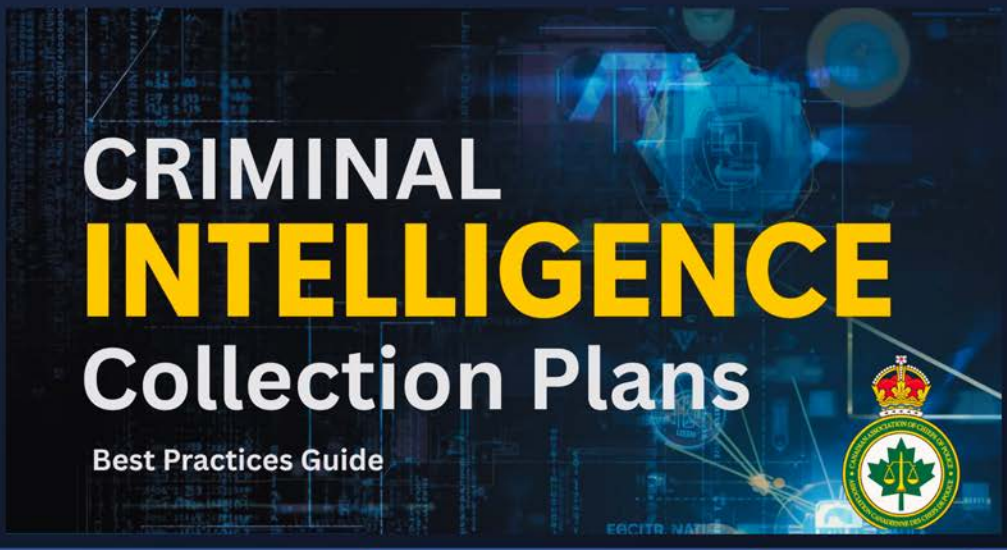


CRIMINAL INTELLIGENCE Collection Plans

Best Practices Guide

2026 Edition

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Introduction

The aim of this best-practices guide is to standardize the use of intelligence collection plans across Canadian law enforcement agencies.



The findings in this guide are derived from resource materials and feedback provided by:

Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta (CISA)
Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (CISC)
Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario (CISO)
Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)
Privy Council Office (PCO) - Intelligence Analyst Community of Practice (IACOP)
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
Montreal Police Service (SPVM)
Service du renseignement criminel du Québec (SRCQ)
Sûreté du Quebec (SQ)
Toronto Police Service (TPS)
Vancouver Police Department (VPD)

Purpose

Road Map

Intelligence analysts can use collection plans as a road map for coordinated collection to support their analysis related to serious and organized crime in Canada. Though flexibility should be afforded to an analyst when creating a collection plan for their specific role or task, there are fundamental steps and components that must be included in the preparation for collection.

These steps include identification of the following:

- Primary Intelligence Requirement
- Information Requirements
- Specific Information Points
- Information Sources
- Collection Methods

Support

Collection plans are predominately used to support strategic and operational intelligence analysis, though they are sometimes, albeit more rarely, used in support of tactical intelligence analysis. The analyst's specific task and its complexity will dictate what the collection plan looks like. Ultimately, it is important that the analyst understand the process of breaking down the larger question or problem into smaller components in a logical and systematic way.

The authors of these best practices hope the methods presented here promote an efficient planning for information collection and that this effort will better serve the analysis that is fundamental to combatting serious and organized crime in Canada.

An example of an intelligence collection plan is included in the appendix.

Collection

The Intelligence Cycle is the process of developing unrefined information and data into intelligence.

Collection is a key step within this cycle. The effectiveness of the collection process is often dependent on the clarity of direction and planning, objectives of the task, and associated deadlines.

Intelligence analysts need information to evaluate and process to answer key questions about a particular crime problem. Collection is the step where intelligence personnel will conduct research and gather information relevant to that crime problem. The main goal of collection is to amass as much relevant information as possible to feed the ensuing analysis. It is anticipated this will contribute to a better understanding of the crime problem.

The information collected can originate from open (public) and closed (restricted) sources and can include a multitude of source types, depending on the analyst's specific role and task. With several sources being used to gather information from, one can appreciate that collection efforts may become disorganized and overwhelming. A structured collection plan will provide focus and scope to the analyst's collection effort.



Collection within the Intelligence Cycle[1]

[1] Image derived from"Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP), Criminal Intelligence: A Lexicon of Police Terminology and Definitions, 2025, p. 6"

Intelligence Collection Plans

Intelligence collection plans are an organized approach to guide focused information collection. [2] Analysts use the collection plan to manage collection and drive the gathering of information relevant to the crime problem being examined. The collection plan, an internal planning document, can also be used on a continuous basis to document all information as it is collected.

The intelligence collection plan enables the analyst to use a systematic approach to identify and collect needed information. In short, the collection plan formalizes the information collection process.

As a best practice, the analyst involved in creating the collection plan should identify or consider the following steps and components:

- Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR)
- Information Requirements (component questions to answer the PIR)
- Scope and Duration of the collection phase to prevent over-collection
- Specific Information Points (the information needed)
- Information Sources (where to get the information)
- Collection Methods (how to collect the information)
- Who will collect the needed information
- How the information will be transmitted, received and collated.
- What intelligence products will be produced.[3]

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[2] "Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP), Criminal Intelligence: A Lexicon of Police Terminology and Definitions, 2025, p. 10"

[3] Ideally, the analyst should know from the outset what type of product is expected and why it is needed before they start their collection effort.

Intelligence Collection Plans

Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR)

The Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR) is the main question the analyst will attempt to answer or fulfill.[4] It provides the foundation and rationale to collect information that can be used to develop insights into a specific crime problem.

At this stage, some prioritization of analytical focus should already have occurred through an organizational mandate or specific direction provided by a client or senior management during the planning phase of the Intelligence Cycle. However, it is sometimes incumbent upon the analyst to consider the client and/or organization's needs, without being told directly, and interpret those needs into something actionable. The analyst must then articulate the intelligence requirement and associated questions that need to be answered. This will empower the analyst to begin the process of collecting relevant information to support their analysis.

Tip: Identify the Client's Needs

If the client or organization's needs are not clear, the analyst should engage with relevant supervisors, colleagues and partners and ask questions that will help clarify and define those specific needs and related objectives. Further, management should review and approve the collection plan in writing. See the Managerial Review and Approval section below for more on this step.

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[4]: "Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP), Criminal Intelligence: A Lexicon of Police Terminology and Definitions, 2025, p. 7"

Intelligence Collection Plans

Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR) continued

The analyst should consider the following as they develop the PIR:
·Is it clear what the client needs to know and why?[5]
·Why is this issue important to the client?
·Is the client possibly seeking insight into a different issue than the one they have expressed?[6]
·What intelligence product is required?
·What will the end-product be used for and who will the audience be?
The analyst should communicate with the client to get answers to these questions and engage supervisors as necessary to facilitate these discussions.[7]

An example PIR: Are criminal organizations involved in the illicit fentanyl market in Canada, and if so, to what extent?

Articulating the PIR up front helps focus the ensuing collection effort.
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[5] Note: intelligence collection plans may not necessarily originate from a specific client need, as an analyst may use them to monitor a new crime trend or illicit market.
[6] Intelligence Analysts Community of Practice (IACOP). An Intelligence Analyst's Guide to Capturing Client Requirements and Building Relationships, 2025, pp. 6-7.
[7] Regarding collection plans that do not originate from a client request, the analyst could engage colleagues, or create and utilize a working group, to help identify questions that need to be addressed.

Intelligence Collection Plans

Information Requirements

After the Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR) has been developed, the information requirements to answer the PIR can be formulated and refined. These are the questions, broken down from the PIR, that will identify the information required to address the PIR.

The information requirements help drive the collection effort by providing focus on specific and detailed pathways to allow the analyst to answer the overarching PIR. Information Requirements make the collection, and ensuing analysis, more manageable.

This is where the analyst can collaborate with other analysts and intelligence officers to identify important questions about the crime problem. Additionally, the analyst can use critical thinking methods and analytical techniques, such as structured brainstorming sessions, to generate questions – and the answers can help guide further collection as well as the analysis.

The analyst can help keep collection in scope by making sure the questions asked tie directly to the PIR. The questions asked should, like the main PIR, be clear and focused, as they will contribute to an organized and efficient collection effort.

Intelligence Collection

The analyst should consider the following as they refine their questions:

- Is it clear what would constitute an answer to the question?
- Is it apparent what information is needed to answer the question, even if obtaining the information is difficult?
- What assumptions are built into the question, and are those assumptions valid?[8]

In order to narrow broad topics into specific issues, the analyst should consider using the '5 W's' (who, what, when, where, and why) and 'How?' when developing their questions, as answers to these questions may help the analyst develop findings that answer the PIR.

Some collection plans, particularly those with an operational focus, may include more specific and granular questions, such as vehicle-types, license plate details, etc.

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[8] Intelligence Analysts Community of Practice (IACOP). An Intelligence Analyst's Guide to Capturing Client Requirements and Building Relationships, 2025, pp 6-7.

For our example PIR – are criminal organizations involved in the illicit fentanyl market in Canada, and if so, to what extent? – some questions, using the '5 W's and 'How?'

Who

- Are criminal organization group members involved in the trafficking, importing, exporting and/or production of illicit fentanyl in Canada?
- To whom are these members associated?

What

·What criminal organizations are involved in the illicit fentanyl market in Canada?
·What is the nature of criminal organization members' involvement in the illicit fentanyl market?
·What specialized skills do they possess or rely upon?
·What is the impact of illicit fentanyl on public safety and community well-being?

When

·When did these criminal organizations become involved in illicit fentanyl and did their involvement coincide with overdose increases over the last 24 months?

Where

·Where are fentanyl overdoses occurring? Do these locations match criminal organizations' areas of influence?
·Where do the criminal organizations operate?
·Where are their homebases?
·Where in Canada are illicit fentanyl drug combinations being produced?
·Where are illicit fentanyl seizures occurring?
·Where is violence related to the illicit fentanyl market occurring?

Why?

· If criminal organizations are involved in the illicit fentanyl market in Canada, why are they involved, and are they using the associated profits to fund other criminal activities?

How?

·How are criminal organizations conducting illicit fentanyl operations?
·How are criminal organizations adapting or avoiding detection?
·How are they controlling, or maintaining, their position in related illicit fentanyl market areas?
·How much does illicit fentanyl cost per pill, and at the gram and kilogram levels?
·How much are criminal organizations profiting from illicit fentanyl?
·How are criminal organizations laundering the funds made from illicit fentanyl?

Tip: Scope and Duration

Importantly, keeping collection in scope – tied to the information r equirements – will help prevent information overload. Redundant information can distract an analyst and prevent the timely development of useful intelligence.

Also, applying a defined timeline to the collection effort helps focus and streamline the information gathering process. Refining the questions above to only include information "within the last 24 months" narrows the scope of the collection effort.

Intelligence Collection

Specific Information Points– the information needed

Next the analyst needs to identify the specific information points. This is the information the analyst needs to fulfill the information requirements. If the analyst can get this information, they may be able to answer the Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR).

Specific information points for our illicit fentanyl example may include:

-Criminal organizations and members
-Criminal organization illicit activities
-Criminal organization associations
-Criminal organization sphere of operations
-Criminal organization related violence
-Overdose information
-Illicit fentanyl seizures
-Illicit fentanyl prices
-Business ownership
-Financial information
-Properties owned

Typically, criminal intelligence needs to meet an acceptable level of evidence and certainty depending on the requirement or task. However, intelligence analysts sometimes work with uncertainty, and capturing the full amount of information needed to gain a complete understanding of a problem is not possible. Sound judgements must be made on what is known, and not known, even when the information available to us is limited. It is important to communicate the degree of uncertainty in the resulting intelligence products.

Intelligence Collection

Note: at the end of collection, the analyst should be able to explain why certain information was not collected. Then, if necessary, the identified gaps can be prioritized, and the impact on the analysis can be assessed and included in the end-product.

Tip: Think Evergreen

As a best practice, analysts should treat the intelligence collection plan as an evergreen product, especially if the plan is for a long-term ongoing issue. This will allow the analyst to revisit and modify the collection plan as needs change, and to document the specific information points and sources.

Information Sources - where to get the information

The next step is to identify the sources of the required information - from where the information can be collected. What resources can be used to source the information?

The analyst should consider and incorporate all relevant sources of information, including internal and external databases, partner agency information holdings and open-source information.

Collecting from diverse sources could enhance the robustness of the analysis, as incorporating multiple viewpoints provides an opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.[9]

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[9] The sources used will depend on the analyst's specific role (strategic or operational) and task.

Intelligence Collection

At this stage, the analyst should examine their assumptions, and plan to defend against any kind of bias, including confirmation bias (seeking evidence that supports what we believe), anchoring (the initial information received shapes our thinking), and availability bias (relying on easily accessible sources over those that hold relevant information). From there, the analyst should try to collect information that could refute their assumptions.

Open Sources: depending on the objective and client's needs, it may be beneficial to include open sources in a collection plan, as they can corroborate classified information and provide reliable insights. Additionally, open sources offer valuable background and context, helping create a more comprehensive understanding of an issue. For example, open sources can provide historical, political, or cultural perspectives that may not be captured in classified reports. Also, when findings are verified through open sources, they can often be shared more freely with justice sector partners, in legal settings and with the public (as needed), thus expanding the reach of the analysis while protecting sensitive information.

At this stage, the analyst can also determine what information sources should be prioritized. Timing may also be a factor in prioritizing sources. The analyst should be asking: 'what is needed first to move forward?' and 'what might take the longest to obtain?'

Tip: Information Considerations

During the collection planning phase, analysts should be aware of the potential for disclosure of information, Third Party Rule implications, and assess how that information may be used in a strategic and/or operational product and environment. When identifying information to collect, the analyst should also be obtaining necessary permissions.

Another advantage of using an intelligence collection plan is that relevant stakeholders can see what information sources the analyst is considering for collection. This will encourage intelligence personnel, tasked with the actual collection of the information, to fully engage the identified sources and protects against sources being overlooked.

For our example specific information points above, a list of sources may include:
-Intelligence reports involving criminal organization members/associates and illicit fentanyl
-Criminal organization association charts
-Occurrence reports involving criminal organization members/associates and illicit fentanyl
-Confidential Informant (CI) reports on criminal organization members/associates and illicit fentanyl
-Overdose reports and statistics, public health reports and statistics
-Property ownership records, business ownership records , financial records
-Communication records
-Community impact reports
-Media reports
-Public domain information
-Academic studies and reports

Specific database system and partner agency resources could include:
-Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC)
-Niche Records Management System (NicheRMS)
-Canadian Criminal Intelligence System (CCIS)
-Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (CISC)
-Provincial Criminal Intelligence Service Bureaus
-Canadian Integrated Response to Organized Crime (CIROC)
-Internal and external law enforcement intelligence, enforcement and drug units
-Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC)
-Public health departments
-Statistics Canada

Evaluation

Later, when the information has been collected, the analyst will have to evaluate the quality of information to determine if it should be included in the analysis. This will involve assessing sources for their credibility and validity. Quality is more important the quantity, and findings based on one or two highly credible and valid information sources have more confidence than findings based on several reports derived from circular reporting.With that said, the analyst should not completely ignore traditionally non-credible sources, as they may have important relevant information. They may also provide alternative possibilities that should be considered.

Tip: Think About Transmission of Information

Law enforcement agencies across Canada use different processes for transmitting and protecting information. Some will password protect a file, while others will use encryption software for files and/or emails. Transmission of information should be considered early in the collection process to find proactive solutions to anticipated obstacles.

Collection Methods

The analyst should consider the methods by which the information will be collected. How will it be sourced? For example, will a simple systems check suffice, or is an email request to a partner agency required? Should a meeting or working group be established? Should a questionnaire be disseminated? Is a sharing agreement or memorandum of understanding needed to acquire the information? Are there any costs involved?

It is beneficial to have these methods specified in the intelligence collection plan, so those tasked with collecting the information are aware of what is expected of them.

Questionnaires

It is important to note that the intelligence collection plan itself usually does not get disseminated, as it is the analyst's internal collection planning document. With that said, there are instances whereby the collection plan may be shared with stakeholders who are assisting with the collection process.

The analyst can develop questionnaires - formal requests for information - that are disseminated externally. These questionnaires should reflect the needs of the information requirements and the Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR). This ensures that results are specific to these requirements.

Different questionnaires can be developed and disseminated to different information sources, based on what the analyst expects to receive from each information source.

Tasking and Tracking

In cases where intelligence personnel other than the analyst will be tasked with carrying out collection, it is important to determine specifically who will collect what. This can be noted in the intelligence collection plan.

Also, regarding prioritization, the collection plan can indicate when the information should be collected. Assigning individual collection tasks to appropriate personnel will expedite collection and prevent duplicate and redundant collection efforts.

The analyst should engage intelligence officers, data and research analysts, and external partners, if available, to assist with specific collection tasks. Intelligence managers should support this collaboration.

Additionally, the analyst should track collection progress in the collection plan. This will ensure that focused collection is occurring in a timeframe that supports the overall collection effort, as well as the ensuing analysis and delivery of the final intelligence product. It also allows the analyst to address any information gathering obstacles in a timely manner.

The analyst may want to implement a regular reporting schedule, such as bi-weekly or monthly, to ensure regular collection of current information. The analyst can make note of this in the intelligence collection plan and assign such a requirement to the appropriate intelligence personnel for their action.

The cut-off date for information collection should be noted in the collection plan and in the final intelligence product.

Intelligence Collection

Collation

The intelligence collection plan can identify collation specifics, such as how the analyst intends on storing and organizing the collected and evaluated information. This will help streamline subsequent steps in the analyst's process and assist with planning for potential disclosure related requirements.

If identifying collation specifics, the collection plan should clearly indicate how the collected and evaluated information will be transferred into a storage system, for example, using an electronic file folder or database. This ensures that the information is accessible for the ensuing analysis.

Managerial Review and Approval

Intelligence managers should review and approve intelligence collection plans to ensure the plan will serve its intended purpose. This review can take place at the outset of collection and when any changes are being made to the collection plan. This ensures that decision makers and analysts agree on the crime problem being examined, the Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR), the information requirements, the specific information points and the sources that will be included in the process. The agreement may also include details on the resources needed to assist with collection as well as applicable due dates. This supports a collaborative approach between the analyst and manager which better serves the effort to fulfill the client's request.
Also, having an agreed upon collection plan assists with transparency, accountability and auditing purposes.

What format should be used

The review of available information shows that Canadian law enforcement agencies use a variety of formats to create intelligence collection plans. These formats include Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, and Portable Document Format (PDF).
This guide recommends that analysts use Microsoft Excel, especially for more complex intelligence collection plans. Excel is an effective tool for creating and organizing information requirements and questions derived from the Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR). Analysts can also use the Excel collection plan to effectively assign and track collection efforts, record when information has been received and identify the status of outstanding collection tasks.

Conclusion

A collection plan provides the following benefits:

- articulates the Primary Intelligence Requirement (PIR)
- provides clarity on the client's needs
- provides a road map for collection
- clarifies what is being collected
- provides organization and coordination
- keeps collection and analysis within the scope required by the PIR
- ensures comprehensive collection from relevant sources
- prevents duplication of collection effort and collection of redundant information
- acts as a time management tool
- allows the analyst to stay focused
- assists with disclosure during the legal process (in some cases)

The authors hope the best practices in this guide assist the national law enforcement community with its intelligence collection plan strategies.

Readers are encouraged to review the example collection plan in the appendix of this guide and tailor it to their own information gathering needs related to their roles and tasks. Doing so will help support an information collection effort that will enhance the intelligence analysis that is fundamental to combatting organized and serious crime in Canada.

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Appendix 1

Collection Plan Overview

INSERT AGENCY LOGO	INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION PLAN (ICP) SYNOPSIS (DRAFT) Protection Level / Restriction level: Date: Version: (i.e. Initial / Update / Version #)	INSERT UNIT LOGO
Date:	Enter date report prepared. (YYYY/MM/DD)	
Agency & File Number:	Identify your Agency as associated file number	
Prepared by:	Enter author's Surname, GI, rank, Badge/VIN #.	
Objectives:	Outline key objectives.	
Background:	Brief overview of the probe, project or information gathering initiative.	
Duration:	Intended duration of the probe, project or information gathering initiative.	
Anticipated Challenges & Identified Gaps:	Identify anticipated challenges and provide and overview of information/intelligence gaps that have been indentified.	
Proposed Next Steps:	Overview of next steps on how to advance the probe, project or information gathering initiave.	
Provincial Threat Assessment (PTA):	Does this Plan refer to an Organized Crime Group? (Yes/No) Has the group or any Persons of Interest POI) been identified on the PTA (list profiled groups or provide N/A if none found. Contact your Criminal Intelligence Service point of contact and/or your PTA Coordinator for assistance.	
Canadian Integrated Response to Organized Crime (CIROC):	Has a CIROC been drafted in relation to the group, probe, project (If Yes, add CIROC number, if No, add N/A	
Supervisor Comments:	Provide additional comments, information and approvals.	

Appendix 2

Collection Plan Details

Canadian Association
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