



The intelligence cycle



When CIA officers are assigned a specific project, we follow a five-step process called the Intelligence Cycle. This process ensures we do our job correctly as we work through a system of checks and balances. The five steps are: Planning & Direction, Collection, Processing, Analysis & Production, and Dissemination. Let's take a closer look at each step:

Planning and Direction: When we are tasked with a specific job, we begin planning what we'll do and how. We move in a specific direction to get the job done, listing what we know about the issue and what we need to find out. We discuss ways to gather the necessary intelligence.

Collection: We collect information overtly (openly) and covertly (secretly). Reading foreign newspapers and magazine articles, listening to foreign radio, and watching overseas television broadcasts are examples of "overt" (or open) sources for us. Other information sources can be "covert" (or secret), such as information collected with listening devices and hidden cameras. We can even use space-age technology like satellite photography. For instance, some analysts could actually view how many airplanes are present at a foreign military base by looking at a picture taken from a satellite in space.

Processing: We take all the information that we have collected and put it into an intelligence report. This information could be anything from a translated document to a description of a satellite photo.

Analysis and Production: During this step, we take a closer look at all the information and determine how it fits together, while concentrating on answering the original tasking. We assess what is happening, why it is happening, what might occur next, and how it affects US interests.

Dissemination: In this final step, we give our final written analysis to a policymaker, the same policymaker who started the cycle. After reading the final analysis and learning the answer to the original question, the policymaker may come back with more questions. Then the whole process starts over again.