CODES ACCELERATION PROGRAM WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES: PROJECT OVERVIEW, OUTCOMES, AND IMPACT

JUNE 2026

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Codes Acceleration Program within Indigenous Communities was designed to help Indigenous communities adopt and implement energy efficient building practices through training, education, and practical resources, including hands on technical support. A core focus of the program was building local knowledge and skills so communities can develop housing that is not only energy efficient but also resilient and sustainable. The program placed strong emphasis on ensuring that all training and materials are culturally appropriate, easy to access, and tailored to the unique needs of each community. The combination of practical support with collaborative and culturally sensitive learning approaches, allowed the program to improve the long term quality and performance of housing, lower energy costs, and support healthier living environments amongst Indigenous communities.

This report offers an overview of the program's Needs Assessment, which played a key role in its creation. It also describes the program's structure, the main findings, impacts, and feedback gathered throughout its implementation.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As part of Canada's broader commitment to safe and energy efficient housing, a Needs Assessment was conducted in order to explore how Indigenous communities navigate the National Building Code (NBC) and the National Energy Code for Buildings (NECB). These codes set minimum standards for construction and energy performance, but how they are utilized by different communities varies significantly. The assessment was therefore designed to provide a clearer and more evidence-based understanding of current awareness, levels of usage, community application, and the core priorities driving housing choices.

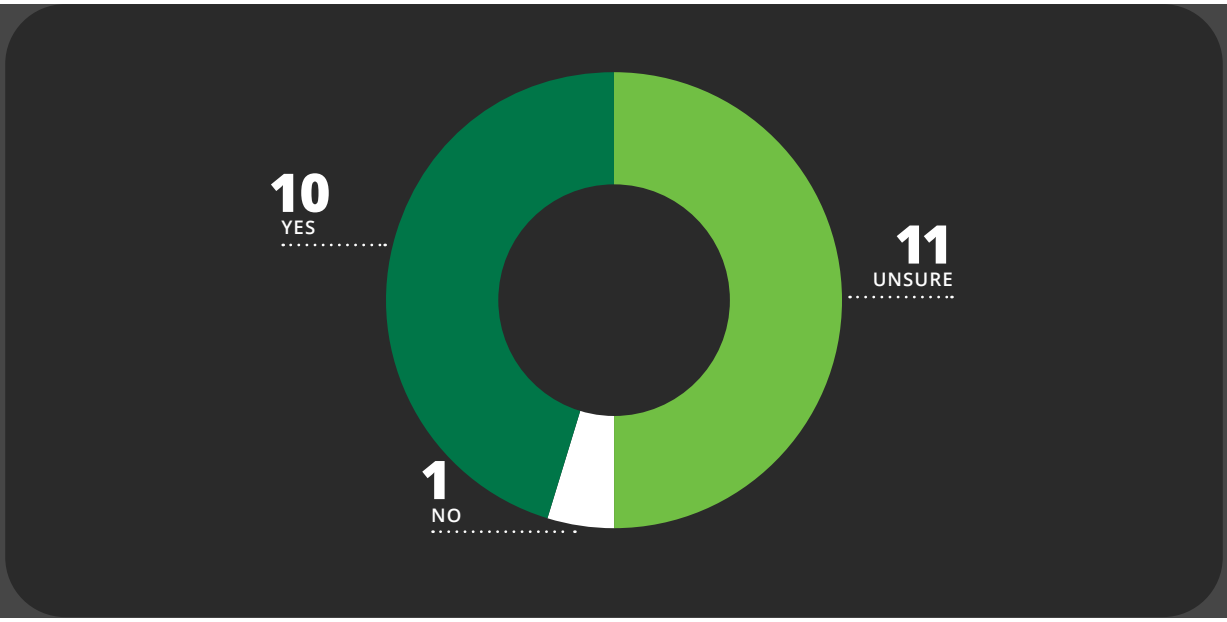
KEY FINDINGS AND TAKEAWAYS

A key finding from the assessment is that awareness of both the NBC and NECB remains low in many communities. Many participants were unsure whether their community had formally adopted either code, and in many cases, there was little knowledge of the NECB at all. This highlighted an important starting point that, before broader adoption and consistent implementation can occur, there is a clear need to strengthen awareness and understanding of these building codes.

In communities where building codes, particularly the NBC or other provincial and territorial codes, have been applied, the results have generally been very positive. Participants spoke on improvements in housing and infrastructure quality, stronger construction standards within social housing projects, and overall better infrastructure performance. Nonetheless, even in communities that have adopted these codes, there is still a lack of knowledge and uncertainty around compliance and consistent implementation. This suggests that ongoing support is needed to ensure the codes are applied consistently and effectively in practice.

Figure 1

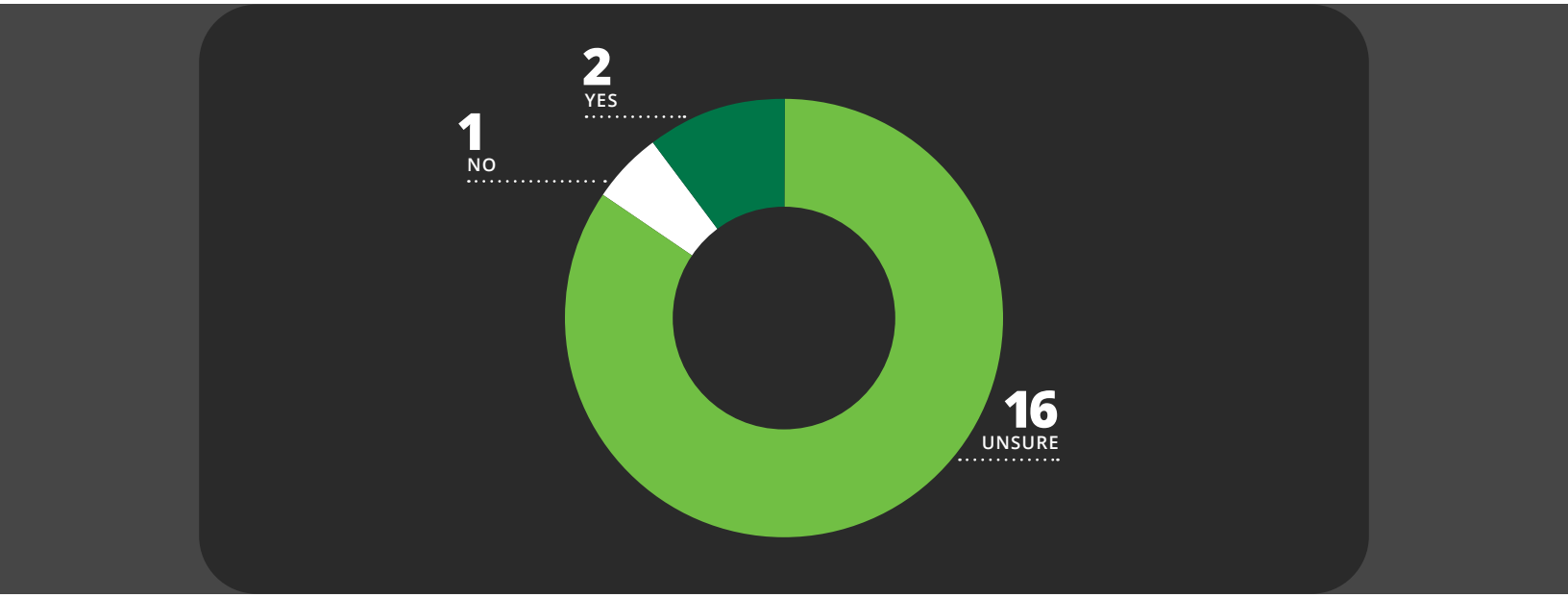
Has your community formally adopted the National Building Code (NBC) or a provincial or territorial building code?



In contrast, awareness of the NECB and its actual implementation were limited in many communities. In the cases where it was adopted and applied, people did notice positive benefits, including improved energy efficiency in buildings and a decrease in their overall energy costs, suggesting that when applied effectively, the NECB can play an important role in supporting long term sustainability goals within Indigenous communities. However, many participants also expressed that putting the code into practice is not straightforward or easy. A major challenge was limited funding, which lowered the ability of these communities to invest in improvements and ensure compliance. It was also expressed that there was a lack of training for those responsible for applying the code, which made it difficult to fully understand and implement the requirements.

Figure 2

Has your community formally adopted the National Energy Code for Buildings (NECB)?



Another key takeaway is the importance of capacity and technical support. Many communities reported they did not always have easy access to local experts in environmental, energy, or building fields, which makes it harder to understand and apply complex code requirements. This often resulted in, outside external support being required to support with compliance, give technical advice and support future planning and funding decisions. The reliance on constant external support highlights a significant barrier in local knowledge and skills. Being able to strengthen expertise within the community is key to achieving long term autonomy in housing development.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving building code adoption in Indigenous communities is not just about the technical rules themselves, but is also dependant on awareness, access to resources, and local capacity. Strengthening education and training, improving access to funding, and developing both local sources alongside reliable external support can create a significant impact. Focusing on these areas would lead to better housing, greater energy efficiency, and more resilient communities over time.

PROJECT PHASES: RESOURCES, TRAINING, NETWORKING, AND ADVOCACY

The Codes Acceleration Program within Indigenous Communities was delivered in a series of phases, with each phase adding onto the one before. Instead of introducing everything at once, the program gradually supported and engaged communities as they built their knowledge, confidence, and were given the tools needed to implement infrastructure standards such as the NBC and NECB.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

This phase focused on ensuring communities were provided with practical and easily accessible tools to assist in the adoption and implementation of energy codes within their housing initiatives. Key resources provided to support the implementation included leadership guidance programs, compliance monitoring tools, and outreach materials designed to enhance and encourage local planning and decision making. These resources were created to be flexible and adaptable, to the community to reflect various levels of readiness and capacity.

This included a public awareness campaign promoting the benefits of building energy codes, with a clear message on the adoption, compliance, and enforcement. The campaign used culturally relevant and accessible content delivered through multiple streams, including print, radio, digital platforms, social media and community events. Its effectiveness was also monitored using engagement data and community feedback to better understand reach, participation, and how the messages were received. A key deliverable of this phase was the development of user-friendly toolkits that provided guidance, checklists, and practical resources to support communities in adopting and implementing building and energy codes.

This phase identified compliance and enforcement resources as actionable tools that allowed community members to gain a practical understanding alongside a theoretical understanding of how to implement building code requirements. Additionally, during this phase, communities received building assistance, as they were guided to identify capacity gaps and strengthen internal processes used to manage housing and infrastructure projects within the community.

HEAR FROM AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

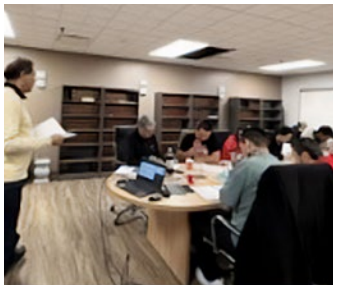
Watch the interview by scanning the code

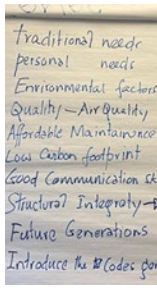
TRAINING

The training phase allowed for organized learning opportunities focused on the adoption and application of high-performance energy building codes. The trainings were delivered through a dedicated program, aiming to promote better foundational knowledge and practical understanding of how codes such as the NBC and NECB apply to housing design, construction, and renovation in Indigenous communities.

This included developing a comprehensive curriculum for both in person workshops and online webinars, covering key topics such as code adoption, compliance, enforcement, and best practices in energy efficiency. The curriculum was designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing it to be tailored to the unique needs, priorities, and contexts relevant to each community. Related programs were also included in the training such as the Energy Management and Leadership Training.

This phase played an integral role in bridging a gap between knowledge and technical code information by translating technical code requirements into a more usable and practical format for all participants. The training provided an opportunity for participants to work with core concepts of energy efficiency, building performance and compliant building processes while developing the skills to support building code compliance in their communities. The training was conducted in six separate modules.





MODULE 1
Understanding the NCB and NECB

MODULE 2
Applying Codes in Indigenous Contexts

MODULE 3
Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

MODULE 4
Enforcement and Compliant Strategies Leadership for Sustainable Communities

MODULE 5
Leadership for Sustainable Communities

MODULE 6
Practical Energy Code Compliance for Modular Housing

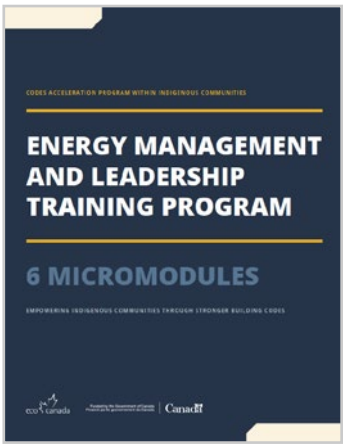
HEAR FROM THE TRAINER

Watch the interview by scanning the code

NETWORKING

The networking phase was developed to facilitate collaboration and share information amongst Indigenous communities by establishing a network of those involved and interested in the initiative. Within this phase, participants were able to establish communications with other participants regarding the process of pursuing opportunities, challenges, and solutions related to the introduction of building codes and energy efficient housing.

Networking events, workshops, and conferences were attended and held to bring together Indigenous communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Participants had the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences through the sharing of best practices and related information while also reinforcing the level of collaboration in the energy sustainability sector through partnerships with relevant organizations. Networking was facilitated through the use of online discussion forums and platforms to continue the engagement beyond in person events, social media groups were established to enable the continued sharing of information and communications among stakeholders. The development of a dedicated Facebook group provided an accessible venue for participants to communicate in regarding ideas, questions, and resources.

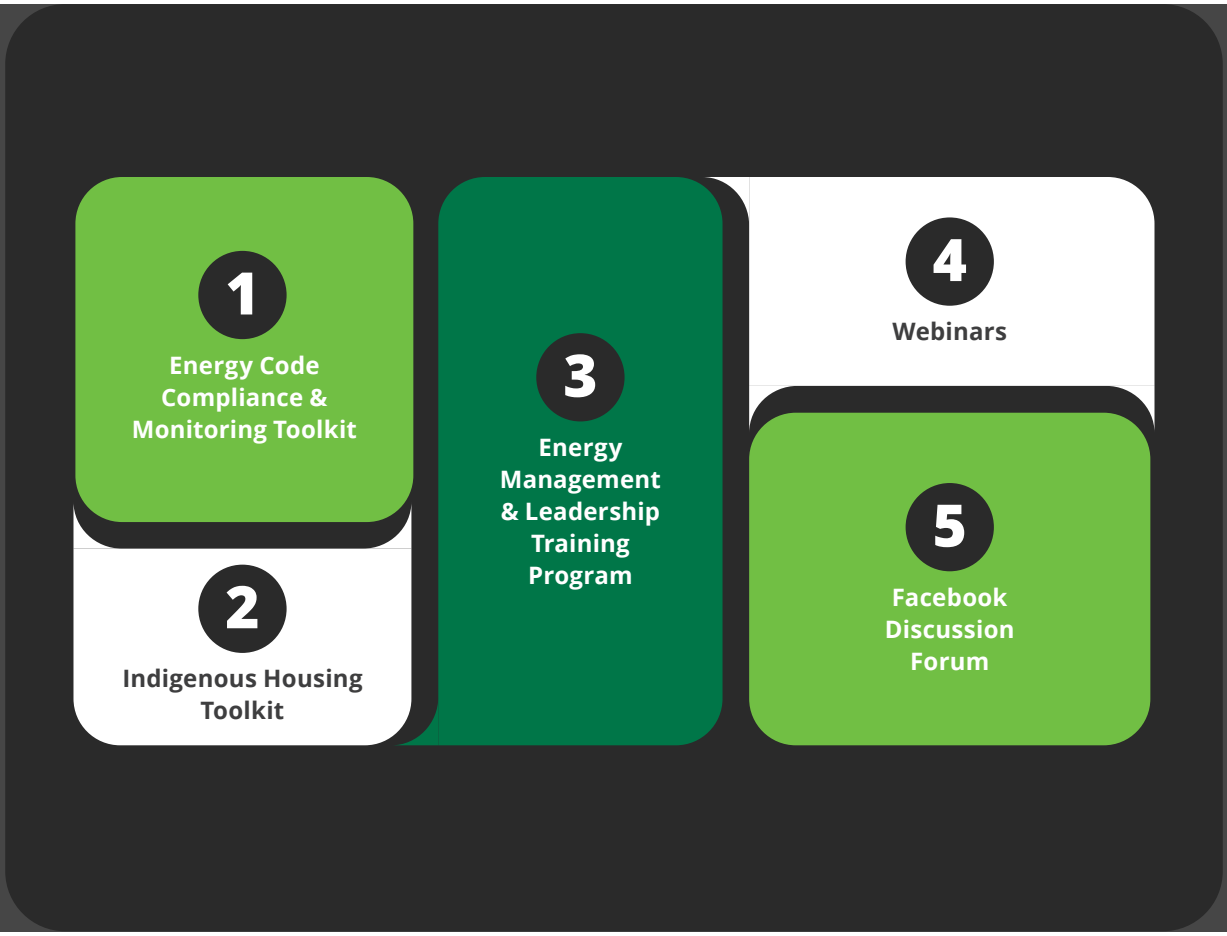


AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY

The awareness and advocacy phase focused on building a clearer understanding of the importance and benefits of high-performance energy building codes. It emphasized how energy efficient design can improve housing quality, lower energy costs, and contribute to the overall long-term community well being.

A key objective of this phase was to encourage engagement by ensuring that community leaders and decision makers had access to practical and relevant information about building codes and their potential impacts. Strengthening awareness resulted in the project creating a deeper foundation for informed decision making and a greater willingness towards adoption and implementation.

All together, the various phases of the project worked in a complementary way to acknowledge both technical and non-technical barriers to building code adoption. In combination, these efforts supported a more effective approach to capacity building, resulting in improved housing outcomes and more resilient, energy efficient Indigenous communities.



IMPACT, OUTCOMES, AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Codes Acceleration Program within Indigenous Communities has had a meaningful impact on participating communities. The Energy Management and Leadership Training strengthened technical expertise, supported workforce development, and contributed to real world housing initiatives, helping communities build the capacity needed to advance energy efficient and code compliant housing. One group of participators reported that the Energy Management & Leadership Training Program contributed directly to the creation of a housing retrofit program, in which trained participants will move into implementation positions and a program manager will be hired to oversee this program. There is strong alignment between the delivery of training and resulting community outcomes, bridging the gap between knowledge and action.

Additionally, participant feedback has indicated that it is possible to deliver this training in other Indigenous communities at all stages of housing development and capacity. The participants noted that the training provided them with hands on, experiential knowledge related to building performance, energy conservation, and durability. Each of these areas are directly impacted by ongoing issues or concerns such as moisture intrusion, mold prevention, indoor air quality, and long-lasting maintenance which are often cost heavy. External feedback further reinforced the value of the program's resources. One participant noted that the Indigenous toolkit was highly relevant, particularly for building in northern climates. The ability to connect these technical concepts to real housing conditions enabled participants to better understand not only what needs to be done, but why these measures are critical for long term community wellbeing.

"I dug into the indigenous tool kit you provided and really impressed with the content, which is incredibly important when building in northern climates. "

– PARTICIPANT

One of the greatest impacts of the training was on how participants approached decision making, both within their own projects and across their communities. Many participants expressed that they plan to apply what they learned to future housing initiatives, including new construction and retrofit projects. This is expected to lead to more thoughtful project planning, more appropriate material selection, and more rigorous evaluation of construction. One participant reported *"the training provided through ECO Canada has been incredibly valuable in helping me understand and grasp what the NCB is and understand the key differences between the regular building code and the National Energy Code, which with my knowledge, I with this newfound knowledge, I feel better equipped to make decisions."* Participants also reported increased confidence in comparing project plans with final outcomes, identifying gaps or issues, and advocating for higher standards of construction quality and accountability throughout the building process.

The program provided participants with insightful and practical learning experiences by presenting technical content in a way that connected directly to their lived experiences. Through real world examples of challenges in housing built prior to the training, such as structural issues, basement flooding, and unresolved construction deficiencies, participants gained a clearer understanding of the consequences of inadequate planning, insufficient oversight, and poor code compliance. This increased awareness helped participants better recognize risks to long term housing performance and reinforced the importance of consistently applying building and energy codes. As a result, participants developed a more practical, proactive approach to ensuring quality and durability in housing.

A training participant estimated that one Nation will apply the training to approximately 400 homes, building on the more than 800 homes already served to date. This work will reflect the application of knowledge and skills gained through the programming. In addition, through capital build projects and anticipated future rental developments, the initiative is expected to impact a further 50–75 homes over the next three years. Another training participant also reported that approximately 36–40 homes will undergo retrofitting to improve insulation in alignment with the NECB. A third training participant further noted that their Nation currently has 42 homes targeted for retrofits to achieve at least Tier 1 performance. To date, two homes have undergone upgrades, including new doors, windows, and insulation, due to the application of knowledge gained through the training. The Nation has plans to retrofit approximately five homes over the next five years, with the long-term objective of achieving full compliance.

Equally important was the program's role in fostering peer to peer learning and collaboration. Participants benefited from hearing directly from others facing similar challenges, which helped normalize common issues while also surfacing practical, community driven solutions.

This exchange of knowledge strengthened a sense of shared responsibility and collective learning, while also reducing feelings of isolation among individuals working in housing and infrastructure roles.

The feedback provided also identified several opportunities to strengthen the delivery and overall effectiveness of the training. Participants indicated that they wanted more flexibility in the format for training. They indicated overall shorter trainings, additional breaks for longer training sessions, and for trainings to be scheduled according to the time zones of participants would help to increase efficacy of training. There was also an indication that there was strong desire for differentiation in training content based on the level of experience of each participant. Additional recommendations included providing more interactive components to training such as direct engagement with participants and structured discussions and using short quizzes as a method of reinforcing understanding and measuring comprehension of training material in real time.

Overall, the program highlights the value of combining technical training with practical application, real world context, and community engagement. It demonstrates that when training is relevant, accessible, and directly connected to ongoing projects and challenges, it can drive immediate outcomes while also building a foundation for longer term capacity, leadership, and improved housing outcomes across Indigenous communities.

HEAR FROM THE TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

Watch the interview by scanning the code

CONCLUSION

The Codes Acceleration Program within Indigenous Communities highlights the critical role of practical, community focused training in improving housing outcomes and advancing energy efficient building practices. By combining technical knowledge with real world application, the program has supported communities in making more informed decisions around housing design, construction, and long-term maintenance. The program also makes it clear that simply providing technical solutions will not address the ongoing challenges related to the promotion of building code adoption. Sustained investment through education, user friendly and culturally appropriate resources, and ongoing technical assistance will be necessary to address underlying barriers to ensure building code adoption persists.

As we move forward it is critical to continue working with communities and remain committed to providing flexible and accessible training opportunities. In doing so, we will create long term energy efficient housing solutions for and by Indigenous communities through prioritizing both knowledge and implementation.

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