



## Community Success Story

# Connecting Indigenous communities with energy experts via the Ask an Energy Specialist Project

### Project Context

Households in Indigenous communities in BC face considerably higher home energy costs than those in other communities. According to estimates, energy costs in Indigenous communities may be double those in other BC communities and triple for those families living in remote communities, where highly expensive diesel generation is common. Indigenous communities also receive limited federal funding, which causes resources and staff capacity to be stretched.

Investment in energy-efficient housing is often considered the foundation for a sustainable, resilient and low-carbon future. This is an opportunity not only to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also to improve quality of life, create jobs and reduce Indigenous health inequalities.

The Ask an Energy Specialist Project aims to support First Nations communities that have an interest in housing energy efficiency but are in the early stages of planning or implementation. The project helps communities get started on energy efficiency work by offering short-term guidance (4 - 18 hours) from an energy specialist. External consultants provide these services and Fraser Basin Council (FBC) staff participate in all meetings with communities to help with follow-up after the consulting hours are complete.

### Project Description

The Ask an Energy Specialist Project provides support to help individuals in Indigenous communities scope out future energy efficiency projects and build capacity in housing and energy planning. This guidance is intended to fill the need for higher-level advisory services. It dovetails with and complements funding available to Indigenous communities through government and utility rebate programs.

The Ask an Energy Specialist Project serves as an important first step in helping First Nations communities get projects off the ground, as a free intermediate service between project planning and delivery.



**Ask an Energy Specialist**

**Free advice for First Nations in planning energy-efficient housing & community projects**

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### Collaborators

Fraser Basin Council

SES Consulting

Sustainable Projects Group

Community Energy Association

### Funders

Real Estate Foundation of BC

Fortis BC

BC Housing

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

### Project Leads

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## Milestones

### February 2021

Initial planning meetings & communications framework established

### March 2021

Energy consultants recruited into the project

### April 2021

Project launched and project delivery started

### May 2022

Secured funding from Vancity to extend the project to 2022-25

### August 2022

105 Consultancy hours were provided to 7 First Nations communities to support scoping out future energy efficiency projects

For more information about First Nations Home EnergySave visit: [www.fnenergy.ca](http://www.fnenergy.ca)



During the first two years of the Ask an Energy Specialist Project, 2021-22, seven Indigenous communities were supported with various housing and energy planning needs. These were:

- Tzeachten First Nation – Creating a community/residential engagement strategy
- Metlakatla First Nation – Exploring retrofitting opportunities through a Greener Homes grant application
- Uchucklesaht Tribe – Supporting the creation of a Community Energy & Emissions Plan, and ongoing mentoring
- Williams Lake First Nation – Supporting general energy planning
- Upper Nicola Band – Monitoring, benchmarking performance & exploring the Greener Home Grant
- Nisga'a Lisims Government – Supporting the creation of a universal building retrofit strategy
- Squamish Nation – Creating Building Standards focused on new developments in the Territory

The Ask an Energy Specialist Project offered support on a range of issues including: finding and selecting contractors; financing and funding resources; heating, ventilation and air conditioning; building enclosure and systems; and lighting, appliances and home automation.

Indigenous youth are an integral component of a low-carbon future, yet they continue to be underrepresented and require more support in the energy sector. As part of the Ask an Energy Specialist Project, FBC made a distinct effort to reach out to individuals new to energy efficiency. Over half of the 2021-2022 project participants were Indigenous youth between the ages of 18 and 35.

One of these Indigenous youth was Drae Azak, now working for Laxgalts'ap Village Government. Through the Ask an Energy Specialist Project, FBC connected Drae to consultants at the Community Energy Association (CEA) to support him in establishing a universal building retrofit strategy for Nisga'a Lisims Government.

While working with FBC and the consultants, Drae realized the deep GHG emissions reduction potential of having a universal building retrofit strategy; there were reduction opportunities that each of the four villages could customize to their unique needs. CEA was able to work with Drae to create the *Big Moves for Buildings* strategy document, which offered guiding principles and actions that could be taken to implement a universal building retrofit strategy.

## Lessons Learned

1. A broader roster of consultants within the project will allow FBC to better match communities with consultants who have the right expertise to meet community needs.
2. Indigenous representation among the energy consultants involved in the project should be increased. In the 2022-25 funding cycle, FBC will be recruiting 4 to 5 Indigenous energy specialists to provide guidance to Indigenous communities.
3. Most communities benefitted from 14+ hours of consultancy support, which meant that fewer communities were supported than initially planned. However, the communities received more comprehensive support.
4. With a limited project budget, FBC had to manage the number of referrals to avoid oversubscription. This made marketing the project challenging at times.
5. There were some challenges to quantifying project impact. The impact of the project was measured based on value added to the First Nations communities' current projects, which was evaluated 6 months after the support was provided.

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