

Community-based Archaeology: What to Do When the Community Has Limited Facilities

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Most archaeology in the Arctic takes place in an area used by residents of a particular community. Even if the site is quite remote, hunters and travelers may use the area, or there may be a displaced descendant community in a near-by settlement. These people are often involved in projects as advisors, field participants and resource persons. They are interested in the project and its' results, as well as in the data and artifacts gathered during the project.

Yet, it is often not practical to house that data and those artifacts in the nearest community. Suitable curation facilities are often lacking, forcing a choice to be made between caring for the archaeological materials and making them accessible. In some cases, legal constraints make use of an approved curation facility hundreds of miles away the only possibility. Even preliminary lab work may take place in laboratories remote from the community, either due to class schedules or issues with finding space and using hazardous chemicals. There is often a huge amount of digital data associated with the archaeology. Such projects often generate a considerable amount of ethnographic or traditional knowledge documentation as well, in the form of audio and video recordings and maps. Again, there is often no suitable space to store this material in the community, either the physical originals or as digital copies. Some of this material is definitely not something that community members would feel comfortable sharing with the public at large.

A variety of solutions are developing to deal with large quantities of digital archaeological data (e.g. tDAR), but they are designed for research use, and may not meet the needs of community members. They are also not ideal for use with TK data of other types.

These issues are problematic enough for well-funded long-term research projects run from academic institutions or agencies. They are far more severe for compliance projects, where the environment is profit-driven, and sustainable long-term support for community information dissemination is not likely to be available.

I will compare archaeological projects which have encountered these issues. One is based in Barrow, which does have lab and museum facilities, the other in Point Hope, which does not have such facilities. We have found solutions to some of the issues for the Barrow project (in part due to experience with and facilities developed by the North Slope Borough for TK data, but they are not totally satisfactory. I look forward to discussing the issues with others trying to deal with similar problems.