



First Nations' Success Stories

Financial and Housing Management Practices



68510 07-01-16

Working together for housing solutions

In an era when housing staff often have to do more with less money, every dollar counts. Taking advantage of affordable technology helps. So does getting residents more involved in managing their homes.

Computer software programs can track housing expenses and tenant history. They can also alert staff of upcoming maintenance and repairs so that small problems are fixed before they become costly headaches. Teaching residents to do their own basic maintenance and repairs instills pride and saves time and money for housing staff. Check out these solutions in the following Success Stories. Some might be just what your community needs!

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CODES ARE THE SECRET TO SORTING OUT HOUSING FIGURES

At **Enoch Cree Nation** in Alberta, two computer systems reveal the full story behind home improvements.

The Band's finance department has a regular financial accounting system to track expenses for repairs, appliances and materials. It also calculates equity in properties. Everything gets its own code. This allows Band staff to research, for example, whether a window being replaced is old (and likely worn out) or new (and possibly wrecked by tenants).

The housing department, meanwhile, has a custom-tailored property management system. Tenants' names, ages and other details are recorded, and before-and-after photos are taken during inspections and renovations.

The result? The software systems project monthly income and cash flow statements, and identify tenants with a history of property damage.

“When you're just starting out, you wonder why you are bothering to enter all those codes, but as the year progresses, you see the payoff in the detailed reports you can generate.”

Jessica Dorion, Finance Manager
Enoch Housing Authority Ltd.



COORDINATED AND READY TO MAKE MOVES ON MORE HOUSING

The best dance partners are in sync with each other. The same holds true for band departments eager to glide toward housing development opportunities, as Alberta's **Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation** discovered.

The community needed housing for more than 1,300 members. But construction financing ran on different terms and schedules from regular financing, and the finance department was not successfully tracking construction expenses.

To whip things into shape, a comptroller was hired and a financial system was set up. Staff were also trained in construction financing.

The result? The housing director now has more time to search for housing opportunities and to work with the Band's construction manager on costing and scheduling before submitting building project applications.

“It's all about timing. We do what we need to on the administration and construction side and then get the proposals to the Chief and Council.”

Tracey McLean, Housing Director
Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation



NIP MAJOR REPAIRS IN THE BUD WITH PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

Although homes in Quebec's **Cree Nation James Bay** region were less than 25 years old, they were starting to need more and more repairs. To solve the problem, the Cree Nation and the Cree Regional Authority wrote their own preventive maintenance computer software program.

Maintenance information for every unit was entered, including the year the unit was built and equipment details. Housing staff members enter data from property inspections, too. Repairs are regularly scheduled before small problems become expensive major repairs.

The result? Budget forecasts are more accurate and yearly maintenance expenditures are down. The communities also know which repairs will be needed in the next year as well as in the next 5 to 10 years.

“Scheduling can be done sensibly and cost-effectively. That means exterior repairs in the spring and summer, mechanical work in the fall and interior repairs in winter.”



HOUSING FOR ALL ENSURES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

At Quebec's **Pekuakamiulnuatsh Takuhikan First Nation**, there's a housing program for everyone.

Young families on tight budgets can turn to a financial assistance plan for properties worth up to \$130,000. A second plan helps people eyeing properties over \$130,000. For those in a position to grow their money, another program provides funds to build homes to be rented to others.

Additional programs help seniors, people with disabilities and residents in older homes to expand, adapt or prolong the life of the homes they rent.

The result? The First Nation developed 140 affordable rental units, with some offering special services to aid seniors or people with disabilities.

“We have implemented housing programs that enable all individuals...to meet both their housing needs and their desire for independence.”

Lucie Germain, Housing Sector Manager
Pekuakamiulnuatsh Takuhikan First Nation



COMMUNITY SAVES MONEY WHEN RESIDENTS LEARN MAINTENANCE SKILLS

With nearly 1,000 houses spread across Alberta's large **Siksika First Nation** reserve, considerable time, gas and money was being guzzled as Band staff attended constant maintenance and repair calls.

But calls have gone down since the First Nation made it mandatory for people to take a home maintenance course to qualify for housing. Residents learn to fix small household items like door knobs, change furnace filters, replace O-rings on kitchen sink traps and test smoke alarms. They also learn to spot early signs of mould and to remediate or prevent it.

The result? Over 200 people have earned a home maintenance certificate. And, with regular maintenance, Siksika is seeing fewer costly repairs.

“People are taking an active interest in housing. They realize that it saves the community money to do things right.”

Stewart Breaker, Housing Manager
Siksika First Nation



DID YOU KNOW?

Making financial plans and adopting smart housing management practices will stretch precious revenues. Consider these two tips:

■ **Create budgets**

Step 1—Develop long-term objectives, such as paying mortgages monthly.

Step 2—Set short-term objectives, such as reducing arrears over a 12-month period.

Step 3—List all personnel and supplies needed to carry out programs and activities.

Step 4—Identify possible revenue sources within and outside the community. Consider ways to stretch those funds, like increasing rents.

Step 5—Calculate the expected cost of personnel and supplies required. Create a maintenance plan to prioritize which repairs must be done and see where resources are most needed.

Step 6—Examine ways to reduce operating costs without losing efficiency or service (persuading tenants to pay their rent on time increases revenues).

■ **Borrow innovative ideas**

Use tools to stay aware of the condition of housing and possible maintenance problems, incorporate energy efficiencies into housing and develop security features to safeguard units, promote efficient repair services, teach property management skills to staff, communicate effectively with residents and encourage them to participate in housing management.

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