidation of the population between the two villages over a 90-year period.

Table 7

*Population, 1920–2010*

Settlement	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Arctic Village	40	24	53	110	85	111	96	90	152	152
Venetie	32	62	86	81	107	112	132	182	202	149

*Note.* Source: Campisi (2002, p. 166).

The following section examines the role of school systems in the permanent settlement of Vĳĳhtajĳ and Vashraĳĳ K'qq.

#### *Vĳĳhtajĳ*

The first attempt at opening a school in Vĳĳhtajĳ occurred in the 1930s. In the book, *Neerihinjik: We Traveled from Place to Place*, Johnny Frank describes conversations that he had with then First Chief Ned Roberts and Second Chief Elijah John regarding the community's desire to start a school. He discussed local efforts to renovate an empty home into a schoolhouse and the hiring of a teacher by the name of Hannah Stevens. Local families reportedly pooled what limited funds they had together to cover Hannah's \$300 dollar salary (Mishler, 2001, p. 525-526). After teaching for one year, Hannah was replaced by Neets'ajĳ leader, John Fredson.

Born in 1895, Fredson was the first person of Alaska Native heritage to graduate from college. After receiving his degree from Sewanee: The University of the South, Fredson returned to Alaska to work at a hospital in Fort Yukon before eventually moving back to his home community of V̄ijht̄aj̄j̄. According to Mackenzie (1985), it was around this period that “A delegation led by Jimmie Robert went to Fort Yukon in the autumn of 1936 to request a government school” (p. 155). The Territorial Superintendent traveled to V̄ijht̄aj̄j̄ by dog team the following year to evaluate the situation and verify that the minimum count of 13 students had been met.

Fredson was hired to open the school during the fall of 1937. Of the more than 100 teachers employed by the Office of Indian Affairs between 1937-1941, Fredson was reportedly the only teacher listed as ‘Indian’ (Mackenzie, 1985). Maintaining student enrollment proved to be an ongoing challenge due to the need of Neets’aj̄j̄ families to harvest food. Over the next several years, Fredson maintained contact with widely scattered Neets’aj̄j̄ families in order to recruit students as described by the late Vashrāj̄j̄ K’oq̄ elder Jenny Sam.

[John Fredson] told us that the school was closing in Venetie. My son Neil was a toddler, my daughter Margaret was this tall (using hand gesture) and my son Sam was a baby. I hated to leave all the food we gathered and the skin that needed to be tanned but I had to take my uncle’s words because he is my father’s brother. When we moved back to Venetie my children goes up to school so they would have enough children for school. They were not even beginners, they were there to eat. During that time the school was closing because they lack firewood. Then my niece Jessie Williams and I made a plan to go out and haul wood for the school. We chopped and hauled 9 cords of wood for school. The Teacher was very happy and threw a party for us. We hauled wood 3 times for

school and that is why the school is still there. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 1 of Jenny Sam interview)

*Shitsuu* (my grandmother) Maggie also sent her older son, Jonas, to attend school in *Viihtajj*. Tragically, Jonas passed away as a result of an accident and it took months before word of the incident reached the family in *Vashrajj K'oo*.

According to Mackenzie (1985), Fredson held classes in a three-room house that was rented for \$5 a month. His schedule included, “daily grammar school classes for children six to 16; night classes and summer school classes at fish camps for adults in English and basic literacy; health clinics, and classes in sanitation” (p. 157). For many years, the people of *Viihtajj* took strategic and disciplined action to adapt the Western educational model to their way of life. Over time, however, shifts in education policy and the operational responsibility for rural schools led to the institutionalization of rural education and greater degrees of involvement by outsiders. In an interview with one tribal member, he describes how this situation introduced a new power dynamic that posed challenges to the seasonal nature of the *Neets'ajj* planning model.

But at that time, I'm just trying to tell you when it started changing. That's when they started bringing in teachers and ministers. That's when everybody started getting together and they encouraged the kids to go to school, and somebody had to take care of them so the whole family can't go out together no more. It's only the father. In very rare instances, it's the mother that goes out. But anyway, that's when it started to change. Before that, it used to be the whole family as a group. They'd go out and did everything together. But right there, you have to go to school they said or else we'll do something... put the law down on you, you know? Uneducated, and teacher had a lot of power in the village. Of course he knew and understood the white man way and we didn't, so that's when it really

started to change how we gather food. (Tribal member, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

This disruption to the seasonal pattern of life was especially true for Neets'ąıı families that had children requiring a high school education. The lack of high schools in smaller villages like Vııhtąıı and Vashraıı K'ıı meant that high school-age students had to attend boarding schools, including Mt. Edgecumbe and the Wrangell Institute. Research on the impact of boarding schools on the Neets'ąıı has yet to be conducted. However, it is clear from interviews with Neets'ąıı elders that such experiences created personal and community hardships.

We didn't know what was going on. They'd send them out to boarding schools and that was a big change in our life. Of course, we were just taken out of some place that we're familiar with and comfortable with, and then put in a place where we know nothing. I didn't even know how to turn a light on. I was used to a gasoline lamp, you know? That's the time we started to really change. Some of us were just starting to learn our Native language. Some were way younger. I seen little kids, and they grew up there, and they completely forgot their language.

He continued onto say:

So that really had a lot of effect, and it changed how we think and how we act and all that. Before that, we were comfortable. What I'm trying to say is we were comfortable who we are... where we're at but after that, it all changed. We weren't comfortable no more. So that's a big change and right now, hardly anybody goes out. (Tribal member, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

A similar pattern of teenage out-migration occurred across rural Alaska and continued up through the 1970s. In 1972, 27 teenage plaintiffs, including Molly Hootch and Anna Tobeluk,

sued the State of Alaska for failing to provide villages with high schools. The resulting settlement, referred to as the ‘Molly Hootch Decision’, was reached in 1976 “assuring every child a right to attend high school in his or her own community if there is an elementary school there, unless the community asks that there be no school” (“Alaska Native Knowledge Network,” 2018). For Vj̄htaj̄j, this prompted the 1982 construction of the John Fredson High School, which was appropriately named after the leader who had passed away on August 22, 1945 at the age of 50.

### *Vashraj̄j K’oq̄*

In the case of Vashraj̄j K’oq̄, the first classroom teacher was an Athabascan woman named Ellen Tritt. In the *Arctic Village Journals 1886-1955*, Albert E. Tritt describes the strategic marriage between Ellen and his son, Abel, due to her ability to speak English.

It came to pass, I went to ‘Fort Yukon’ by my own work. With my two sons I stay at Fort Yukon while that William Moses came from Circle, Alaska with his wife and they told me we got one girl at Circle that they want Abel Tritt to marry her. Abel said ‘yes’. They don’t see each other yet but there’s no one for them to marry. The season was very warm so we can’t gather with toboggan at Circle. I asked them what kind of girl she is and how she educated then. I know that all. Then I went to get her in airplane. Then next day April 7, 1940 they were married. Everyone had big dance next day. I left town. That girl I need her she writes for me and read letter for me. (pp. 132-133)

Ellen instructed Neets’aj̄j children in the English language at various locations including Vashraj̄j K’oq̄ and Sheenj̄ik Village. A second figure in local educational efforts around the 1930s/40s was Katherine Peter who also was married into the Neets’aj̄j community. During an interview with Vashraj̄j K’oq̄ elder, Sarah James, she described some of the fears that drove the

Neets'ąjį people to provide their children with a Western education and the challenges that they experienced in the process.

They even got Katherine married up this way so she can teach because the government started telling them that if their kids don't go to school, there is a chance that the kids can be taken away, or adopted out, or a foster home, or boarding school, or just take them away. They are afraid that might happen so they tried their best to start a school but each time it failed because they didn't have enough student for the government to help them. And they have to do most of it...build a cabin, keep it heated, provide papers and food for kids have to eat and all that. And they're not used to staying in one place because that's not their lifestyle, so they had go long ways to get things to eat to stay one place, and it's just hard on them. (S. James, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

In the book, *Neets'ąjį Gwiindaii: Living in the Chandalar Country*, K. Peter (1992) described arriving in Vashraįį K'ųų in 1936. At the time, she documented 10 households including those of Albert E. Tritt, Gilbert Joseph, James Gilbert, Esias James, Gabriel Peter, Moses Sam, Lucy Frank, Elijah Henry, Isaac Tritt, and Joseph Peter all of whom lived in log houses (p. 5). Shortly after her arrival, Katherine observed a disruption to the Neets'ąjį planning model that was similar to what had occurred in Vįįhtąjį.

At that time there was no school and the men traveled around wherever the hunting was good. James Gilbert and his family, Gilbert Joseph and his wife, Sarah Simon and her children, Moses Sam and his family, and Gabriel Peter and his wife, these people were living around Zheh Gwatsal and Ddhah Ghoo. After January 1937 we didn't go off this way or that (into the wilderness). We lived at Arctic Village and only the men went off into the wilderness. (K. Peter, 1992, pp. 30–31)

In 1940, *shitsii* (my grandfather) James Gilbert was elected as chief of Vashraq̃i K'qq̃ and made the month long trek to Fort Yukon to pick up schoolbooks for seven local students (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 3 of James Gilbert interview). Sometime after, Ellen moved to Chalkyitsik with her husband at which point, Katherine became more involved in teaching Neets'ą̃i children with support from the broader community.

All winter [1942] I taught the children; no one paid me. You see Esias James did a lot of work to enable his children to acquire knowledge. And all the rest of them did this too. Whenever Gabriel went out to get wood he pulled a load into my front yard, even if it was in between the times when the men brought me wood. That's how much the people wanted their children to acquire knowledge and that's how much they worked for it. I didn't teach everything as it is taught these days, but still they use what they learned even now. (K. Peter, 1992, p. 83)

In 1943, Katherine Peter described being paid \$64 a month by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to teach Neets'ą̃i children between the two settlements of Khiinjik Zheh and Vashraq̃i K'qq̃.

Now that winter [1943] I was going to teach the children. We even brought some books from the BIA. From then on I taught every winter. We moved back and forth between Khiinjik Zheh and Arctic Village and I taught through it all. Eventually James Gilbert, Gabriel Peter, and Gilbert Joseph were all moving around with us on account of the school. (p. 87)

Despite the flexibility of this model of educational delivery, it was not without its challenges as described by Sarah James.

They tried to start up a Western school a couple of times. First time was when they were living in Salmon Village with Katherine Peter and Ellen [Tritt] but it's hard on them because that's not their lifestyle. We have to be out in the land in order to survive and we can't be living one place and survive that way so they tried...they tried their best. (S. James, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

According to *shahan*, Florence Newman, the next attempt at a Western-style education largely involved a missionary teacher named Ray Harrison. Harrison operated classes out of a log cabin in “downtown” Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ. Following his tenure, the BIA hired a teacher by the name of Yulana Rocker who operated under the supervision of a principal based in Fort Yukon by the name of Mrs. Wilson. In 1953, *shahan* left Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ to attend boarding school at the Wrangell Institute. During the year she spent at Wrangell, yet another teacher, Mark Keyes, moved to Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ. By the time *shahan* returned to the community, Mr. Keyes had been replaced by a couple named Bob and Marie Mott (F. Newman, personal communication, February 21, 2018). These events and others like it signified an important shift away from an educational model that was responsive to the needs and lifestyle of the Neets'ǰǰ to one that necessitated permanent settlement and greater decision-making by non-Natives.

Berardi (1999) broadly describes the impact of permanent settlements on the mobility of Alaska Native communities as well as the positioning of most villages relative to external markets. He states, “Today mobility, this effective adaptation to harsh, remote living conditions, has been undermined and replaced with the ‘persistent village’ typically located in remote and isolated regions, economically as well as physically distant from centers of wealth and power” (p. 330). He further argues that, the Bureau of Education’s role in using schools as magnets for settlement, helped to “produce current population densities that are sustainable only with outside



assistance” (p. 343). This certainly proved to be the case for both Viihtaii and Vashraii K’oo who would struggle in coming decades to maintain control over the course of village development decision-making.

### **Chapter Reflections**

An analysis of the interview data, supplemented by other sources of literature, revealed a gradual transition from Neets’aii camps to semi-permanent and then permanent communities. While various scholars have speculated as to the significance of different factors in catalyzing the settlement process, the demands of Western educational institutions emerged as a key factor in this research. Early efforts to expose Neets’aii children to Western knowledge was an intentional decision achieved through strategic marriage alliances with women who spoke English and could fill the role of teachers. Women such as Hannah Stevens, Ellen Tritt, and Katherine Peter, were instrumental in delivering a model of education that was flexible enough to accommodate the traditional Neets’aii lifestyle. As education became more institutionalized and increasingly driven by missionaries and agencies, the mobility of Neets’aii families changed resulting in the women and children spending more time in villages while the men carried on seasonal activity patterns. The two aspects of the Neets’aii planning model that remained relatively stable throughout this period of change were the strategic and disciplined nature of decision-making which carried over into new arenas.

## Chapter 6

### *Kwaiik'it Gwich'in Eenjit Gwintl'oo Geegoo 'aii*

In Gwich'in, the phrase, *kwaiik'it gwich'in eenjit gwintl'oo geegoo 'aii*, is used when describing something that is of importance to the community and the people. Chapter Six discusses findings related to the third research question: What are key Neets'ąıı community development values that have persisted? According to Mark D. Bennet and Joan McIver Gibson (2006), “Values are the foundation of our opinions, preferences, choices, and decisions. We cannot and do not make value-free decisions” (p. xvi). Values play a particularly important role in community development decision-making. For example, if residents of a community place a particularly high value on green space, they are more likely to support investment in parks, trails, and natural landscapes. This process is generally referred to as value based decision-making. The focus of this chapter is to explore the ways in which the Neets'ąıı have engaged in value-based decision-making in the arena of community development.

#### **Values Based Decision-Making**

Professional planners are trained to assist communities and organizations with identifying their core values as a basis for decision-making. A challenge that I have personally encountered in this process is that groups frequently shift into either talking about values that they aspire to but perhaps not currently practice, or they default to a laundry list of generic value statements such as innovation, efficiency, etc. While the latter terms often do carry important meaning, they are also so general that it becomes difficult to “operationalize” them in ways that can practically inform everyday decision-making. Furthermore, authors James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras (1996) argue that, “Only a few values can be truly core—that is, so fundamental and deeply held

that they will change seldom, if ever” (p. 67). In an organizational context they define core values as a system of guiding principles and tenets that, when coupled with clarity around core purpose (i.e. reason for existing), become a powerful foundation from which groups can begin to make strategic decisions about managing continuity and change.

In a community setting, core values serve a similar purpose and importance. To illustrate, several years ago a colleague and I travelled to a coastal village that was facing the need to relocate due to climate change impacts. The community had been working with multiple state and federal agencies to navigate the incredibly complex process of planning a phased relocation. Some of the agencies had longstanding relationships with the village while others were relative newcomers. At the time, the leadership recognized the benefit of identifying a set of core values that could guide decision-making into the future. While the village undoubtedly possessed traditional values that long governed how people engaged with one another and their environment, it was not necessarily obvious how such values could directly inform relocation decision-making, particularly in a context where the balance of power weighed so heavily in favor of outside agencies. My colleague and I were charged with facilitating a community conversation, much of which took place in the local Yup’ik dialect, around core values. The value statements that emerged during this community conversation were structured into a set of guiding principles that could serve multiple purposes. First and foremost, they offered the local leadership a framework for determining whether or not decisions made in relation to the relocation were in alignment with their core values. Secondly, the guiding principles offered partner agencies insight into which aspects of life were most important to the village as defined by the people themselves.

Although most Alaska Native groups share somewhat similar values, each region is also unique as demonstrated by the Alaska Native Values poster developed by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network. A general list of Athabascan Values was compiled during a Denakkanaaga Elders Conference in 1985 which included the following: *self-sufficiency and hard work, care and provision for the family, family relations and unity, love for children, village cooperation and responsibility to village, humor, honesty and fairness, sharing and caring, respect for Elders and others, respect for knowledge and wisdom from life experiences, respect for the land and nature, practice of Native traditions, honoring ancestors, and spirituality* (“Alaska Native Knowledge Network,” 2018). While it could be said that the Gwich’in share in many of these general values, it is also important to recognize differences in interpretations of these values by region and culture. To my knowledge, there have been multiple attempts over time to articulate a set of values that are unique to the Gwich’in. Part of the challenge of this task however has to do with both the diversity of Gwich’in communities as well as dialectal differences. Table 8 includes a list of Gwich’in values and principles as articulated by the Gwich’in Tribal Council. Table 9 contains a slightly different list of Gwich’in values from the 2014 Biennial Gwich’in Gathering.

The two examples illustrate the variability in expressions of Gwich’in values. Some of this variation can be attributed to the source(s) that inform the value identification, the language that the values were vocalized in (Gwich’in or English), as well as the quality of translation among other factors. An additional complexity is that many concepts in *Dinjii Zhuh K’yaa* derive meaning from the context in which they are used, as discussed in Chapter Four. Unlike English, it is unusual for a single word in Gwich’in to effectively communicate a concept as dynamic and complex as *yiinji’ hidhoh’ee* (“respect”).

Table 8

*Gwich'in Values & Principles*

Values	Principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Honor</li> <li>• Love</li> <li>• Kindness</li> <li>• Dance/Song</li> <li>• Laughter/Humour</li> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Our Stories</li> <li>• Spirituality</li> <li>• Honesty &amp; Fairness</li> <li>• Sharing &amp; Caring</li> </ul>	<p>Our elders play a crucial role as teachers. They are the source of traditional knowledge, history, language and culture.</p> <p>The Gwich'in way of life is based on a unique and special economic and spiritual relationship between the land and water.</p> <p>The preservation and respect for the land are essential to the well-being and subsistence lifestyle of our people and our culture.</p> <p>Our family history is important to our identity as Gwich'in.</p> <p>All Gwich'in have a role to play in keeping the culture alive.</p> <p>Cross-cultural understanding and awareness between Gwich'in and non-Gwich'in is essential in building a new respect and understanding in today's global economy.</p>

*Note.* (Gwich'in Tribal Council, 2018)

Table 9

*Gwich'in Values*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect – <i>yiinji' hidhoh'ee</i></li> <li>• Honor – <i>yiinji gwichil'ee</i></li> <li>• Love – <i>th'at' agwiiniidhan</i></li> <li>• Kindness – <i>zhzhghadidich'uu</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laughter – <i>oh'dlaa</i></li> <li>• Teaching – <i>ga'oonaatan</i></li> <li>• Our Stories - <i>diigwandak</i></li> <li>• Dance/Song - <i>oodzoo/igidlii</i></li> </ul>
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*Note.* The Gwich'in Values were taken from promotional items (e.g., T-shirts) handed out at the 2014 Biennial Gwich'in Gathering.

As a person of Neets'ąjį descent, I have yet to come across a list of values that neatly captures the ways in which we are taught to live and to regard others and the world around us. Such values, rather, are learned through stories and teachings and then fostered through lived experiences. During my own lifetime, I have witnessed Neets'ąjį values in action within the home, in the community, and on the land. To illustrate, during community potlatches it is common knowledge among our people that elders are the first to be served food. Similarly, when boys harvest their first *vadzaih* (caribou) or *dinjik* (moose), families know to distribute the meat around the community. All of these practices, and more, are manifestations of Neets'ąjį values in action. Since beginning this research, I have come to better understand how it is that our leadership uses our value system to drive community development decision-making as it relates to Vashraįį K'ųų and Vįįhtąjį.

### ***Neets'ąjį Community Development Values***

The following section discusses key Neets'ąjį community development values that emerged from the analysis of interviews and literary sources. Thanks to the assistance of a fluent language speaker, the themes from this analysis were organized under three overarching concepts in *Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa*, which serve as an organizing framework.

- a. *Yeenii gwiindhat datthak diinan tra'ahil'ee ts'à' gwinzii k'erahtii*
- b. *Jii kwaiik'it gwizhit jidii datthak, zeh, taii deegwiindhan gwik'it gwariltsaii*
- c. *Dinjii zhuu tr'inlii ts'à' ch'eet'inegwiindhan nileenjit tr''ii'ii ts'à' chan nileerahil'ee.*  
*Jidii datthak haa nihts'ariinyaa*

The meaning(s) of each concept is described in greater detail throughout the following sections.

### *Yeenii Gwiindhat Datthak Diinan Tra'ahil'ee Ts'à' Gwinzii K'erahtii*

The expression, *yeenii gwiindhat datthak diinan tra'ahil'ee ts'à' gwinzii k'erahtii*, is used to convey how our people have cared for and respected our land 'since a long time ago'. In nearly every interview with Neets'ąıı elders, past and present, there is some mention of our land and the inherent responsibility that we have to safeguard it. Since contact, the traditional territory of the Neets'ąıı has been threatened by numerous forces including encroachment, ownership transfers, and resource extraction. In a (post)colonial context, the Neets'ąıı have frequently found themselves to be in value-conflict with others, particularly on issues relating to the use and management of lands and resources. A consistent theme in the history of the region is the ongoing fight to uphold Neets'ąıı land values using whatever legal and political means available. According to *Nakhai' T'ini'in*, "Tribal members have made it clear that protecting the land is the number one concern for the future" (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 15). The following paragraphs describe commonly referenced moments in Neets'ąıı history where land values were reported to have informed the course of community development decision-making.

#### **(Post)colonial Neets'ąıı Land Use Planning**

*We know that tomorrow will be different than today  
for our children and we must give them good land,  
like it was given to us.*

—Arctic Village Council (1991)

In the late 1930s/early 1940s, the Neets'ąıı began mobilizing to secure their traditional territory in response to increased trapping activity by non-Natives. A central figure in catalyzing this effort was John Fredson.

In 1940, a Gwich'in Indian man named John Fredson saw that our people must continue to govern ourselves or face extinction. John Fredson saw that our people, our lives, our

traditional ways would soon be challenged by the outside world. John Fredson knew that white people would soon want what we, as Gwich'in Indians, value most: our land and animals. To protect us, he went to the white man's school and learned their ways. John Fredson never forgot us, he dedicated his life to the Gwich'in people, so that we could remain true Gwich'in Indian people and not be forced into another way of thinking or another way of life. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 37)

Quickly recognizing the threats that encroachment posed to the Neets'ąıı way of life, Fredson took advantage of an amendment to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (applied to Alaska in 1936), which enabled Alaskan tribes to petition Congress for reservations. During this period, few Neets'ąıı people spoke English and most families were, in fact, still living in widely scattered camps that added to the immense amount of groundwork needed to effectively make decisions relating to the petition process. One example of the logistical challenges that Fredson faced was meeting the requirement of posting public notices informing Neets'ąıı people of a scheduled election to vote on the reservation. In a letter written on January 17, 1944 to Reinholt Brust, General Superintendent of the Alaska Indian Service, Fredson described his attempts to distribute notices throughout various semi-permanent settlements.

One notice left here on the 12<sup>th</sup>, to be posted at Sookoo or Martin Creek about 35 miles from here on the Fort Yukon trail. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, one Notice left here to be posted at Robert's Fish Camp [K'ahtsik]. And also on the 15<sup>th</sup>, another Notice was sent to the Arctic Village people who are camping on Salmon River via Fort Yukon. This last one went this way because we heard some of the men were in Fort Yukon. So unless you instruct otherwise, I believe this completes the posting of the Notices on the proposed Reservation. (Arctic Village Council, 1991)



Despite the decentralization of the Neets’ąjį community at the time, many families made the commitment to travel to Vįįhtąjį during *khaii* (winter) to participate in the elections that took place on November 25, 1943. Table 10 on the following page includes a breakdown of the distribution of Neets’ąjį voters by residence.

Table 10

*Distribution of Votes to Establish the Venetie Indian Reservation*

Residence	Population	# of voters	# voted	Absent
Arctic Village, people at Sheenjik, Alaska or Salmon River	41	19	12	7
Christian Village	24	12	11	1
Robert’s Fish Camp	32	11	0	11
Sooko (Marten Creek) 35 miles from Venetie	3	3	3	0
Venetie	69	27	21	4
	169	72	47	23

*Note.* Source: Arctic Village Council (1991).

Regarding the election results, Fredson noted that Robert’s Fish Camp was not represented “though all wished that the Reservation would be obtained” (Arctic Village Council, 1991). While Fredson is rightfully credited for his role in mobilizing the Neets’ąjį people to petition for a reservation, it is important to recognize that he was supported by the broader community who shared in his vision.

Many of today’s elders supported John Fredson at the time he was working for our land and our people. They helped John Fredson with wood, food and even a cabin while he was writing letters to the federal government and traveling to Washington, DC (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 37)

A component of the petition process was the formalization of traditional Neets’ąjį governance structures through the establishment of the Native Village of Venetie in 1940.

According to Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ elder Gideon James, “The very purpose of this tribal government was for the tribe to maintain control over their land and water and to be able to continue to practice their spiritual and cultural activities” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 45). While the proposed boundary of the Reservation did not encompass the entire traditional territory of the Neets'ǰǰ, it did strategically include many key hunting, fishing and trapping areas. After years of planning and disciplined action, the Venetie Indian Reservation was made official in 1943. At the time, the securing of 1.8 million acres of our traditional land was a monumental victory for the Neets'ǰǰ. No one had reason to expect, however, that the same values that guided the decision to form the reservation would again be tested during the era of land claims in Alaska.

For the Neets'ǰǰ, an important consequence of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 was that it effectively dissolved the seven reservations (including Venetie) that were established under the 1936 amendment to the Indian Reorganization Act. In *Nakhai' T'ini'in*, Gideon James described being selected as one of eight individuals from the Doyon region to help interpret ANSCA. The decision facing the Neets'ǰǰ people was whether or not to lay claims to their land through the township provision under ANCSA, which Gideon had concerns about.

The interpretation that I use is that I try to make them understand that under township they will only cover area around their village. For Arctic Village, 3 townships, 90,000 acres, maybe less than that, according to population. The ownership is not clear. Three townships and control over only the surface, 70% surface rights to the township. The 30% of that goes to the regional corporation. The regional corporation consists of maybe over 40 villages (Doyon). When you come back to the definition of ownership, you have

a very little fraction of the amount that goes to the village of the individual. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 4 of Gideon James interview)

In the end, the Neets'ąjį were compelled under ANCSA to form two village corporations as a mechanism for assuming title to former reservation lands. The corporate model however did not sit well with many Neets'ąjį leaders who immediately began conversations with community members to strategize next steps. In an interview with Vįįhtąjį elder, Robert Frank, he described his experience serving as a tribal leader during these conversations.

Well, I was a village leader that time when all the land claim thing. I always tell these people around here, Arctic and here, we work together, just like all those other chiefs way before Gideon, his dad and everything. All those guys. I used to work with them because I was the leader down there. I said that I think we're really doing the wrong thing going with ANCSA. I said we've already got land set aside for us. I really encourage them. And you know what they did? They just came in and tried to incorporate us without saying. Just like "okay, we got to do this. This is the law they passed" you know? By my thinking is, "Why do that while got 1.8 million acres, we can't give up 1.8 million acres of land." Why are we – we can't give up 1.8 million acres of land. So I said to our attorney, NARF [Native American Rights Fund] and we got a private attorney too from Anchorage. And I said, "Hey, we should try and get out of that corporation. Let's go up to Arctic and let's put this thing together, and then we're going to try to make a ballot." (R. Frank, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

The question before voters was, "Do we want to go with ANSCA or keep our land"? Once again, the strength of Neets'ąjį land use values prevailed in terms of guiding community development decision-making.

Our tribal leaders were shrewd. In less than one year, they formed a village corporation in Venetie and Arctic Village, selected our traditional lands under ANCSA, and then held an election in 1974 which deeded 1.8 million acres in fee simple title to the tribal government of the Venetie Indian Reservation and dissolved the ANCSA village corporation charter. Now, there are few complications with our tribal lands. There is no city, no borough, no easements or rights-of-way within our tribal, traditional lands.

(Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 39)

Today, the 1.8 million acres of the Venetie Indian Reserve is managed by the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government (NVVTG), which is composed of five elected tribal council members from Viihtajj and four from Vashrajj K'oo. At the time that the legal status of the land changed from a "Reservation" under the Indian Reorganization Act to a "Reserve" formed under an Executive Order, it was unclear what challenges this would pose to Neets'ajj sovereignty. In fact, it was not until 1986 when NVVTG attempted to levy a tribal tax for business conducted on tribal land that they found themselves embroiled in a legal battle with the State of Alaska. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1998 where the high court held that ANSCA largely extinguished Indian Country in Alaska. While the ruling has been interpreted as a setback for Alaska Native tribes, the Neets'ajj continue to feel strongly in the position that we never gave up our sovereign rights to make decisions regarding the land as illustrated by the following quote from Vashrajj K'oo elder Sarah James.

You have to use your sovereignty rights to the land because we have that. And that's never been taken away. We never gave up our sovereignty rights, so that's how we got this piece of land. And we have to be sovereign, and consistent, and teach that sovereign

rights to our next generation because they can do development. (S. James, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

Another mechanism capitalized upon by the Neets'ąjį in order to uphold their land values was the Alaska Native Allotment Act of 1906. The Act enabled qualifying Alaska Natives to apply for up to 160 acres of unappropriated land. To be eligible, applicants had to reside in Alaska, be an Alaska Native, and be at least twenty-one years old or the head of a family (Case & Voluck, 2002). Because the Neets'ąjį had been so successful in securing a significant portion of their traditional territory, the residents of Vashraqį K'qq and Vįhtąjį did not actually begin the process of filing for individual Native allotments until the 1970s. According to *shee'ii* Trimble Gilbert, it was a local teacher by the name of Bob Martin who initially worked with the people of Vashraqį K'qq to navigate the process of filing for allotments. Trimble described how the community worked together to identify areas that were of strategic importance to Neets'ąjį families but which fell outside of the Venetie Indian Reserve boundary.

The boats brought 60 people to the most important place, like here in Red Sheep Creek.

They know that it's a good hunting area, so they used their name. I have mine [allotment] here somewhere. They want to hold that land, that's why they did it that way. (T. Gilbert, personal communication, June 16, 2014)

One of the first places that the people of Vashraqį K'qq sought to protect was a communal fishing spot called Old John Lake located on the northeast corner of the reserve boundary. Once allotments were selected along the lakefront, people began laying claim to parcels in other culturally significant areas. The Gilbert family, for example, having spent much of their time around an area locally referred to as First Tower, filed for allotments in that region. Although individual land ownership was a relatively new concept to Neets'ąjį people, allotments became a

key strategy to extend protection over outlying lands. Over time, however, the management of these parcels has become more challenging as original allotment holders pass away and their lands are willed to multiple heirs. As this cycle repeats, the land becomes further and further fractured, which poses serious concerns for the practical use and management of allotments.

A more recent test of Neets'ąıı land values has come in the form of increased mining activity north of Vııhtąıı. Responding to community concerns regarding the potential impacts of mining on water quality, NVVTG established the T'ee Drin Jik Tribal Conservation District in 2014. As one of 13 tribal conservation districts in Alaska, the mission of T'ee Drin Jik is "to protect and preserve the natural resources of the land and waters through traditional values for healthy current and future generations." The conservation district covers the entire 1.8 million acres and is managed under NVVTG. While the organization is still very new, the leadership of Vashrııı K'ıı and Vııhtąıı has been actively exploring ways in which T'ee Drin Jik can serve as a mechanism for opening new opportunities to support tribal land priorities.

***Jii Kwaii K'it Gwizhit Jidii Datthak, Zheh, Taii Deegwiindhan Gwik'it Gwariltsaii***

The second overarching concept, *Jii kwaii k'it gwizhit jidii datthak, zheh, taii deegwiindhan gwik'it gwariltsaii*, refers to the practice of building our community the way we want it. During the early settlement period, Neets'ąıı people worked together to construct log cabins, churches, schoolhouses, and other community-based projects relying primarily upon local materials and volunteers. Beginning in the 1960s and 70s, federal agencies became more involved in the arena of village infrastructure development, often relying upon outside engineers, contractors and other professionals to make decisions regarding facility placement, design, construction and operation. Like other Alaska Native peoples at the time, the Neets'ąıı grappled with responding to new needs that emerged in response to permanent settlement. Rural Alaska

had entered into a new era of (post)colonial infrastructure development which would test the ability of the Neets'ąjį to self-determine the physical development of Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ and Viįhtąjį.

### **(Post)colonial Neets'ąjį Infrastructure Development**

Besides schools, public washaterias were among the earliest forms of modern infrastructure in Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ and Viįhtąjį. The construction of washeterias in rural Alaska was part of a pilot project that began in 1972 to improve village sanitation and water quality under the U.S. Public Health Service. At the onset of the construction of Vashraįį K'q̄q̄'s washeteria, the community responded to a bid to supply logs for the foundation, which they ultimately provided. The actual walls, however, were prefabricated from a factory in Michigan and were supposedly designed to effectively insulate the facility. The washeteria was powered by several generators that required a steady supply of fuel. Soon after the facility was constructed, the community began to recognize numerous design flaws, which resulted in recurring mechanical issues and system failures. For example, in 1979, the system that drew water from a nearby lake froze (Caulfield, 1983, p. 95). In a separate incident, the sewage lagoon that was connected to the facility eventually failed and spilled into a nearby lake. The village eventually adopted a haul system whereby individual homes were equipped with fiberglass holding tanks used to contain household waste. The tanks themselves proved difficult to drain due to the "L" shaped design. They also added significant weight to the house foundations and were prone to cracking if any part of the system shifted. Over time the washeteria fell into a state of disrepair. The facility was eventually turned over to the village to mostly serve as a power plant and a garage for repairing equipment. Today, the abandoned facility, which can be characterized as an "eyesore," still stands in the middle of Vashraįį K'q̄q̄. In 2007, it was identified by the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council as a potential brownfields site; however, no funding has been secured to date

to aid in demolition. Viihtajj had a similarly disappointing experience with their first water and sewer project which resulted in an underground system of pipes that froze during the first winter.

Both Vashrajj K'qq and Viihtajj have experienced their share of infrastructure projects that were not only poorly designed but also poorly managed. Many of the early infrastructure projects were put out to bid and eventually awarded to private contractors. While not all contractors operated exactly the same, many often preferred to bring in their own crews, which resulted in little or no economic benefit to the villages. Disagreements often erupted between contractors and village leaders fueling further dissatisfaction with the model of externally driven development. The passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 ("Public Law 638") was an important shift in Federal Indian Policy that created opportunities for tribes across the country to exercise greater control over the management of 638 programs. Along with this shift came new capacity and resources that enabled the Neets'ajj to once again exert self-determination over key aspects of their lives as well as the built environment. The desire to do so is reflected in a quote within *Nakhai' T'ini'in* which states, "We are the best people to make decisions for the tribal good, because we have the most at stake" (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 38).

A key part of the Neets'ajj strategy involved developing its workforce but also building tribal administrative capacity to pursue and manage grants. In an interview with Arctic Village Council Chief Jonathon John (June 19, 2014), he describes the learning curve associated with administering the installation of a high line power project in Vashrajj K'qq in the 1980s:

We had to bring in an accountant just to learn the basic accounting. We sat there for two days trying to learn and take over the grant. From there, we brought in a grant guy and he taught us and from there, we picked it up. Oh, man, it was crazy. We had five or six plans. We have five or six check boxes. We had all general funds but each plan has to



have its own account, so we've been following that but that's how they learned to do the grant. It was our first round, and a lot of things went on, but finally at the end we made it through. It closed out, that's the main thing.

Over time both Vashraġi K'oo and Viġhtajġ became increasingly successful with securing grants for a variety of village projects. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, between 1998 and 2003, a total of \$483,452,291 in federal funding was awarded to Alaska villages. Of that amount, 38% was split between 13 villages (62% was split between 203 villages). The Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government (Arctic Village Council and Venetie Village Council combined) was among the villages that received the most federal funds awarded to Alaska tribes (4%) (U.S. Government Accountability Office, August 2005). Table 11 includes a breakdown of the funding distribution to Alaska villages by top federal agencies.

Table 11

*Federal Funding Received by Villages, 1998–2003*

Agency	Program name (CFDA)	Total funding	% of total funding
HUD	Indian Housing Block Grants	\$104,068,580	22
EPA	Indian Environmental General Assistance	\$63,269,797	13
HHS	Indian Health Service Health Management Development Program	\$47,721,221	10
Interior	Tribal Self-Governance	\$45,500,244	9
DOT	Airport Improvement Program	\$17,545,183	4
Commerce	Economic Adjustment Assistance	\$11,705,345	2
Justice	Public Safety Partnership and Community Policing Grants	\$9,766,546	2
USDA	Water and Waste Disposal Systems for Rural Communities	\$6,017,480	1
Education	Alaska Native Educational Planning, Curriculum Development, Teacher Training, and Recruitment Program	\$1,497,690	<1
	103 other programs	\$176,360,205	36
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$483,452,291</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note.* Reproduced from *Alaska Native Villages: Recent Federal Assistance Exceeded \$3 Billion, with Most Provided*

to *Regional Nonprofits* (p. 19), by U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005, Washington, DC: Author. Copyright 2005 by U.S. Government Accountability Office.

According to a statement in *Nakhai' T'ini'in*, “Our tribe has had far more success running our own community development projects under Arctic Village Council control than has any bureaucracy that exists hundreds of miles away” (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 15). During my interviews, participants regularly referenced the need for the tribal governments to be in the driver’s seat when it comes making decisions regarding village infrastructure as illustrated by the following quote from a tribal member.

Well, this project here, it really went well for us. We have complete control over it. All the foremen and all the people who take care of the payroll, they were from here. We had complete control over it. And we had people who were kind of in charge, taking care of the hours and stuff like that. So it really went well. (Tribal member, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

In a (post)colonial context, village infrastructure development is not just about the end result of a much-needed facility (though that is absolutely critical). Such projects are also important in terms of creating training and employment opportunities for local workers. The economic benefits captured from infrastructure projects has, in fact, become a factor in shaping local perceptions about whether or not a capital project was “successful” as demonstrated by the following quote.

The Arctic Village Council has had a fair degree of success designing, constructing and maintaining several village-based construction projects in the past. These projects have increased the economic cash economy of the village by creating jobs in heavy equipment, carpentry, maintenance, plumbing, electrical and other construction fields. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 26)

By putting values of self-determination, local control, and hard work into action, the Neets'ąjį successfully repositioned themselves within the arena of village infrastructure development. Over time, those very same values carried over into decision-making regarding housing development in Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ and Viįhtąį.

### **(Post)colonial Neets'ąjį Housing Development**

The first cabins constructed in Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ and Viįhtąį (and along traplines in the surrounding area) were simple, single room log structures. In Vashraįį K'q̄q̄, Neets'ąjį families worked together to harvest logs from key locations typically floating them back to the village on rafts. The most significant costs associated with these cabins were people's time and energy. Beginning in the 1960s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs became more involved in village housing projects in rural Alaska. Housing development funded by the government gave rise to the need for subdivision planning which serves to divide land into individual lots. This style of development created a different type of footprint as far as the built environment in most villages. Whereas before, village residents had more freedom in terms of where and how to build their homes, federal housing regulations began to dictate decision-making regarding suitable site locations, housing eligibility, and construction standards.

In 1971, Alaska passed a statute that resulted in the creation of fourteen Alaska Native Regional Housing Authorities. Among those entities is the Interior Regional Housing Authority (IRHA), which administers housing programming for 34 Athabascan tribes. In 1996, Congress passed the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA), which consolidated a number of federal housing programs targeting Native Americans with the intent of offering tribal governments greater control over housing programs. Rather than joining IRHA, Vashraįį K'q̄q̄ and Viįhtąį opted to form their own tribal housing authorities, which was

a bold step given the complexity of modern tribal housing development. For example, before housing construction can even begin, funding has to be secured, site(s) must be identified, site control obtained, environmental reviews completed, materials and supplies transported, and skilled labor hired. The decision, however, of the Arctic Village Council and the Venetie Village Council to operate their own tribal housing authorities is very much consistent with their philosophy on locally controlled development. The model has enabled them to be in the driver's seat of housing development decision-making and to aggressively pursue funding for housing projects. When the current tribal housing director, Dave DeLong, began working for the Arctic Village Council in 1996, he encountered both a general lack of housing as well as substandard housing conditions.

Well, the first thing we did was write a home grant. I wrote a home grant for three houses and we built those and we started climbing the learning curve. And then we got a Indian Community Development Block [ICDBG] grant and then NAHASDA came. So that happened in '99 and then we were able to use those funds to – well, back then we had enough money to even build a house – but we used those monies also to leverage further ICDBG funds. So that's basically what we've been doing you know? Keeping that program going and going and getting these competitive funds to build more housing. And, you know, our success has been a combination of well... I'm good at grant writing, we're good at administering and the people in Arctic Village and Venetie have been turning out the product, you know. (D. DeLong, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

Over the past two decades, Vashraǰi K'ǝǝ and Viǰhtǰi have successfully built over 60 homes between the two communities. This is an incredible feat when considering that many tribes wait decades to construct one or two homes due to limited NAHASDA funding and the

highly competitive nature of supplemental housing funding. According to Delong, the success of Vashraji K'oo and Vihhtaji can be attributed to a variety of factors including skilled grant writing, decision-making through the respective Councils, and the use of force accounting to employ local workforces. He stated, "We use totally local crews; we don't bring anyone in. I am the only outsider that's involved and really I just get the project set up for them, get them the materials here and they do the construction" (D. Delong, personal communication, June 18, 2014). Through tribal force accounting the housing authorities are able to bypass the requirement of putting housing projects out to bid.

Now most [Housing and Urban Development] projects you would contract and hire a private contractor but we use what is called the Indian force account, which is the grantee's labor force. We have an in-house labor force. If we didn't do that, we would have to go out to bid and if we went out to bid, the lowest bidder would get the job and he would probably bring his people in, you know. (D. Delong, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

Another key difference between modern housing development in Vashraji K'oo and as opposed to other rural communities relates to the land status. For most villages, complex land ownership patterns often pose significant barriers to subdivision planning and subsequent housing development. This is particularly the case in situations where the local tribe owns little or no land and therefore has to enter into long-term leases with the city government and/or village corporation to obtain site control. With NVVTG owning 1.8 million acres in fee simple title, planning for housing development in Vashraji K'oo, for example, is driven less by land availability than by suitability and proximity to roads and utility infrastructure.

It's quite difficult here in Arctic because there's a lot of wetlands, and we wanna stay out of those. We wanna stay on the road system because we really don't wanna be building roads and we don't wanna build power line infrastructure. So all those things kind of come together and determine where the sites are gonna be and we try to make the homeowner happy... we want them to be happy with where they're at. (D. DeLong, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

Guided by their values of self-determination, local control, and hard work, the Neets'ąįį effectively changed the development paradigm to better reflect their desire to build their communities the way they want.

***Dinjii Zhuu Tr'inlii Ts'a' Ch'ee't'ineegwiindhan Nileenjit Tr'ii'ii Ts'à'  
Chan Nilerahil'ee. Jidii Datthak Haa Nihts'ariinyaa***

The third and final concept, *dinjii zhuu tr'inlii ts'a' ch'ee't'ineegwiindhan nileenjit tr'ii'ii ts'à' chan nilerahil'ee. Jidii datthak haa nihts'ariinyaa*, refers to the love and respect our people have for one another that is expressed through the practice of helping each other. During my interviews, as well as those in *Nakhai' T'ini'in*, Neets'ąįį elders referred to dozens of examples that illustrated the relational interdependence of our people. Prior to settlement, Neets'ąįį camps maintained communication across vast distances in the interest of collective survival. In a (post)colonial context, the value of interdependence has been regularly challenged by the overwhelmingly individualistic culture of Western society. At times, the Neets'ąįį have struggled to ensure that the collective good continues to be at the forefront of community decision-making yet these values continue to persist. Discussions with village leaders revealed an abiding consideration for these values, which has helped to ensure more equitable development and employment at the local level.

## **Equity in Development**

The decision to manage their own tribal housing authorities has positioned the Venetie Village Council and Arctic Village Council to directly influence decisions related to who will occupy newly constructed homes, what the criteria are for determining priority, how many residents will benefit from housing projects, etc. During an interview with Arctic Village Council Chief, Jonathon John, he described the first housing project that the tribe assumed management over which was driven, in part, by the desire to extend the benefits of limited funding.

Tanana Chiefs came in doing an assessment of each house all over for rehabbing. They came around and then after that TCC got a grant for housing rehab and it says we're only going to do 35 houses. We took that grant away from them by resolution and that's the first federal grant that we did. That's the one that Dave DeLong and Jeff Weltzin came in and helped us on that, doing it on our own. We did for force account on that doing housing rehab. That's the first grant that we went down river and got logs, floated it down, sawed and nailed them up trying to spread the whole thing around. \$239,000 and we did almost 50 houses of rehab with that money. We working for about \$10.00 an hour, okay, so that stretched it a lot. (J. John, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

Similar principles of equity are applied in other aspects of housing development including design and construction as illustrated in the following quote by DeLong.

We build basically a modern Alaskan craftsman home and they're pretty energy efficient. I like to think that they're fairly safe. We sheetrock them completely on the inside with 5/8 Type X, you know. So I think we build a pretty quality product. And we've kind of stuck with the same design. We do what I like to think of as a Mercedes Benz approach. We don't put tailfins on one year and take them off the next. We've made some very

small changes and sometimes we found those small changes didn't work so we went back, but basically we've tried to stick with the tried and true and not doing anything real different, you know? It's an Alaska craftsman model house. There's other ways to build houses and I think other ways have got their value. The main thing is we've got a good way of doing it and the people know it and so we've stuck with that. (D. DeLong, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

An advantage of consistency in housing design is that it fosters equity in terms of the skills required of local workers. According to Chief John, "All of these are the same measurement...they remember the measurements from last year. They do the same thing. It's just a configuration inside, and that's the only thing that's changed. But, all of the things are all the same." (J. John, personal communication, June 19, 2014)

### **Equity in Employment**

In rural Alaska where jobs can be few and far between, infrastructure and housing development projects serve as important sources of local employment. According to *Nakhai' T'ini'in*, "Generally, when people must go away to work every year, the quality of life in Arctic Village goes down, because our people are separated from each other" (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 14). As mentioned previously, there was a tendency to outsource early infrastructure projects to private contractors, often resulting in little or no economic benefit to villages. A common rationale for not hiring local residents was the supposed lack of skilled workers. In the mainstream construction industry, skilled laborers have a greater likelihood of not only being hired initially but also of staying employed for as long as their skills are needed on a project. *Vashrajj K'oq* and *Vijhtajj* operate from a very different approach to construction management. Rather than simply identifying the most skilled laborers to work from start to finish on housing



projects, the tribal housing authorities rotate workers every two weeks. This rotation functions to extend the economic benefit of limited job opportunities. From an administrative standpoint, this model creates additional work in terms of hiring employees, on-the-job training, and tax reporting; however according to DeLong, the benefits outweigh the burden.

So people sometimes say “could we do more?” and we might be able to do more but we have our core crew of guys like carpenters and equipment operators that we rotate every two weeks. For my position, that’s kind of a lot of work. When we were doing the stimulus, we had a half million dollar payroll but we had over a hundred W2s so it’s administratively quite burdensome. And some of these people don’t have that much experience and maybe they don’t contribute that much but they do get two weeks of work, they are exposed to the work environment so we try to balance our mission which is ultimately, we gotta turn that house out and we got the skilled guys to make sure the quality is there you know.

He further stated:

There’s a lot of people who you know – a little bit of work can go a long ways because somebody works a little bit, they can get unemployment or it contributes, and then earned income credit, you know? It’s a big difference to make a few thousand dollars as making none. The earned income, especially with kids, can make a big difference. So it helps people. It’s a hassle for me, but I don’t argue with it. It’s good that everybody gets a chance to work. (D. DeLong, personal communication, June 18, 2014)

Statements, such as those included above, are illustrative of the Neets’ajj philosophy on development and the importance of creating opportunities to maximize equitable outcomes for tribal members and their families.

## Chapter Reflections

In this chapter, I identify three concepts in *Dinji Zhuh K'yaa* that serve as an organizing framework for key Neets'ąįį community development values that have persisted: *land, self-determination, local control, hard work, love, respect, and helping one another*. By putting these values into action, the Neets'ąįį were able to grow their spheres of control and influence over many aspects of modern village development despite regular challenges to their self-determination.



## Chapter 7

*It'ee Jyaa Dagwahtsii Gwizhrih, Jidii Gagwadhal'e', Jidii Gwal'in,  
Jidii Gwadoiik'ii, Datthak Geegihe' Et'ee Daanagwaljik*

In Gwich'in, the phrase, *it'ee jyaa dagwahtsii gwizhrih, jidii gagwadhal'e', jidii gwal'in, jidii gwadoiik'ii, datthak geegihe' et'ee daanagwaljik*, is used to describe the conclusion of everything I saw, learned, and heard. In Chapter Seven, I summarize the four key findings of this research and discuss their implications. Those findings include the following: a) planning is a Neets'ąjį tradition, b) settlement is an ongoing transition, c) modern village development has decreased self-reliance and increased dependency, and d) self-determined village development generates greater community benefits.

### Key Findings

#### Planning is a Neets'ąjį Tradition

An analysis of the data and existing literature on the Neets'ąjį Gwich'in revealed a well-established pattern of planning that predates Western contact and village settlement. Previous generations of Neets'ąjį demonstrated a clear ability to not only plan from season-to-season but also from generation-to-generation. The term “planning” continues to be somewhat of an awkward (and limiting) descriptor for the range of knowledge and activities related to Neets'ąjį decision-making. It is important, however, to recognize the Neets'ąjį tradition of being forward-thinking and taking disciplined action as displays of their inherent planning capacity. An examination into Neets'ąjį planning practices revealed a model that could be best characterized as *seasonal*, *strategic*, and *disciplined*. In a pre-settlement context, the Neets'ąjį exercised high degrees of control and influence over most aspects of their lives yet the harshness of the natural

environment posed constant challenges in terms of survival. As many Neets'ąıı elders described, survival required constant movement; however those movements also had to be calculated and well timed. The knowledge and skills required to exercise good decision-making in that regard was part of the education that Neets'ąıı boys and girls received from a young age.

As the lifestyle of the Neets'ąıı began to shift in relation to Western influences, their patterns of movement also changed. Historically, a family would move together as a unit with every member contributing towards camp life. This model was interrupted when local attempts at incorporating a Western education gave way to more institutionalized schooling administered by missionaries and then Bureau of Indian Affairs. The need for children to attend school forced Neets'ąıı families to adapt their planning model which resulted in the men primarily spending long periods of time on the land during *khaiits'à'*, *khaii*, and *shreenyaa*. While the context for planning may have changed considerably for the Neets'ąıı, the strategic and disciplined nature of their planning practices persisted. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the Neets'ąıı were confronted by various threats including those to their traditional lands and resource base. They also found themselves struggling in a post-settlement context with an externally driven model of village development that challenged Neets'ąıı self-determination. Through all of those developments however, the leadership remained consistently strategic and disciplined in their decision-making as illustrated by the following quote within *Nakhai' T'ini'in*.

Our ancestor's NEVER GAVE UP in anything they did and we are that way until today.

We will never give up on our human rights to determine our future, to manage our land or abandon our way of life. We know that some people will try to stop us or change us, but we will accept only those changes which are believed to be good for future generations, regardless of how hard it will be for us today. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 2)

Current generations of Neets'ąıı confront challenges that are very different than those of our parents', grandparents', and great-grandparents' time. Today, the people and leadership of Vashraıı K'ıı and Vııhtıı are faced with many new needs which often require some monetary investment. When it comes to village infrastructure in particular, that monetary investment has proven difficult, if not impossible, for the villages to respond to alone. In recent decades, the Neets'ąıı have recognized the importance of formalizing their planning practices in order to capitalize on various funding opportunities. In 1991, the Arctic Village Council took advantage of a grant through the Administration for Native Americans to develop a plan for preserving their cultural identity otherwise referred to throughout this manuscript as *Nakhai' T'ini'in*. In 2013, the community of Vııhtıı worked with the Tanana Chiefs Conference to develop its first written community development plan that outlined their goals and priorities for the future. Such plans resemble a Western planning framework, which is more easily recognizable to funders, agencies, and other outside audiences. The fact that these plans were published fairly recently might lead some to assume that the Neets'ąıı have had a relatively short history with planning. This, however, could not be further from the truth as evidenced by the examples discussed in Chapter Four. The implication of this finding is that the Neets'ąıı possess an inherent capacity to plan their lives and communities.

### **Settlement is an Ongoing Transition**

Though the seeds of Neets'ąıı settlement were sewn in the early 1900s, the transition from seasonal camps to permanent communities was a gradual process that occurred over the span of several decades. Considering that the Neets'ąıı trace their history back to a time when humans and animals spoke the same language and have been in their lands for over 10,000 years, a few decades represents little more than a sliver in time. For countless more generations, the

Neets'ąıı organized their lives according to the seasons of *khaiits'à'*, *khaii*, *shreenyaa*, and *shin*. Families would often camp apart only to come together periodically to harvest foods or to endure winter months (and, later, for holidays such as Christmas and New Year). For much of our history, the Neets'ąıı enjoyed the flexibility to determine where and when to move or who to move with. The traditional social and governance structures both reflected and reinforced this more fluid sense of community. The subsequent consolidation of the Neets'ąıı population into semi-permanent, and then permanent settlements, was not merely a physical change but rather a redefining of their sense of community and place.

Like other Alaska Native groups, the Neets'ąıı are a people of place with extraordinarily strong ties to their traditional territory. The term “Gwich'in” refers generally to a people; however, when coupled with place-name identifiers, it literally translates to the people of a certain location. The Vuntut Gwich'in, for example, are people of the lakes, whereas the Neets'ąıı Gwich'in are people of the northside. The desire to exercise stewardship over the places that our ancestors called home was a consistent theme in Neets'ąıı decision-making throughout the twentieth century. The establishment of the Venetie Indian Reserve (1943), the filing for individual allotments in key customary use areas, and the conveyance of former Reserve lands from village corporations to the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government (1979) are all examples of Neets'ąıı land values in action. The latter transfer actually made history as the biggest Native land conveyance in Alaska's history and “the largest contiguous tract the federal government has ever conveyed to private hands” (Lindbeck, 1979). By securing both the surface and subsurface title to a significant portion of their traditional territory, the Neets'ąıı essentially positioned themselves to be in the driver's seat regarding what type of development they will and will not consider as demonstrated by the following quote from

*Nakhai' T'ini'in*, "Our people are very proud to be the owners and controllers of 1.8 million acres of land, and we will not let money change our special status or consider any economic development project which could negatively affect our tribal lands" (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 15).

Although Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ are fairly well-established communities at this particular point in time, the degree to which they are "settled" remains somewhat debatable. *Shahan* (my mother), and others of her generation, were the last to be raised on the land moving from camp to camp. The ability to survive in that particular lifestyle required a certain mindset, knowledge, and skill set as well as a high degree of interdependence both within and among families. As subsequent generations spent more and more time in Vashraǰǰ K'ǰǰ and Vǰǰhtaǰǰ, the Neets'ǰǰ community settled into a new pattern of life. That adjustment has both posed challenges but also created new opportunities. Based on interviews with community members, it became clear that we are very much still a people in transition socially, economically, politically and otherwise.

The realization that "settlement" is, and continues to be, an ongoing process has several important implications. First, it offers insight into the fact that the context of our lifestyle has shifted so dramatically within the past few decades that we are still grappling with how to relate to one another and our surrounding environment in new ways. For modern Neets'ǰǰ families, living in a single location for 365 days a year is still a relatively new condition that sometimes creates interpersonal tensions and stressors within the community. The fact that fewer tribal members are spending long periods of time on the land also has implications for both individual and collective wellbeing. Hunting, fishing, picking berries, and other land-based traditions hold mental, social, and emotional benefits that extend far beyond the actual harvest. Secondly, this



research has clearly shown that past generations of Neets'ąıı did their best to provide for both present and future generations, yet Vashraıı K'ıı and Vııhtıı still face myriad issues that challenge the sustainability of both communities. High fuel costs, food insecurity, the lack of economic opportunities and other factors have created added layers of instability that manifests in the daily lives of village residents. Tribal leaders often find themselves in a constant position of reacting to immediate internal and external pressures, leaving little, if any, time to plan more long term, which is contrary to their planning model. No one can predict what the future holds for Vashraıı K'ıı and Vııhtıı in the next 50 or 100 years; however, by acknowledging that our people have always been, and continue to exist, in a state of transition and transformation, I believe, is a mindset that will help us to navigate whatever lies ahead.

### **Modern Village Development has Decreased Self-Reliance and Increased Dependency**

Similar to other rural communities in Alaska, Vashraıı K'ıı and Vııhtıı have become heavily reliant upon external investments to fund modern village development. Those investments often come in the form of grants, subsidies, and loans all of which have different strings attached that influence the direction, scope and timing of village projects. This situation, while not totally unique to rural Alaska, has served to decrease village self-reliance and increase external dependency. Unfortunately, much of the dominant narrative surrounding rural Alaska continues to pathologize villages for their perceived failure to be more sustainable or to effectively “resolve their own problems.” What Alaska Native people rarely get credit for is the extent to which their lives were self-reliant and sustainable for countless years prior to Western contact. In fact, it could be argued that colonization, and the many ways it is imposed upon Alaska Native people, is in fact the fundamental challenge to village self-reliance. One example

of this dilemma is state regulation of fish and game laws that often interfere with the ability of rural Alaskans to provide for their subsistence needs.

As a land-based people, the traditional lifestyle of the Neets'ąıı was inherently sustainable. Guided by longstanding values that emphasized a respect and relational accountability for all life forms, the Neets'ąıı lived a lifestyle of low impact. The introduction of the fur trade to the region created an economic incentive for harvesting fur-bearing animals in greater numbers; however the Neets'ąıı remained cognizant of breeding seasons and took disciplined action to refrain from harvesting during periods of resource renewal. Chapters Five and Six demonstrated a pattern of Neets'ąıı decision-making that emphasized local control even in the face of laws, policies, and power dynamics that sought to undermine or limit their spheres of influence and control.

According to a statement within *Nakhai' T'ini'in*,

Our system of self-regulation and self-determination is based largely upon self-respect and self-esteem, which allows us to then work for the common good of our village. We cannot change our values of sharing whatever we have with the needy and carrying for our young together. We cannot change our view that what we do today is not really for us, but for our children and grandchildren's future. That is how we are raised, and that is what we expect from government. (Arctic Village Council, 1991, pp. 37-38)

It is important not to confuse the general desire for greater village self-reliance as an opportunity to reduce or discontinue rural access to critical programs and services that are the state and/or federal governments' responsibility to provide (which is sometimes how it is interpreted). Rural Alaskans, the Neets'ąıı included, do not want to go backwards in terms of modern infrastructure, technology and overall improvements in quality of life. What tribal

leaders do often express frustration with is the growing burden of having to justify investments in basic infrastructure, such as running water, that is taken for granted in other parts of the state and nation. The implications of this third finding is that most villages in rural Alaska find themselves in a cycle of dependency that has made them increasingly vulnerable to shifts in political administrations, as well as with changes in the broader fiscal climate. The current level of dependency on external investments has also fostered a tendency for villages to chase funding opportunities as they become available, for fear of not knowing when such funding might again be available. This pattern has led to an incremental approach to village planning that is more based on short-term resource availability than a long-term vision for the future.

### **Self-Determined Village Development Holds More Community Benefits**

While the history of planning and development among the Neets'ąjį is unique in many ways, it also parallels the experiences of Indigenous people elsewhere. Across the world, Indigenous peoples have fought for the right to self-determine their future, often in the face of laws and policies that sought to deprive them of their traditions, their homelands, their inherent sovereignty, and access to the resources that sustain them. In many places, efforts are now being undertaken to reclaim planning as a means for Indigenous communities to exercise greater self-determination over their lives and future. Such efforts are often vigorously opposed by governments and other entities that perceive tribal self-determination as a threat to their interests, as the following quote by Porter (2004) illustrates.

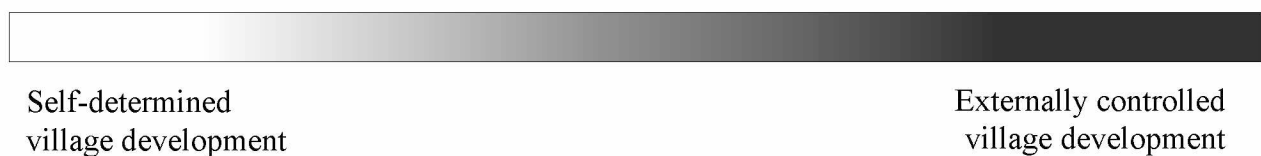
Regaining control over custodial lands and the (sometimes) valuable resources they contain is a project of great symbolic importance for Indigenous peoples, one that has often been vigorously resisted by both states and majority populations. It is also of profound practical importance: indigenous peoples see sovereignty as a means of

rebuilding community and culture and ameliorating the pernicious legacies of contact and dispossession. And they have used planning to do so. (p. 103)

What opposing forces often overlook is a trend that the current National Congress of American Indians President, Jefferson Keel, recently mentioned at the 2018 Executive Council Winter Session. He stated, “When tribal communities flourish, surrounding communities begin to flourish” (Keel, 2018).

The more recent history of the Neets’ąjį has demonstrated that externally driven approaches to village development typically result in fewer local benefits to communities. During the period when village infrastructure projects were largely planned, designed, and constructed by outside agencies and entities, the primary benefit that villages could expect was the end product or facility. In some cases, that end product was so poorly designed or constructed that it created ongoing problems for village leaders. Today, village infrastructure projects not only fulfill important community needs but often serve as opportunities for local training and employment, as was described in Chapter Six.

In general, village development is more self-determined when community leaders are driving decision-making; however, what that looks like may be somewhat context-dependent. Figure 12 illustrates the spectrum of village development decision-making with self-determined village development on one end and externally controlled village development on the other.



*Figure 12.* Spectrum of village development decision-making.

While there is no universal checklist to help determine where a particular decision might fall on this spectrum, Māori scholar, Hirini Matunga (2013), identifies ten critical questions for Indigenous peoples to consider which could be helpful in identifying their present orientation (see Figure 13).

- Whose future?
- Who decides what this future should or could look like?
- Who is doing the analysis and making the decisions?
- Who has the authority, the control, the final decision-making power?
- Whose values, ethics, concepts, and knowledge?
- Whose methods and approaches?
- What frameworks, institutions, and organizations are being used to guide the planning process that most affect Indigenous peoples?
- Where are Indigenous peoples positioned in the construction of that future? (p.4).

*Figure 13.* Eight critical questions for indigenous people. Source: Matunga (2013).

If the answers to the above questions are not considered desirable or favorable to Indigenous people and their agenda, it is likely that more work needs to be done to better position their interests in the development process.

### **Conclusion**

This research has drawn upon the experiences of the Neets'ąjį Gwich'in with planning and development in a pre- and post-settlement context. The case study offers insight into the planning model of one Indigenous group in Alaska, how and why that planning model changed over time, and key community development values that have persisted. There are several implications associated with the key findings of this research.

First, acknowledging that the Neets'ąjį possess an inherent capacity to plan their lives (and to do it well) challenges paternalistic beliefs that Alaska Natives need others to plan our communities and future for us. Furthermore, the fact that our planning traditions do not resemble

those of dominant Western society does not mean that they are any less “formal” or legitimate. In my career, I have witnessed village leaders effectively engage in planning without writing a single word in a technical document. I have also seen my share of glossy, professionally written community development plans that sat on village shelves collecting dust. The key is understanding what planning processes and practices work for individual tribal communities and to keep in mind that the most important audience of any resulting plans are the local people and decision-makers themselves.

Second, the recognition that settlement is an ongoing transition helps to shed light on the fact that the Neets’ąjį, and possibly other Alaska Natives groups, are still in the midst of adjusting to village life. In our case, the transition from semi-permanent to permanent settlements occurred in *shahan*’s (my mother’s) lifetime. The fact that she, and others of her generation, were born into a lifestyle of moving from camp to camp only to later witness/experience the evolution of modern villages is a tremendous change in a relatively short period of time. When you consider that the Neets’ąjį existed for countless generations living a lifestyle of near constant movement, the past 80-90 years as a more “settled” community is like a drop in the bucket. As discussed earlier, settlement is more than just a physical process. Rather it is a redefining of community and the ways in which people relate to one another and the surrounding environment.

Third, the finding that modern village development has decreased self-reliance and increased external dependency is important to future conversations regarding sustainability. Historically, dependence on grants funds to support development projects was not perceived as much of an issue particularly when more funding was available. As state and federal funding has declined, rural communities in Alaska are finding themselves in the difficult position of having

to justify public investment in projects that would benefit a relatively small population. As stated earlier, I have yet to come across a community that is not interested in becoming more self-reliant or sustainable. The challenge is how to move towards those goals while also existing in an increasingly globalized world where our economies, food systems, etc. are becoming more vulnerable to even slight changes that occur elsewhere.

Lastly, the finding that self-determined village development holds more community benefits will come as little surprise to rural leaders but may help to inform their strategy development. In the case of Vashraǰi K'q̄q̄ and Vǰihtaǰi, externally driven community development efforts rarely resulted in meaningful benefits to the villages. As the communities built their capacity to manage village infrastructure and housing projects, they repositioned themselves to ensure maximum local benefits through workforce development.

It is my hope that this research proves useful to successive generations of Neets' aǰi people who will inherit the responsibility of planning for the future. To them, I offer these words of our ancestors, "The answers that work for the Gwich'in people have always come from the cultural knowledge which has been handed down from one generation to another among ourselves." (Arctic Village Council, 1991, p. 10). *It'ee jyaa dagwahtsii gwizhrih, jidii gagwadhal'e', jidii gwal'in, jidii gwadoiik'ii, datthak geegihe' et'ee daanagwaljik.*

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

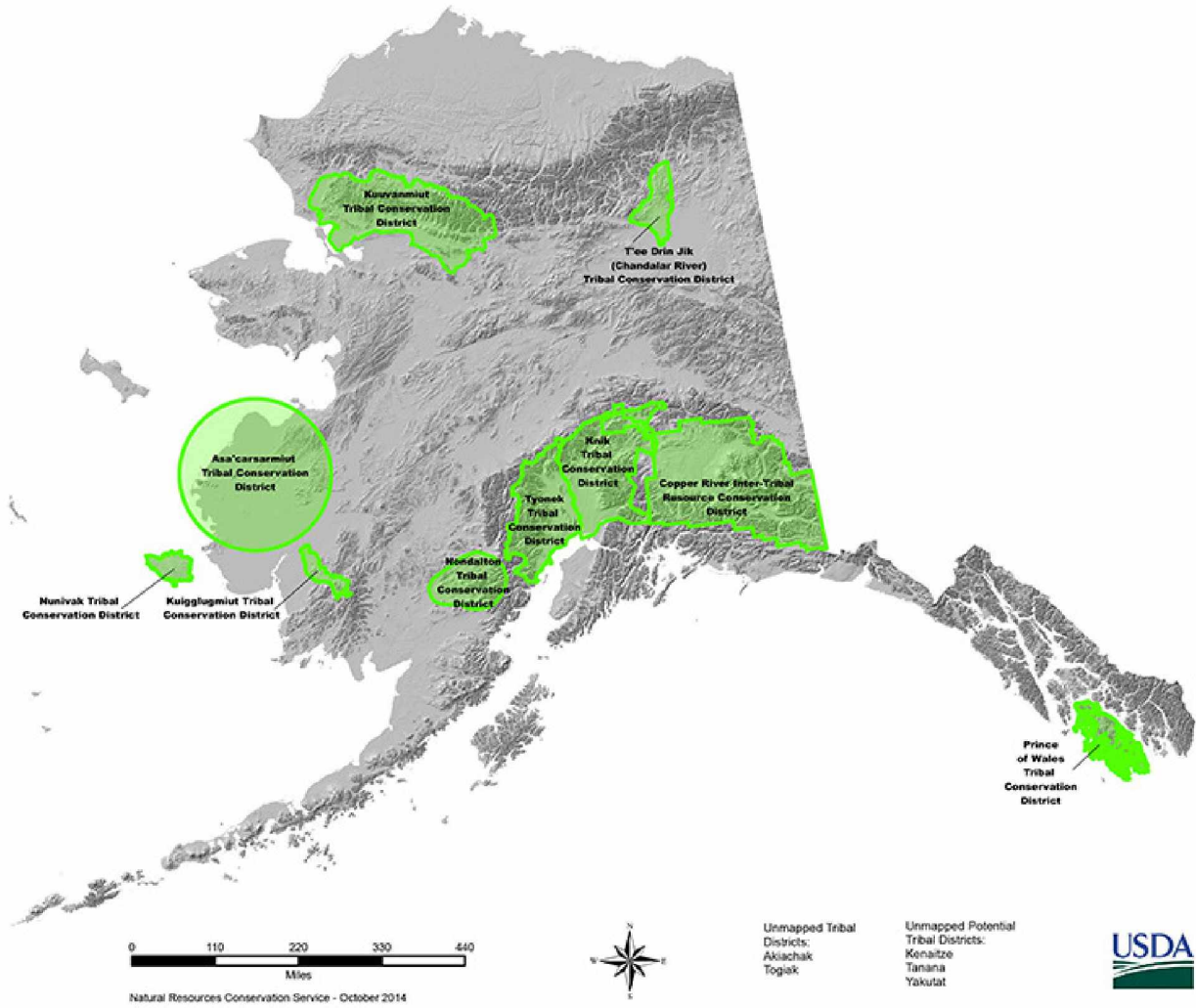
Researcher script: Mahsi' choo (thank you very much) for participating in this study. Do you have any questions before we begin? I'd like to start by asking you some questions about your knowledge and experience of planning in the Arctic Village/Venetie region. We will be audio-recording this interview and you may ask to stop or pause the recording at any time.

- Is there a story that you would be willing to share that highlights how Neets' aji Gwich'in plan?
- How do you think planning has changed from when before Neets' aji people lived in villages up to today? What factors influenced those changes?
- What planning projects have you been involved with on the Venetie Reservation?
- What types of projects that have involved planning do you consider a success?
- What types of projects that involved planning do you consider a failure?
- How important do you feel planning is to the long-term sustainability of Arctic Village and Venetie?
- Is there anything you would like to add on this topic?



# Appendix B

## Map of Tribal Conservation Districts







## Appendix C

### Ni'inlii Declaration

Vashraji K'qq  
July 28, 2016

*We, as Gwich'in youth, believe that the power of our ancestors runs strong in our blood. We have to work and get together to support our development of Gwich'in skills, knowledge and values. Our growing minds need positivity and support for our growth. We need to learn how to reach out to our resources. We live between two forever-changing worlds, and we need to find our own voice and have it be heard. — Statement of the Gwich'in Youth*

The Gwich'in Nation from Alaska, the Yukon and Northwest Territories at the 14<sup>th</sup> bi-annual Gwich'in Gathering, hereby declare that we will come together in unity, strength and leadership to address the issues facing our people.

The Gwich'in will honor and uphold natural laws and our natural environment.

The Gwich'in assert our inherent right to govern ourselves as a nation and to bring forward the teachings and ways of our people to secure their longevity through our youth.

The Gwich'in recognize the division that the US/Canadian border has created among our nation and will work to strengthen relations and collaboration across our nation.

The Gwich'in will honor the right of our youth to be supported positively in their growth. We recognize our youth are one of our most powerful resources and will honor their journey and mentor them into leaders.

The Gwich'in define our own standards and benchmarks of success.

The Gwich'in declare diiginjik is our first language.

We call upon all Gwich'in to exercise our inheritance: language, values, cultural practices, spirituality, and knowledge.

The Gwich'in must stand strong in our identity, the foundation of which comes from our relationships with the land, air, water, plants, and animals.

The Gwich'in shall support a global just transition from destructive fossil fuels toward sustainable energy and economy, which upholds our culture and way of life for generations to come.

The Gwich'in stand in solidarity and support of permanent protection of the Porcupine Caribou calving and post calving grounds and their migratory routes. We will ensure the restoration and conservation of the salmon in the Yukon River watershed.

We call upon our Gwich'in people to support one another in healing, to live healthy lives and bring balance to our cultural, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

Gwich'in will stand together and safeguard our vision of the future and ensure its delivery into the world through our youth with guidance from Elders and Vit'eegwigwaach'yaa this will come to pass.

## Appendix D

### Guideline for Researchers Conducting Traditional Knowledge Research in the Gwich'in Settlement Area

#### **A Guide for Researchers**

*The Gwich'in recognize and value the fact that living on the land for many millennia has provided them with an extensive body of knowledge, values, beliefs and practices that many people today refer to as traditional knowledge. This knowledge, which has been passed down orally and through personal experience and spiritual teachings, is the foundation of Gwich'in identity and survival. It continues to have relevance today and draws its strength from being used, revised and continuously updated to take into consideration new knowledge. The Gwich'in hold this knowledge in trust for future generations in the belief that this knowledge is of benefit to themselves and all humanity. The Gwich'in believe the best way to ensure its survival is to continue to use it and share it in a matter that respects this knowledge (Preamble, GTC TK Policy, 2004).*

#### **Introduction**

##### **The Gwich'in Tribal Council**

The Gwich'in, as represented by the Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC), are the holders of Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge (TK) in and around the Gwich'in Settlement Area (GSA). The GTC takes a lead role in the management of Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge issues in the GSA by monitoring and guiding the collection, use and distribution of Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge. In taking on this role, the GTC will work to ensure that Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge is used ethically and safeguarded for future generations of Gwich'in beneficiaries.

##### **Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute**

The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI) is the heritage arm of the Gwich'in Tribal Council and has been authorized by the GTC to implement the Gwich'in TK Policy on its behalf.

##### **The Gwich'in Welcome Collaborative Research**

The Gwich'in welcome collaborative research that invites research participants and local community members to determine appropriate research areas and approaches. Collaborative research methodologies often involve direct community benefits in the way of training, education, capacity building, elder-youth interaction and employment.

## **Before the Research Project**

### **Gwich'in TK Policy**

Any research that documents Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge requires a GSCI Research Agreement to be completed and forwarded to the GSCI Executive Director and Research Director along with a copy of the consent form and questionnaire. See Schedule A of the Gwich'in Tribal Council TK Policy (2004).<sup>1</sup> It is recommended that researchers contact the Executive Director for initial discussions about their research before completing the agreement. The GSCI research agreement has an extensive list of requirements to be covered in an informed consent statement, which should be followed.

### **Meeting with Community Councils**

Local protocol is to meet initially with the Chief and Council followed by an introduction to the local Renewable Resources Council (RRC) office, and Designated Gwich'in Organization (DGO) office. Call the Chief or the Band Manager at the band offices in each Gwich'in community to make the initial contact. Include pre-meeting expenses in your research budget that will allow you to present proposed research in person at their scheduled monthly meetings. Explain in plain language your proposed research and schedule of work including the dates you will be reporting back after the research is completed. If you require community participation in your research, ask for a list of names and phone numbers of possible Elders and people who may be approached. It may be beneficial to hire a community assistant who could identify participants and who could also determine whether or not a Gwich'in interpreter/translator will be a part of your team.

### **Community Awareness**

Public awareness of your project in the communities will be of great benefit and interest to people especially if your research relates to the land or people's health. Prior to project start up, we suggest broadcasting your proposed work and perhaps a description of research questions on CBC Radio in Inuvik and the local radio station in Aklavik and Tsiigehtchic and on CBQM radio in Fort McPherson. Where possible, ask the local Chief or Band Manager to arrange for you to go on the radio to explain your proposed research.

## **During the Research Project**

### **Being with the Community**

It is good to be seen in the community over the course of the research project and to drop in to see the Chief, the RRC and DGO offices to say 'hello'. Community members appreciate when researchers are visible and participate in community affairs such as feasts and other activities, and greet people when walking around the community.

### **Time and Date of Interviews**

For community interviews, ask each interviewee beforehand by telephone, if possible, to select the best time and day for their interview. While some elders are early risers, others may prefer a later time in the day or an evening interview. Prior to the time of the interview, the community assistant can call ahead to make sure interviewees are ready.

### **Place to Interview**

For community interviews, give each interviewee the option to do their interviews in their home or a quiet place such as a pre-arranged empty public office. Be aware that if the band board room is to be used for the interview a fee may apply.

### **Interviewing Gwich'in Elders**

Use a local interpreter/translator as needed. Brief the interpreter/translator beforehand on your research project and topic. When speaking to or interviewing Gwich'in Elders, we suggest that a Gwich'in interpreter/translator work with your team. On your behalf they will provide a clear description, through their translation, of your research work and its objectives. Contact the local Gwich'in Council office for the names of a local Gwich'in interpreter/translator who could work with you. Interpreter/translators or community assistants are normally paid an hourly or daily rate.

### **Use Plain Language**

When speaking with Gwich'in Elders, please speak in a moderate loud and clear voice using plain language as some Elders may be hard-of-hearing and not understand higher level, technical or medical English terms used to explain research work. It may be good to practice your introduction with your community assistant who could help you identify areas that are unclear. Also when speaking with community people and Elders it is a good practice to paraphrase your explanations and any questions you may have. Paraphrasing will result in optimal feedback and interaction with Elders who support meaningful community-based research work.

### **Participant Confidentiality**

Regarding confidentiality, the GSCI suggests that Gwich'in Elders and participants interviewed are given the option to provide their names in the research. Our people like to know who provided Traditional Knowledge information. Their names on tapes and/or transcripts and final reports will add credibility to the Traditional Knowledge provided. The confidentiality clause may be a different matter for medical or social research.

### **Use Visual Aids**

Bring visual aids (like maps, posters, displays, etc.) to the interviews to jog interviewees' memory as needed. People enjoy looking at maps and especially photographs of people.

**Caution!**

For reasons of safety and credibility of the research, avoid interviewing any persons if they appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

## After the Research Project

### Keeping in Touch

After completing your research work in the community or area, write letters of thanks to the Chief, the RRC and DGO councils. Also outline what the next steps will be in the research (e.g. transcribe recorded interviews, analysis of research, draft reports, etc.).

### Research Material

All transcripts from taped interviews with Gwich'in Elders and other Gwich'in participants along with audio and video tapes or digital files, research photos, maps and other research materials are to be sent to the GSCI office in Tsiigehtchic at the end of the study. These will be added to the GSCI Archives.

### Reporting Back

At the completion of the study, send three hard copies and digital files of the final research report, thesis, or posters to the GSCI office in Tsiigehtchic. As well send separate hard copies to the respective local Gwich'in Council offices. The Gwich'in Tribal Council publishes a widely distributed newsletter several times a year. Researchers are encouraged to submit a short plain language report on their research for this newsletter.

*As part of the follow-up process, all researchers working with Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge should return to the community to present the findings of their research. Research results should be presented or displayed in the Gwich'in communities in culturally relevant and creative ways. An example of the latter would be poster or audio-visual formats (p. 14, Reporting Back, Gwich'in TK Research Guidelines, Gwich'in TK Policy, 2004).*







## Appendix E

### Gwich'in Tribal Council Checklist for Researchers

- Are familiar with the Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge Policy.
- Copy of GSCI Research Agreement submitted to GSCI Executive Director & Research Director.
- Include copy of consent form and questionnaire you are using.
- Initial presentation to Chief and Council, local RRC and DGOs.
- Leave behind a copy of research schedule.
- A local Gwich'in interpreter/translator and community assistant are hired as required.

#### **Research Materials**

- Mail copies of sound and video recordings (digital and audio), electronic transcripts, maps, photographs, field notes, final report (hard copy and CD) to the GSCI head office in Tsiigehtchic.

#### **Reporting Back**

- Present in person your research findings and results to the Chief and Council, local RRC and DGOs at their monthly meetings and at a public meeting as required.
- Forward a hard copy of final reports to each interviewees and the community when available.