

First Nations' Success Stories

Housing Policy to Support Fair and Transparent Governance



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Working together for housing solutions

Strong lines of communication between residents and a First Nation's housing staff pave the way for fair and open housing operations. Two-way discussions are vital to identifying housing needs and capturing suggestions from residents. And, when housing staff explain how missing a rent payment could result in fewer dollars for non-housing programs, tenants see why it's so important to pay their rent regularly.

Creating a housing committee which includes resident members and developing a housing policy with clear roles and responsibilities for occupants and housing staff are just two ways to harness the power of clear communications. Read about the experiences of various First Nations through the following Success Stories. Perhaps some would suit your housing department!

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NEW WAYS TO HEAR HOUSING CONCERNS

Residents of New Brunswick's **Elsipogtog First Nation** love to talk about housing but they haven't always been able to pass their thoughts along to those in charge.

The First Nation made two changes which led to better communications between their members and housing management. The first was creating a volunteer-driven housing committee. Committee members attend informal gatherings, answer questions, listen to concerns and propose solutions. Second, one band councillor is now responsible for housing. Housing department staff report to that councillor, who then briefs the Chief and Council on housing actions.

The result? The Band can easily pinpoint housing needs and priorities now. A five-year skills development plan is also teaching residents how to better manage their homes.

“ [Committee members] help us connect with people who might never show up for a community housing meeting.”

Charles Levi, Director of Housing
Elsipogtog First Nation



HOUSING IMPROVES WHEN EVERYONE'S ACCOUNTABLE

Years ago, the housing department of **Enoch Cree Nation** in Alberta had no clear path to improving housing. This was partly because the history of housing units, tracking methods and task management weren't properly documented.

That changed in 1995, when the Enoch Cree Housing Authority Ltd. was created to manage finances and housing information, and to renovate, buy and build houses. The Authority also set roles and responsibilities for occupants and the housing department through a housing policy. Later, Enoch Cree members approved that policy in a referendum.

The result? With a better records management system, homes are generally better maintained and, the Band can apply to housing programs more easily.

“There’s a stronger recognition that homes are important assets, and members look on occupancy as a privilege that comes with responsibilities.”

Connie Morin, Housing Manager
Enoch Cree Nation



ONE HOUSING POLICY, FOUR FIRST NATIONS

Four First Nations from British Columbia's **Northern Shuswap Tribal Council**, four housing policies, one shared problem—how to get tenants to pay the rent?

Members often moved between the communities and viewed all housing departments in the same negative light. At the T'exelc First Nation, for example, unpaid rents left no money for repairs. The Band had to take funds from non-housing programs to pay for mortgages, too.

So the four First Nations formed the Northern Shuswap Housing Alliance. It produced a single housing policy which explained to tenants what was expected of them and advised housing managers on rent collection, notices and coordinating with Social Assistance.

The result? Successful monthly rent collections have shot up.

“Each First Nation has a role at the table.
We started with the housing policy
and the work just keeps growing.”

Janine Alphonse, Housing Manager
T'exelc First Nation



DIVERSE HOUSING COMMITTEE BRINGS SUCCESS

What do elders, youth, off-reserve Band members and staff from different Band Office departments who make up **Eel River Bar First Nation's** first-ever Housing Committee have in common?

There's a willingness to happily toil for the long-term benefit of this New Brunswick community. Having alternate members from each group to step in when it's needed also helps.

The result? The Housing Committee accomplished a lot quickly, thanks to open communications between Band staff and members. One major triumph was the creation of a point-based selection process that allocates new housing to members in a fair, uniform and open way.

“For most of the members, working on the Committee has just become part of their day-to-day job responsibilities.”

Mario LaPointe, Capital and Housing Manager
Eel River Bar First Nation



TACKLING HOUSING CHALLENGES HEAD-ON

When even one tenant misses rent payments on a small reserve like Prince Edward Island's **Lennox Island First Nation**, it's a problem. But it spurred the Band into action.

A policy committee comprising Band staff and representatives of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island was established. Its job, in part, was to ensure the housing policy reflected newly acquired housing assets.

Crucial to shaping an updated policy was staging three community meetings. Residents detailed concerns and ideas, and the Committee, in turn, explained why it's important to pay rent.

The result? The Band, among other changes, added credit checks and an affordability analysis to see whether prospective tenants can afford the rent.

“Because they were involved right from the start of the process, the majority of the members were on side with all the changes.”

Corinne Dymont, Band Administrator
Lennox Island First Nation



DID YOU KNOW?

Well-written policies and procedures set the stage for good relations between residents and housing staff. Consider these two tips when developing a housing policy:

- **Purpose**

Explain generally what your housing department wants to do, and why and how it wants to do this. A housing policy starts with clear decisions based on an organization's mission, vision, values, ethics and objectives.

- **Content and formatting**

Use plain language for easy-to-understand text. State who drafted the policy, how it was developed, when it was approved, and how the document will be distributed. Include the signatures of the people who approved the policy. Describe the policy's purpose, the programs it covers and policy specifics such as who is responsible for what. Explain how the policy will be carried out. The document must show the date when the policy takes effect, any dates of revisions to the policy and, if required, the date when the policy ends. As for formatting, try to make this document look like your community's other policy documents. That way, it's easier for readers to find the information they need.

Learn more about how First Nations are bringing
about positive change in the area of housing.
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