FNHPA Research Study 2025

Building Strategic Planning Capacity in on-reserve First Nations Housing

FNHPA Study Report June 2025

First Nations Housing Professionals Association

L'Association des professionnels de l'habitation des Premières Nations

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Chapter 1: FNHPA Research Report 2025 Leveraging Housing Strategy, Policy and Accountability

Introduction

The First Nations Housing Professionals Association (FNHPA) aims to support housing management roles in First Nations communities by providing resources and building capacity. This research report reviews existing and promising practices in housing strategies, policies and accountability, examines those that have shown effective and successful outcomes and proposes recommendations for using existing resources and identifying new opportunities to develop strategic planning specifically for First Nations Housing staff.

Background

In 2023, FNHPA released a report: *Resource Requirements for the Effective Management of First Nations On-Reserve Housing*. It includes 22 recommendations aligning with their core areas: national standards, education, communication, support and research. The 2024-2025 priority focuses on advancing Recommendation 13, to "leverage the FNHPA's lessons on Housing Strategy, Policy and Accountability to build capacity around strategic planning." This report analyzes literature and effective and innovative practices and provides insights from members on their challenges and the supports they need to advance elements of strategic planning. It also offers tools to assist First Nations in strategic planning to operationalize their housing plans. The outcome includes an outline for a ***FNHPA toolkit: strategic planning for housing managers*** with initial templates and next steps to support First Nations in developing their plans.

About the First Nations Housing Professionals Association

The FNHPA is a national not-for-profit professional association exclusively serving the needs of individuals working for or aspiring to positions within the First Nations housing industry. It is the governing body for certification, training and professional development opportunities for all First Nations housing across Canada. It was founded on November 15, 2018, and formally incorporated on January 1, 2019. Specifically, FNHPA supports existing and future housing professionals in serving their communities by:

- setting national standards for First Nations housing on-reserve
- delivering housing management education and certification programs
- encouraging communication and knowledge-sharing
- offering direct support and access to First Nations housing professionals in Canada
- undertaking relevant research aimed at identifying ways to improve First Nations on-reserve housing management in Canada

The importance of FNHPA strategic planning resource development

FNHPA has determined the best way to meet the needs of their members is to facilitate learning and growth by providing the best experts, resources, training and support for First Nations housing managers. FNHPA acknowledges that change occurs over time and that resources are not readily available to facilitate these changes in every community. Therefore, they prioritize recommendations that maximize opportunities to improve the management and operations of on-reserve housing and First Nations housing organizations.

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FNHPA members have participated in yearly surveys, and the team at FNHPA listens and learns what members are asking for and then addresses their priorities. FNHPA builds their expertise alongside building the capacity of its members to put changes into practice.

> *"Our leaders and communities need to understand that well-being begins and ends, each day, in the home."*
>
> *Member response regarding the community's future goals for housing*

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Chapter 2: Study Approach and Methodology

Study Approach and Methodology

Housing is at the heart of a community's well-being, affecting health, social and economic outcomes. The FNHPA supports and improves housing management within First Nations communities step-by-step, focusing on the most impactful research questions, and developing approaches and methodologies that create practical recommendations. They focus on building on what exists, listening to their members, prioritizing actions and building additional resources based on this feedback. By doing so, FNHPA is building its expertise and helping its members implement changes and gradually improve their housing services.

The **FNHPA Research and New Services Committee** guided the study team, ensuring the methodologies applied would add value, respect their members' time and ensure that fully informed consent would be provided by participants. The approach and methods build on prior research from FNHPA that includes quantitative and qualitative data and added qualitative methodologies focused on grounded saturation; meaning that the data analyzed is the best available information gathered to answer the research question. The result is practical and usable resources for communities in which housing managers work and are served by FNHPA.

The research question:

How can FNHPA support strategic planning capacity in on-reserve First Nations Housing Departments to better plan and meet the housing needs of their members?

Methodologies used

At the outset, researchers were asked to conduct a background review of contextual materials, including:

- Existing strategic planning tools and supports available to all First Nations
- Existing approaches to strategic planning facilitated by firms, groups and consultants
- Comprehensive Community Plans and planning resources
- Land use plans, including housing and connected infrastructure services on-reserve.
- Housing programs and departments' housing strategies, operating and planning materials.

This study stage resulted in a literature review examining studies, tools and expert advice identifying practical approaches for planning and managing housing in First Nation Communities. It also reviewed results from existing FNHPA data to understand the demographic and quantitative data, such as the number of housing units, staff numbers and positions, budgets and administrative processes used across First Nations of different sizes, regions and stages of self-government. From this review, an understanding of existing data and the needed outreach to First Nations communities was gained. Survey and interview responses would result in data saturation and ensure analysis and outcomes of the study would provide effective recommendations and outputs for all members of FNHPA.

Following the literature review (see Appendix A for the full technical report on this review), a questionnaire was sent to FNHPA members to help researchers understand strategic planning

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capacity in housing departments and to find solutions that respect and reflect First Nations' unique cultures and needs. The questions were designed to gain member insights, exploring:

- Strategic planning that First Nations currently implement in supporting their future housing goals
- Recommendations for potential FNHPA-developed strategic planning tools and resources
- Potential effective metrics for accountability and transparency, such as community reporting
- Insights from First Nations housing leaders on further developing educational needs, resources and support related to strategic planning
- Direction on tools and templates that are accessible and easy to use

In addition to the questionnaire, a series of interviews was conducted to collect information about the current state of the strategic planning capacity of on-reserve housing programs and insights into the roadblocks and opportunities for FNHPA to effectively support housing managers in advancing their ability to improve planning and operationalize First Nations housing management.

Limitations and Restrictions

Potential limitations and restrictions associated with this review may have directly or indirectly influenced the level of detail researchers could collect. These limitations are listed below to provide transparency around our findings.

1. **Capacity in First Nations Communities**
   An important engagement component is the time and resource commitment required by First Nations communities. Since many do not have sufficient resources to carry out these requests, consultations can burden individuals asked to participate. In short, many communities simply do not have the staffing resources to handle the number of engagement requests delivered to them, let alone staff with the required experience and expertise to lead these initiatives.

2. **Engagement Fatigue**
   Over-consultation and the resulting engagement fatigue are realities for many First Nations communities. The impacts of over-engagement can show up in a community's resistance to participate in new initiatives, not only due to a shortage of resources to carry out the work but also because of the apprehension to trust that a process will garner meaningful results.

3. **Emerging Priorities**
   As with any organization, there are competing pressures for time, budget and resources. As priorities shift, so too does the community's focus. In this regard, there are instances where engagement was reprioritized, and discussion times were cut short or could not happen within the allotted project timeframe.

   A distraction from engagement on this project has been the change in federal politics and the global economy, including US tariffs. Many leaders and organizations have had to

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redirect their priorities and refocus energy on a quick response to minimize negative impacts and maximize opportunities before the forecast recession and existing multi-jurisdictional budgets are reduced.

4. Project Timelines

The research program spanned from November 2024 to March 2025. Initially, questionnaires and interviews were planned from February 7 to March 17; however, the program was extended to March 21, 2025, to achieve qualitative data saturation. The response rate to the questionnaires was just under eight per cent, aligning with the anticipated range of five to 20 per cent. Not all individuals were available within the study period. This timeline constraint, also noted in prior research, underscored the need for adaptability. To address this, the report and toolkit are designed to be flexible, allowing for new insights and innovations from individuals who could not contribute during the initial timeframe.

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Chapter 3: Research Findings

Research Findings

This chapter reports on the findings from each of the following study components:

- Literature review: A comprehensive literature review was conducted early in the study program. Appendix A provides the comprehensive technical report and list of all references consulted. This chapter provides a high-level summary of the literature reviewed in the technical report, as these findings informed the questionnaire and interviews.
- Questionnaire: A series of in-depth questions was asked, and 24 members answered the questionnaire. Participants spent 30 minutes to an hour answering the questions, and sharing their experiences, ideas and needed resources for their communities. They also shared their experience with current housing programs and the effectiveness of FNHPA training and resources, and explored opportunities for future improvements.
- Interviews: Researchers conducted nine interviews, adding more insights and validating the questionnaire results. Seven interviewees had also completed the questionnaire. Each interview lasted about one to 1.5 hours and provided a deeper understanding of the responses.

The research findings are presented in a way that respects the integrity of insights provided by individuals while collating and summarizing comments to ensure participant consent and confidentiality parameters are maintained.

Literature Review

The following provides a high-level summary of key components of the literature review related to the existing environment. (See Appendix A for the full technical report on literature and works consulted.)

Background

Strategic planning for on-reserve housing has historically faced challenges, often following colonial frameworks that regarded housing primarily as a social service. A spectrum of strategic planning capacity exists in First Nations across Canada. Some communities have dedicated resources to developing and implementing their Comprehensive Community Plans (CCPs). In contrast, others have had limited capacity due to funding constraints. Communities with access to their own-source revenue often have more flexibility to take a holistic approach to housing, integrating business opportunities and cultural design to strengthen community bonds and overall wellness.

First Nations-led innovations in housing are gaining momentum and influencing government policy and institutional frameworks in Canada. At the same time, public awareness is growing around the need for meaningful change, with greater recognition of First Nations' strengths in addressing systemic issues. This is true of advocacy efforts of the First Nations Housing Professionals Association (FNHPA), which emphasizes professional development and capacity building in governance and strategic community engagement to transform housing systems in ways that reflect Indigenous values and priorities.

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Despite these advancements, many First Nations remain constrained by federal, agency and regional policies, programs and initiatives, which can limit their ability to implement comprehensive solutions. While well-intentioned programs exist, outdated systems still shape housing policies, sometimes leading to barriers that hinder success. Continued efforts to assert jurisdiction and strengthen Indigenous economies are key in shaping a sustainable and community-driven future for housing.

Summary of Existing and Promising Practices

Promising practices in housing developments have evolved significantly since the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. The literature review emphasized the importance of community-led strategic planning, good governance practices, Indigenous economic principles and multi-sectoral collaboration in housing initiatives (see Appendix A). FNHPA's mandate and vision are to establish professional standards, certification and other services for First Nations housing professionals across Canada, enabling them to develop their own innovative, effective and financially responsible housing. This community development of housing is critical for enhancing community safety, health, education and economic well-being.

The review examines the planning capacities, challenges and opportunities for self-determination among promising First Nations initiatives and economic development that result in meaningful changes in housing on-reserve. Smaller and more remote First Nations typically have fewer revenue streams for innovative housing plans and face greater challenges in retaining long-term, qualified housing staff. Conversely, larger First Nations or those located closer to other communities or service centres have greater capacity to build and maintain housing staff while implementing planning initiatives and cost-saving measures. Focusing on recruiting, training, hiring and creating quality work environments within communities has helped improve housing on-reserve.

Regardless of community size or access to external opportunities, improvements in housing depend on strong governance that transcends the limitations imposed by the Indian Act. Encouraging community participation, accountability and transparency is vital. Distancing political influence from daily operations and integrating Indigenous culture and knowledge through active community engagement are essential practices emphasized in First Nations' strategic planning to foster meaningful progress.

First Nations' economic principles play a crucial role in addressing housing challenges. Examples of below-market homeownership programs, revolving loan funds and First Nations' mortgage initiatives demonstrate the potential for creating economic markets.

The literature highlights the importance of building community capacity, implementing strong governance practices and innovating housing as a business (HAAB). Teamwork, fair wages and ongoing training and development are critical. FNHPA's role involves supplying resources, creating networks, enhancing the capacity of housing professionals through targeted training, establishing

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wage benchmarks and identifying research that provides evidence for improving self-determination and decreasing reliance on external processes rooted in colonial approaches.

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) has introduced the **Horizontal Initiative – Support for Indigenous Housing (2024-2025)** to fund First Nations housing needs. This initiative supports housing along a **continuum**, meaning it funds various stages—from planning and construction to long-term management and maintenance. The goal is to create housing solutions that provide shelter and encourage economic opportunities and community well-being.

The funding model allows communities to develop housing that meets essential standards of **suitability** (ensuring homes fit household needs), **affordability** (costing less than 30 per cent of pre-tax income), and **adequacy** (requiring no major repairs). By supporting diverse housing approaches, the initiative helps communities integrate social support with revenue-generating opportunities.

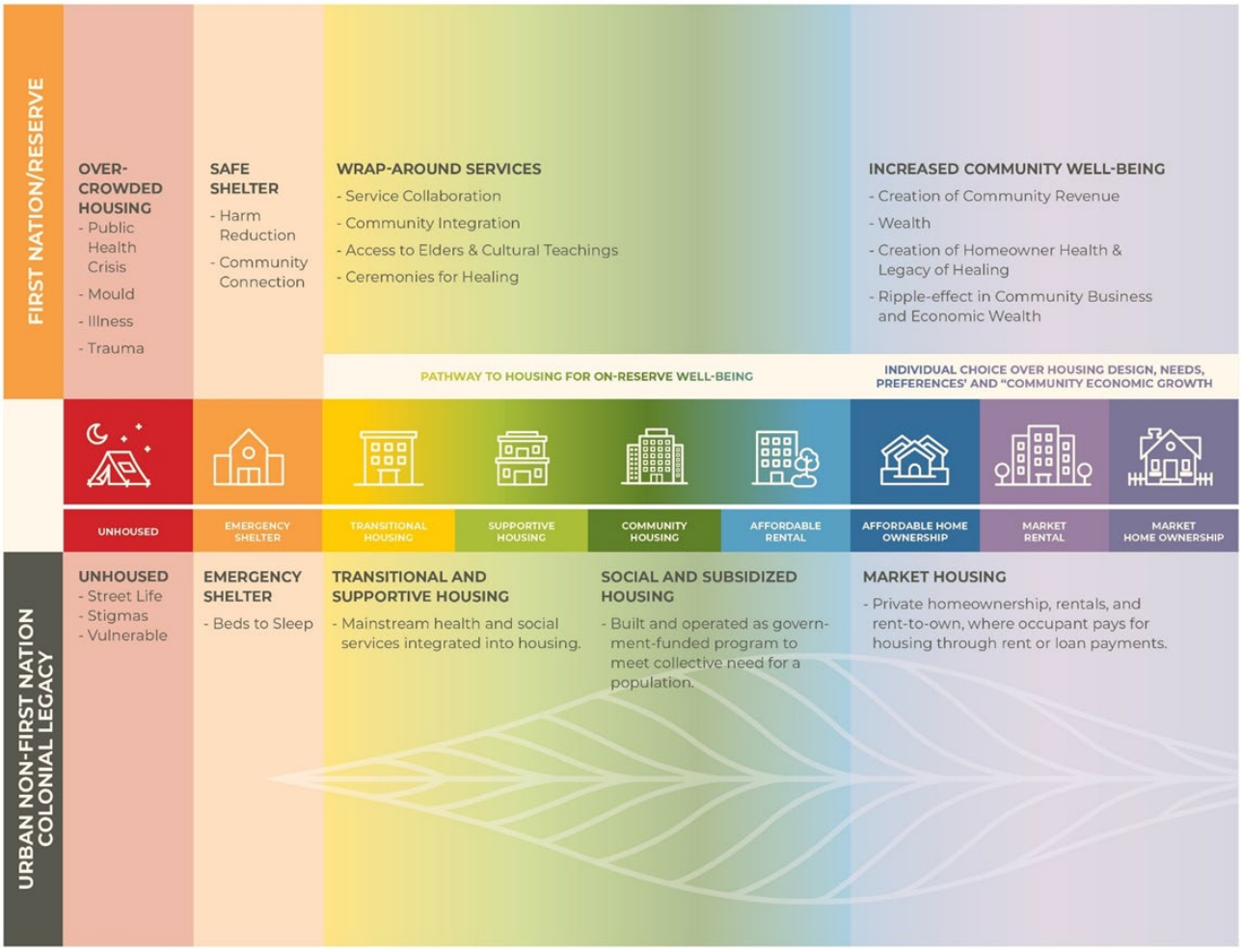

Figure 1 combines the First Nations Housing Professionals Association (FNHPA) mandate with the **housing continuum** outlined in the Horizontal Initiative. It illustrates how strategic planning can align with First Nations values while addressing housing challenges sustainably.

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Questionnaire Results

The research team aimed to collect at least 10 completed questionnaires from various First Nations of different sizes and regions to ensure diverse representation. Twenty-four member communities provided detailed responses, highlighting the high engagement and commitment to FNHPA membership.

When interpreting the results from the questionnaires, consider the following points:

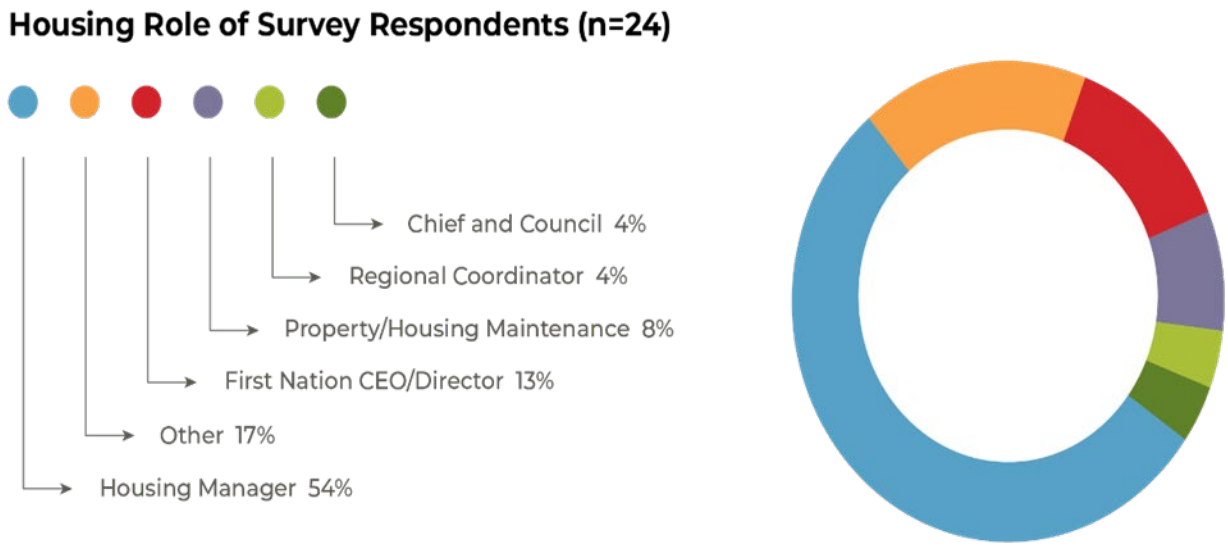
- Nineteen respondents answered all 10 questions.
- Five respondents provided partial answers or skipped some questions.
- Open-ended questions resulted in multiple comments, which were combined into themes. Therefore, not all data add up to 24 distinct comments.
- Some checklist questions allowed respondents to select multiple options, leading to larger data numbers compared to the number of participants.

Each section of the results clarifies whether multiple responses were allowed.

A full copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Housing role of members completing the questionnaire

Over 62 per cent of members were involved in frontline housing roles on-reserve, including positions such as housing managers and housing maintenance personnel. Additionally, one housing portfolio councillor and three department directors participated in the survey. Two were FNHPA regional team members.



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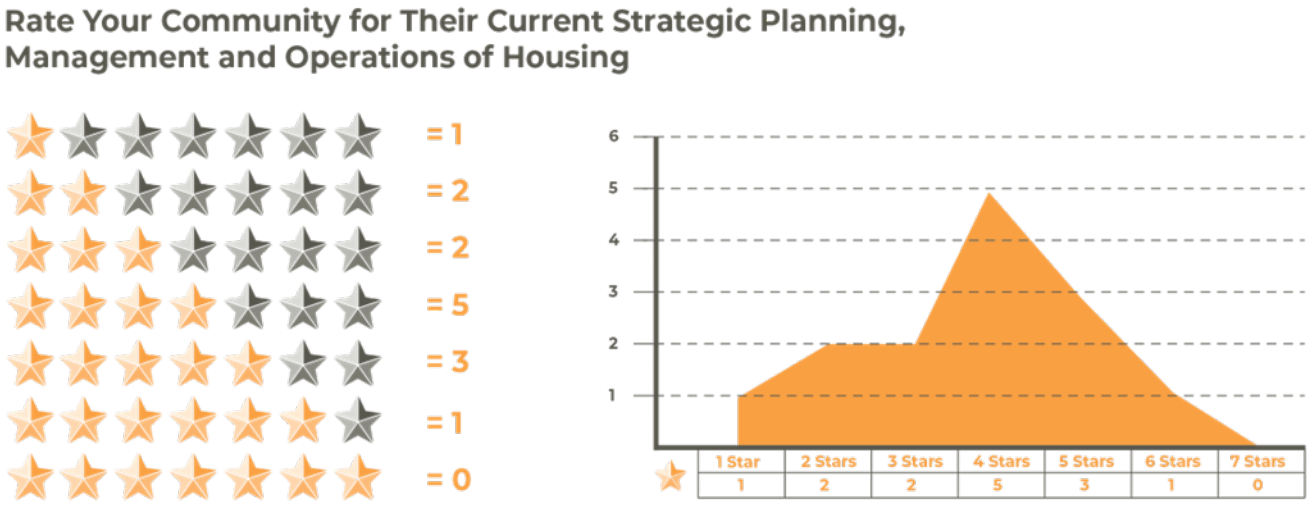
Members review their community's housing program:
At the outset of the questionnaire, each member was asked to rate, on a seven-point scale, their community's housing strategy, management and operations. Fourteen members responded, and 28 per cent rated their communities above average.



Status of community strategic planning and Housing Plans:

Survey participants (17 of 24) stated that their community had no active housing plan or strategy in operation. Two responded that the community was in the planning phase for new housing strategies. Four had housing plans or strategies newly developed since 2023. Of the remaining strategies highlighted, many were unsure of the year or provided various reasons for not being involved or why operationalizing the plan was shelved.

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Of all the resources and processes shared about how communities develop their strategic plans, a couple of themes emerged:

- Technical expertise in community engagement and community-driven facilitation is low, so it is often outsourced when funding is made available
- Demographic and housing asset data from the community requires collaboration and information sharing across departments

Of the 24 respondents, the top community planning methods they were involved in included:

- Chief and Council Strategic Plans (10)
- Comprehensive Community Plans (10)
- Land Use Plans (7)

Only two indicated having a stand-alone housing strategy, one of which was new and developed as an action item from their Community Comprehensive Plan.

Community housing goals, resources and challenges in achieving success

Regardless of the status of formal community housing strategies, questions were asked about housing goals, resources and challenges in achieving desired housing outcomes. Figure 2 visualizes responses as a word cloud, with the most frequent responses appearing in larger text and less common ones in smaller text. It highlights the prominence of certain ideas based on repetition across participants. All 24 members provided open-ended responses to these questions, yielding rich qualitative input and identifying key themes related to needs, resources and factors that present significant challenges. Seventeen per cent of participants responded with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals.

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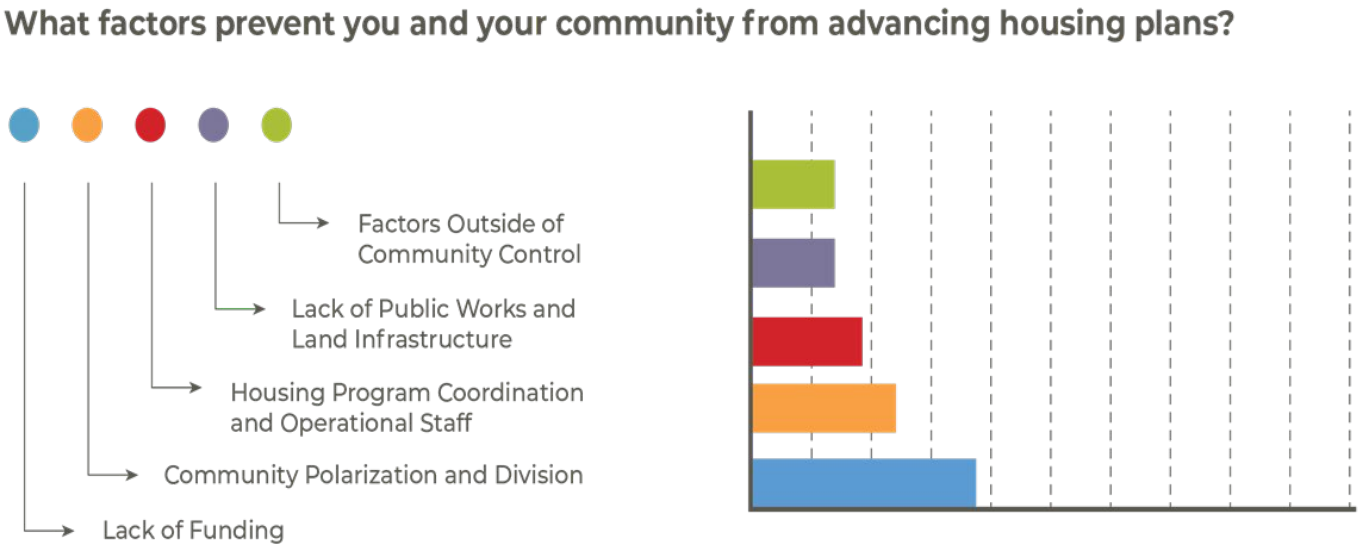
Members accessed the following resources to help achieve their housing goals (in order of commonality across all responses):

- Federal, CMHC, own-source revenue (OSR)
- Other collaborative proposals and funding grants
- In-house HR development:
    a. Building staff expertise in research and proposal writing
    b. Learning from and networking with other communities
    c. Use of technology for data management and analysis
- Restructuring with:
    a. Housing organizational chart
    b. Job descriptions with roles and responsibilities
    c. Plain language policy creation, including tenant involvement
    d. Planning process protocols
    e. Staff training
    f. Community and tenant training on home ownership and tenant maintenanceg
    g. Collaboration with regional non-profit organizations (included in comments were Habitat for Humanity, Friendship Centers, FNHPA tools, Keeper of My Home and Tribal Councils.)

The figure below shows the most common factors that prevent members from advancing their housing plans.



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Thirty-eight per cent of survey participants indicated funding was the most common obstacle. This signals deeper challenges related to the limited funding of outdated housing programs.

Over 25 per cent of survey participants expressed discontent with what could be interpreted as "community polarization" due to division around governance, stating that it slows down community housing planning, can delay decisions, create tension and make it hard to move forward with housing projects.

Only 12 per cent mentioned issues beyond community control, such as funding misalignments and political events that affect capacity, program restructuring, inventory and contractor costs. The FNHPA mandate, literature findings and challenges related to internal dynamics highlight how these external factors are not always fully understood at the grassroots level and can impose frustrating limitations.

The structure and operationalization of housing

The questionnaire asked members how their community plans to coordinate and operationalize four areas of housing: administration, tenant and property management and maintenance, data and records management and multi-sector collaboration. Members identified diverse and multifaceted challenges in organizing and supporting housing programs within their First Nations communities. Table 1 summarizes high-level feedback from the FNHPA members who responded across the four components necessary for structuring and operationalizing housing on-reserve.

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HOUSING COMPONENT	MEMBER RESPONSE RESULTS (21 MEMBERS RESPONDED)
Administration	· 48% of Housing Programs are tied to band administration and Chief and Council · 19% operate housing as a separate entity, with governance, finance departments and teams independent from Chief and Council involvement. **Challenges:** band administered delays in policy approvals, budgeting/ invoicing and tenant rent collection Benefits to independent housing entities included operating with a board of directors and ability to administer real-time asset management, inventory control, and hiring. **Goals include:** real-time asset management, inventory control and hiring; sustained funding managed independently from the band and creating governance and business models for home ownership and rental programs.
Property and Tenant Management & Maintenance	· 33% had updated policies for tenants and operations and maintenance. · 24% have tenant relations staff **Challenges:** relate to inconsistent enforcement, staffing shortages, and inadequate leadership support. **Goals include:** developing policies and tenant programs and Building codes and protocols for all property repair and maintenance and building tenant miantenace programs.
Data and Records Management	· 80% reported some for of data and records management · 20% reported ineffective or no data and record-keeping **Challenges:** lost records and inconsistent practices in paper filing and spreadsheet tracking delaying response time to application and requests for repairs. **Goals include:** protocols and process for consistency, hiring data entry clerks, adopting frameworks like Asset Management Planning and transferring to software and electronic file management systems.
Multi-sector Collaboration	· 21% report formal collaboration and cross-departmental teams. · 60% report minimal collaboration, characterized by informal interactions, unclear plans, and a lack of implementation. **Challenges:** Leadership inconsistency, leadership portfolios limit full Chief and Council awareness of housing priorities and challenges and lack of leadership involvement

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Planning solutions and practices that have worked with members

The second-to-last question focused on planning solutions to address housing needs and asked respondents to share what has worked best for their communities. Nearly 60 per cent of members said there is still no clear solution to their housing challenges. This response highlights that capacity and resources do not consistently support proactive planning and housing solutions.

The members who offered planning solutions provided the following themed responses, summarized and prioritized based on the frequency and clarity of their descriptions:

- **Planning for improved crisis management and emergency service:** Outputs could include a dedicated phone line, prompt technician response and regular follow-ups to ensure the timely handling of emergencies.
- **Operations and maintenance policy and data management structuring:** Consistency, planning for data management software and data entry clerks, consistent operations and maintenance programs, understanding of the total costs of all repairs and maintenance. Planning for increased staffing of data entry clerks and reporting of to-dos to help housing work crews carry out daily work to meet regular and yearly maintenance and inspections, tenant education and maintenance and repair priorities.
- **Community engagement and surveys:** Engaging communities to prioritize spending yields actions with ongoing small successes. Collecting input through surveys is a valuable tool for assessing needs and prioritizing budget decisions.
- **Adding capacity for succeeding at funding applications:** Securing housing funds requires continuous effort to maintain progress. Bringing on team members with the technical skills to write and assist in proposal development creates opportunities for additional funding.
- **Planning for home repair:** Reviewing options for implementing damage accountability through service fees and cost recovery programs with community members.
- **Planning for rental programs:** This could include reviewing the cost of constructing rental units, managing invoices and recovering monthly rent. This would empower tenants to maintain their payments, resulting in better housing control.
- **Incorporating homeownership and cost sharing into housing strategies:** Rental and homeownership programs increase tenants' understanding of housing costs and create more substantial community investment.
- **Partner planning opportunities:** Collaboration with Habitat for Humanity is making meaningful contributions.
- **Considering temporary housing in planning:** Modular home units have been introduced through collaboration with the support of regional organizations.
- **Homeowner choices:** The slow process of choosing housing locations remains a long-term goal.

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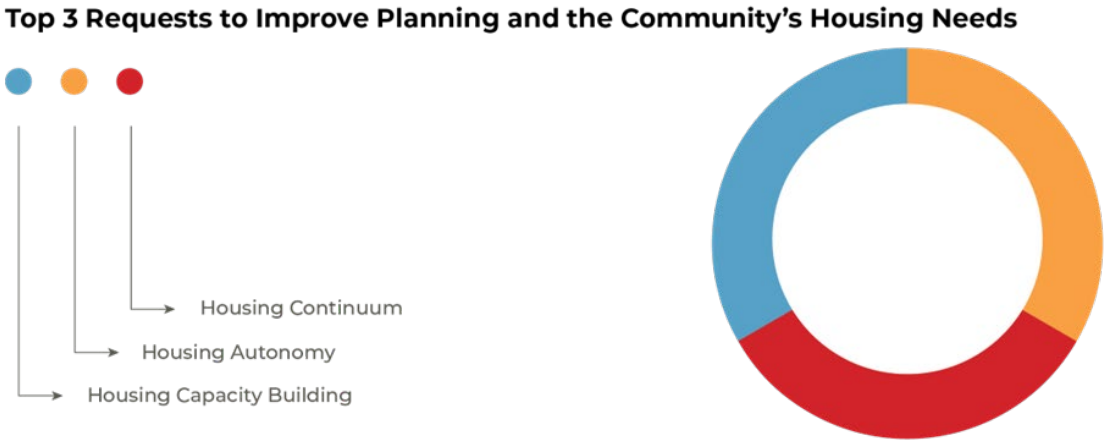
Top three requests to improve planning for community housing needs

Members were asked to identify their top three strategic planning needs to improve their planning and ability to meet the community's housing needs. While "more funding" was a typical response, a closer look at the additional comments fell into the same three categories across all members:



While these are very broad categories, comments within each category provide valuable insights into the needs of FNHPA members to advance their planning and success on-reserve. The following includes direction on priorities to inform First Nations housing strategic planning:

1. **Housing autonomy:**
   a. Housing as a separate organizational business, autonomous from elected leadership, with:
   b. Education and community awareness of effective practices, financial literacy, funding sources, self-government and strategic planning for housing.
   c. Strong policies and governance
   d. Community engagement and

2. **Housing continuum:**
   a. Support in the planning and operationalizing of new revenue and efficiencies in costs:
      i. Rental program
      ii. Service fees
      iii. Home ownership
   b. Addressing social wrap-around programming for those in need of shelter/transitional/social housing (harm reduction and protection from environmental hazards i.e. meth labs)

3. **Capacity building:**
   - Recruitment, hiring and retaining qualified housing team members
   - Training FNHPA housing professionals from within communities
   - Policy and procedures expertise
   - Journeymen

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- Trades programs for youth
- Operations and maintenance crew team development
- Fair wages
- Training, education and continuing capacity building to keep talent

Interviews

The questionnaire results offer valuable perspectives on how FNHPA members benefit from their education and certification and highlight opportunities to continue developing FNHPA members and resources. To build on the questionnaire's findings, the research team also interviewed key individuals to explore and confirm emerging themes. Those interviewed include:

- Two FNHPA regional outreach coordinator team members focused on validating and adding understanding to questionnaire results
- Four-member First Nations housing staff (two housing managers and two members with FNHPA certification in different housing roles in the community): Focused conversation on examples of FNHPA training being applied in community housing programs
- A community engagement firm supporting housing projects and Comprehensive Community Plans for several member communities. The discussion focused on identifying tools and innovative methods for enhancing community capacity and optimizing decision-making in First Nations housing projects. This conversation contributed to the design recommendations of the FNHPA toolkit, building capacity and resources for member First Nations to implement their housing strategies, needs assessments and planning documents for FNHPA members to use independently within their communities.
- A national organization focuses on training housing stakeholders and providing resources to support non-profit housing and community programs in non-First Nations areas. The discussion aimed to clarify national standards and resources for the professional development of non-First Nations housing managers in strategic planning, governance and policy development.

The interviews validated and clarified the questionnaire analysis, providing deeper insights into the members' responses. They helped ensure that the data were comprehensive and supported the literature review on national standards, presenting additional opportunities to apply practical tools in practice.

The following section discusses the key findings from the interviews. It highlights how FNHPA members achieve success with the support of FNHPA education and certification and emphasizes the high value placed on FNHPA membership.

The detailed answers to the questionnaire showed the essential contribution of FNHPA membership. The interviews further validated these findings, providing important details about the most valued training and capacity-building resources and priorities for additional support. This support helps members plan and deliver on-reserve housing programs more effectively.

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The interviews confirmed that the questionnaire results reflect the diversity of FNHPA member communities. They validated the importance of FNHPA resources and services. FNHPA's certification training, expertise, standards and available support encourage First Nations housing departments to adopt proactive approaches. Additionally, members are speaking up, requesting that FNHPA continue to build on its priorities, focusing on capacity development for better planning and implementation, and advocating for First Nations administration of housing policies and programs.

Overall, FNHPA's training, standards and resources for housing managers lead to improved planning and governance in housing.

> *"The FNHPA has an amazing team. The level of technical expertise, ability to motivate in-class participation and engagement and approach to adult education helps all housing personnel aim for a common goal that every housing department, regardless of having enhanced and augmented funding, can achieve the same basic level of housing programs."*
>
> FNHPA Graduate

> *FNHPA has helped us improve housing just that much because when we come together at workshops, meet other housing managers and learn what other communities are doing, we see where we are in our own plans and figure out that if another community can do it, so can we.*
>
> Saddle Lake Housing Team

> *The FNHPA workshops and training program opened our eyes to the true cost of housing; it was a game-changer. The chief and council changed their decisions to move toward better policy and had us move forward with renovation programs. Senior support is critical.*
>
> Cowessess First Nation

> *Housing managers, or sometimes a community that only has a housing maintenance person, have felt deflated for so long, having a network of peers feels like relief. I hope that FNHPA can bridge the gap between housing managers getting trained and having chief and council educated and aware of FNHPA and support their housing managers in applying what they learn in best practices across First Nations.*
>
> Regional Coordinator

The findings emphasize the importance of providing First Nations housing staff opportunities to learn through a collaborative approach to strategic planning. This helps housing professionals support one another, share experiences and learn directly from each other. Regional coordinators, who offer guidance and tailored knowledge, are a key resource for these housing teams. Interviews suggest that having technical experts within national non-profit organizations and funding entities to call for support can significantly reduce the need to rely on external mainstream consultants.

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> *I have called the CMHC resource support for our region and the FNHPA regional coordinator for support, and it has given me enough clear information and guidance, as well as some technical support through emails back and forth, that we have been able to engage with the community and revise all our housing policies to be more practical. Our housing policies for each housing program are relied on for our operations, maintenance programs, and tenant relations.*

FNHPA, through its training facilitators and certified housing professionals, fosters mentorship that positively impacts and encourages housing teams to continually improve their practices. Members who seek out and receive expert guidance help their communities proactively plan for housing, even without additional resources. Community facilitation is key in this process; when housing staff have the right resources and confidence in the materials, they are more likely to engage their communities effectively. The comments provided are a validation of the *Resource Requirements for the Effective Management of First Nations On-Reserve Housing Report* Recommendation 13: Leverage the FNHPA's lesson on housing strategy, policy and accountability to build capacity around strategic planning, its elements, how to engage staff in the process and linking strategy to operations. Provide templates and training videos/documents to support First Nations in developing their plans. Overall, the findings highlight FNHPA as leaders in First Nations governance and housing on reserves, and the guidance that can be provided in First Nations housing strategic planning capacity development.

> *A large part of FNHPA's success and full workshops is the facilitator and team energy. Roxanne has energy and a way to engage participation. You can feel it because at breaks and lunches, everyone is really about networking with peers and learning what each other is doing. We thought we were so behind every other First Nation, and then we went to this event and found out we are ahead in some ways, considering we don't have any enhanced revenues. That has us motivated. (Saddle Lake First Nation)*

> *When I need to call a national organization or funding body, I usually have to mentally prepare to be on guard, and the hierarchy of who to call first really matters. With FNHPA, if I can't reach my regional person, I can call Candace. She understands that the regional person is busy and just answers or follows through. I don't feel patronized or redirected to wait for that regional person to free up their time, and I don't feel like anyone is going to get into trouble. It's this sense of collaboration.*
>
> *(Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge)*

Interviews emphasize how challenging it is to educate communities and dispel outdated myths and mindsets. A facilitation approach that can raise awareness, present evidence and demonstrate the long-term benefits of strong strategic planning is crucial. These efforts encourage progress and mobilize communities to participate in planning.

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Research findings emphasize the importance of having skilled professionals within autonomous housing departments who can facilitate and organize planning activities in their communities and ensure they have strong planning tools. Developing housing strategic planning skills in First Nations staff is crucial because technical knowledge alone cannot replace the value of community expertise. Understanding local operations and culture is vital for supporting change effectively.

First Nations can achieve better outcomes by combining technical knowledge of housing programs and initiatives with community-specific expertise. Members are asking FNHPA, through research findings and interviews, to build leadership awareness and understanding, advocate for fair wages to retain staff and ensure an independent housing workforce. Key human resource priorities for strategic planning include: policy and proposal writing, financial management, data entry and skilled trades. This diverse expertise is essential for effective housing governance.

Effective First Nations housing strategic planning requires strong coordination skills, teamwork and community engagement. Leaders must collaborate to combine diverse skills and perspectives to solve complex issues effectively. Working together allows housing professionals to find sustainable solutions and achieve long-term goals. FNHPA's growing membership and the certification of housing professionals will enable communities to develop better housing strategies. Technical support from FNHPA is essential for success.

> *Housing Managers are going back to a community after being certified and having their efforts fall on deaf ears is deflating. One lone wolf equipped with what is needed to make change isn't enough, it's like Chief and Council need to come together to hear from FNHPA experts about the mandate of FNHPA and the Housing Managers training and resources available to them in order to facilitate their staying engaged in their job.*

When asked about outlining a workshop on strategic planning, the following were brainstormed:

- Collaborative Planning Tools (I.e. SWOT Analysis, TOWS Matrix): How to organize collaborative approaches to support the diverse needs of members and different membership segments. When describing a specific emergency response, one housing manager said, "Each department goes about trying to figure out solutions to a specific urgent situation and find the councillors with the portfolio to support decisions and stretch our resources to solve a problem, then we all end up at the same door of this person who needs help with uncoordinated solutions and predetermined decision."
- Environmental Scan (i.e., resource reviews and resource checklist): Educate and raise awareness of existing housing programs, including creating a common language about housing on-reserve. The recommendations from the questionnaire responses were enhanced with interview recommendations to facilitate educating chief and council, as well as all band departments and administration on the CMHC and ISC requirements related to reporting, policies, budgets and funding distribution.
- Setting scheduled goals, milestones and benchmarks: Housing managers described it this way: "The yearly cycle of seasons, cultural way of life and limited construction season often

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result in the colonial systems not aligning, creating mismatches in construction material purchases and construction seasons." Gantt charts, strategic plan timelines and project charters are helpful tools for building community capacity and measuring success.

- Describe the typical day of a housing manager and their housing team, explaining the jobs that don't fall within the job description and why things go awry when the organization bypasses policy. Additionally, this presents an opportunity to achieve efficiency and long-term sustainability gains by assembling the right teams with the necessary qualifications. "I'd like to see an exercise facilitated that highlights the 'A Day in My Shoes' experience." (Housing manager).

> *"If the band is delayed in financial accounting, then housing reports will be late, and funding will also be postponed. Additionally, when funding is allocated for maximizing repairs and housing construction but does not include resources for developing housing staff and administrative capacity (i.e., proper data entry applications/tools), there are negative consequences for the operation and maintenance of housing assets. We can't do our job without a team of staff and the right tools and training. Young adults from our own community to fill these positions encourages retention and expertise that fits with the community."*

- Community data tracking and performance measurement: Those interviewed reiterated that data collection, management and quality of entry, as well as producing reports and work plans for maintenance crews, result in the effective use of resources and timely reporting to funders, thereby limiting delays.
- Governance involvement in housing strategic planning: Interviews reiterated that it is essential for chief and council to understand each other's portfolios and their goals. Everyone could then work in alignment and collaborate to create and advocate for a system that works in conjunction with band administration schedules. They would also be able to invest and trust the development of individual housing entities that can meet these requirements and parameters.

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Chapter 4: Analysis and Recommendations

Analysis: Benchmarks and Key Themes

The remainder of this report analyzes the research into themes and resulting recommendations related to the study's research question, focusing on the development of a unique toolkit with FNHPA enhancements and resources for on-reserve First Nations housing departments to better plan and meet their members' housing needs.

The research literature review, questionnaire results and interview data were examined with the Research and New Services Committee to identify FNHPA benchmarks and supporting actions, validate themes and prioritize components for creating a toolkit toassist First Nations Housing Departments in conducting strategic planning within their departments and overall community planning initiatives.

The data collected and the study findings focused specifically on First Nations and on-reserve initiatives. The resources available for housing initiatives beyond what might be accessible to all First Nations on-reserve include communities that developed their own-source revenue (OSR) over time, geographic proximity to urban centers and accessibility to an extensive consultancy team approach, all of which offer enhanced strategic planning capacities not part of this research project. This study prioritized solutions that support the ability of all to meet the FNHPA benchmarks and receive support through FNHPA's actions in housing for First Nations, regardless of their access to enhanced resources and consultants from external areas.

Benchmarks and Supporting Actions

Literature analysis provided key themes in developing equitable benchmarks and supporting actions in First Nation housing. Benchmarks are crucial for creating a fair baseline of access and capacity in planning and operationalizing housing strategy. Based on the literature, benchmarks are essential for every First Nation, regardless of its resource abundance, to achieve the capacity and acquire the tools necessary to provide and support a basic standard of housing for community growth and wellness. These benchmarks aim to establish the support and actions (including training, resourcing and advocating) for a minimum standard of planning and operationalizing housing accessible to every First Nations community regardless of size and remoteness.

By creating these fair and practical benchmarks, FNHPA aims to support all communities in overcoming challenges, maximizing economic and growth opportunities and enhancing their strategic planning capacity, ultimately transforming their housing programs that address the spectrum of needs and opportunities. Furthermore, these benchmarks and standards are tailored to respect and align with the unique culture, leadership and geographical location of each community, ensuring that the solutions provided are both relevant and practical.

Table 2 presents initial considerations of effective strategic planning practices as benchmarks and FNHPA supporting actions that can help achieve strategic planning capacity in First Nations housing.

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Table 2 Benchmarks for FNHPA strategic planning and supporting actions

Benchmark	**Supporting Actions**
Good Governance Practices in Housing	Effective housing policy, governance and decision-making frameworks are accessible to all First Nations. Provide FNHPA education and awareness to First Nations leadership and community teams regarding effective governance and administration of housing programs, initiatives and funding sources (FNHPA/INAC/CMHC). Advocate for accountability and transparency supported by community-owned electronic data management.
First Nations Economic Principles Applied to Housing	Offer resources and training to support the administration of housing as a business with enhanced communications technology and data collection (asset management, inventory control, funding business models and cost recovery) Establish fair wage guidelines and advocacy for the continued development of certified FNHPA professionals.
Strategic Planning for First Nations Housing	Education and resources for strategic planning frameworks, activities and templates. Provide training and support in community engagement and facilitation. Invest in providing education, tools and resources for First Nations housing teams in proposal, policy and business development of housing.
Multi-Sector Collaboration in Housing Needs Assessment	Provide education and awareness tools for organizational structuring and multi-sector collaboration. Provide capacity building in leadership and teamwork facilitation, which will create energy for community participation in identifying housing needs and priorities.

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Key Themes

The insights from FNHPA members ultimately fall into six themes:

Awareness and access to resources for effective housing proposal, policy and strategic planning

- Expand awareness and education about the FNHPA mandate, training and resources among First Nations leadership and staff of First Nations organizations.
- Build and promote practical tools and resources that reflect effective and promising practices in planning for a future state of housing that meets community needs and adheres to FNHPA standards.

Electronic data management:

- Common roadblocks related to improving First Nations housing involve data entry, tracking and maintaining the right information electronically to produce effective accounts, management and staffing work plans efficiently and effectively. The three key areas where electronic data management improves housing responsiveness on-reserve include:
    - Improved crisis and emergency management tools
    - Housing First community needs assessments to allow data input for a baseline and the continuation of tracking asset management data and economic, social and health indicators.
    - Cost recovery and budget efficiencies because electronic file management within housing departments supports consistent data entry and usable reports for day-to-day assessment and work planning. This leads to effective management of maintenance programs, material inventory, asset tracking and work orders that improve daily response to tenants' needs.

Role of FNHPA to develop facilitators and champions:

- Facilitators bring energy, mentorship and specialized knowledge in First Nations governance and housing.
- Champions play a vital role in community strategic planning by raising awareness and presenting evidence-based approaches.

Human resources in strategic planning priorities:

- Developing autonomous housing departments with skilled professionals is key to sustainable success.
- Fair wages and diverse expertise, such as policy writing, financial management and skilled trades are pivotal for effective housing operations and retention.

Visionary leadership and teamwork are required in housing strategic planning:

- Multidisciplinary collaboration among leaders from different community planning and teamwork sectors drives the development of innovative, sustainable housing solutions that improve community well-being.
- Housing strategic planning requires strong facilitation, stakeholder engagement and teamwork, aligning with overall community priorities. The Housing First approach emphasizes that other health and social initiatives will face significant challenges in achieving holistic community well-being without secure and adequate housing.

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Recommendations and Toolkit Framework

The following recommendations incorporate the most frequently mentioned themes from members and the integration of effective practices and funding priorities facing First Nations across the country. The recommendations are focused on priority topics and resources in building an FNHPA Toolkit for Strategic Planning Capacity in on-reserve housing.

Recommendation 1: Develop a two-day FNHPA Strategic Planning workshop

The workshop could help community leaders understand FNHPA's vision, values and goals. It would offer tools for better communication, share helpful practices and show how strong housing management and leadership can create positive results. The goal is to inspire and support communities in improving housing programs. The Next Steps section of this report provides discussion and a framework for what could be included in the two-day workshop.

The workshop will aim to set the standard for housing on-reserve and promote leadership and collaboration, evidence-based planning and alignment across the community.

Recommendation 2: Enhance Long-Term Data Collection and Accountability

This recommendation highlights the importance of prioritizing strategic planning and long-term data collection to strengthen housing management practices. Electronic data management has been demonstrated to improve timely and consistent record-keeping. This recommendation should inform communities about data and how it informs strategic planning, evaluation, reports and insights for successful funding proposals, community engagement, partnerships and business opportunities.

Recommendation 3: Create a toolkit for members to support the facilitation of community housing planning, responding to member needs and priorities in planning

This toolkit will be a practical and forward-thinking resource for housing managers, enabling them to plan effectively while fostering innovation and collaboration within their communities.

The creation of this toolkit aims to empower FNHPA members to facilitate community communications and use innovative tools and resources, thereby enhancing housing planning and management. A draft of the toolkit framework and preliminary tools for each strategic planning section will be provided as an addendum to this report.

Recommendation 4: Create education, awareness and support for Multi-Sector Collaboration in Housing Needs Assessment:

This recommendation would demonstrate the tangible benefits of FNHPA resources and training, inspiring communities to collaborate across sectors and adopt similar strategies among First Nations for practical needs assessments, driving their housing strategies and programs. The tools would enhance awareness of evidence-based approaches and foster collaborative leadership that builds capacity for housing managers to make informed decisions. These decisions would address community needs, improve operational efficiency and align with long-term housing strategies.

The Toolkit and next steps

The toolkit framework and preliminary tools have been developed as a key deliverable of this report. They are provided within the *FNHPA Study 2025: Toolkit for Strategic Planning Capacity in on-reserve First Nations Housing*.

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To follow through with the research recommendations, FNHPA will need to focus on raising awareness and strengthening member connections to the resources already provided by FNHPA related to each recommendation component. As part of this research study, a toolkit has been developed with resources, templates and outlines for the coordinating recommendation. In addition, supportive next steps are provided for areas outside this project's scope and in places where further expertise and engagement are needed. The toolkit is a dynamic resource, and additional tools will continue to be identified, with links to other relevant FNHPA resources and tools. Hence, members receive the most comprehensive support possible. These steps will help maximize the impact of FNHPA's efforts and address gaps in service effectively.

The following table outlines the study recommendations, highlighting FNHPA benchmarks, supporting actions, recommendations and existing tools and suggestions for future ways to ensure comprehensive support for housing managers.

This approach will enable FNHPA to focus on building awareness and outreach to members where resources are already accessible and available, evaluate and revise any resources developed as part of the capacity-building tools within the toolkit and, lastly, determine what additional resources could be developed to enhance the toolkit.

Table 3 Strategic planning benchmarks, recommendations and toolkit next steps

Benchmark	Supporting Actions	Recommendations	Toolkit Component:
Good Governance Practices in Housing	Effective housing policy, governance and decision-making frameworks are accessible to all First Nations. Provide FNHPA education and awareness to First Nations leadership and community teams regarding current effective governance and administration of housing programs, initiatives and funding sources (FNHPA/INAC/CMHC). Advocate for accountability and transparency supported by community-owned electronic data management.	Develop a two-day FNHPA Strategic Planning Workshop. To set the standard for housing on reserve, promote leadership and collaboration, evidence-based planning and alignment across the community.	**Toolkit Study 2025 includes:** FNHPA two-day community workshop goals and Suggested topics Planning checklist Sample schedule **Components for Development:** PowerPoint presentations Activities Worksheets to accompany activities Sample Housing Department Continuum placemat Template for recording notes for developing into a webinar Webinar instructions.
First Nations Economic Principles Applied to Housing	Offer resources and training to support the administration of housing as a business with enhanced communications technology and data collection (asset management, inventory	**Enhance Technology, Communications and long-term data collection.** Introduce practical tools, resources and	**IN THIS TOOLKIT:** List of components to consider in updating on-reserve technology, communications and data collection

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	control, funding business models and cost recovery) Establish fair wage guidelines and advocacy for the continued development of certified FNHPA professionals.	related HR development (data entry training and job descriptions) for electronic data management to improve: Tracking housing operations and budgets for transparency	Housing business model canvas **Components for Development:** List of what is essential for First Nations to
Benchmark	**Supporting Actions**	**Recommendations**	**Toolkit Component:**
		• Streamlining tenant maintenance records, rental and repair invoicing for cost recovery • Use housing data to create evidence-based proposals for successful funding • Improve planning and self-determination in crisis and emergency management response Support long-term capacity for housing teams and independent administration and operations	Gather (not collected by ISC) list of ISC data tracked by First Nations. Resource list of recommended data management software (databases) Monthly/quarterly housing tracker Process chart/map of housing data collection pathway HR development in technology - templates for OCAP data policy and data clerk/team job descriptions Economic principles: Fair wage guidelines Resources re: software and analysis tools
Strategic Planning for First Nations Housing	Education and resources for strategic planning frameworks, activities and templates.	Develop a toolkit with practical, user-friendly resources to assist housing managers in planning	**IN THIS TOOLKIT:** DRAFT FNHPA strategic planning checklist Visioning exercise

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	Provide training and support in community engagement and facilitation. Invest in education, tools and resources for First Nations housing teams in proposal, policy and business development of housing.	and community engagement. Provide FNHPA Business Model Canvas for innovative projects.	SWOT analysis Strat Plan template Tracker for multi-department collaboration Housing Business Model Canvas. **COMPONENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT:** Communications plan for strategic planning exercise TOWS Matrix Sample policy template Sample project charter
Benchmark	**Supporting Actions**	**Recommendations**	**Toolkit Component:**
Multi-Sector Collaboration in Housing Needs Assessment	Education and awareness tools for organizational structuring and multi-sector collaboration Provide capacity building in leadership and teamwork facilitation, which will create energy for community participation in identifying housing needs and priorities	Develop engagement and facilitation support for gathering community input and establishing community priorities Create adaptable frameworks, templates and tools for community needs assessments Showcase and highlight First Nations housing program transformations and innovations Share examples of different housing options, and new innovations	IN THIS TOOLKIT: Needs assessment outline Interview questions SHOWCASE of _____ COMPONENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

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Appendix A: Literature Review: Technical Report and References Consulted

Literature Review

Leveraging Housing Strategy, Policy and Accountability

FNHPA Research Report 2024-25

Abstract

The following literature review aims to highlight all critical findings gathered through the environmental scan to support the development and exploration of Recommendation 13: Leveraging Housing Strategy, Policy, and Accountability, proposed in the Resource Requirements for the Effective Management of First Nations On-Reserve Housing Report. To create a comprehensive research report on Recommendation 13, our team is committed to further developing functional tools and strategies that FNHPA can choose to adopt.

Introduction

Through previous FNHPA national research focusing on First Nations on-reserve housing management, operations and capacity development, FNHPA has prioritized leveraging existing resources and/or identification of new development opportunities in the area of housing strategy, policy, and accountability to build capacity around strategic planning, linking strategy to operations. The report's conclusions address various housing topics, identify overlapping challenges, propose potential next steps and develop 22 critical recommendations. Although all recommendations are considered essential, they must be examined individually and consecutively to formulate a resolution for each. Recommendation 13 states, “Leverage the FNHPA’s lessons on Housing Strategy, Policy and Accountability to build capacity around strategic planning, its elements, how to engage staff in the process and linking strategy to operations. Provide templates, training videos and documents to support First Nations in developing their own plans.” The desired outcome of this recommendation is for “First Nations communities to have housing strategies that account for future needs and the goals and metrics to support realizing this desired future state.” The research focuses on the identified recommendation to enhance current FNHPA education and support for First Nations. This could involve improving existing curricula and programs, developing new programming or creating resources and tools for First Nations communities.

Moving forward, it is essential to examine the current state of strategic planning, policy and accountability within the FNHPA’s educational offerings, the ongoing practices of First Nations housing teams and the additional resources available. The following report outlines our findings and the potential direction for this project's success.

Background

Canada’s colonial legacy, particularly the enduring impact of the Indian Act, even with its contemporary revisions, has significantly influenced the control and social structuring of First Nations housing. The legacy of the Indian Act surrounding housing established a scenario where reserve infrastructure relied on government funding, turning housing into a social service. The cultural, geographical and economic repercussions of Canada’s colonial resource development and attempts to assimilate Indigenous communities have led to a housing crisis filled with complexity and enduring barriers that remain unresolved.

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A note about the literature reviewed: Until very recently, the processes and systems addressing the First Nations housing crisis employed data and frameworks based on assumptions and limitations rooted in colonial governance structures and capitalism. In other words, the systems within which First Nations must operate are outdated and hinder the innovation that could emerge from First Nations sovereignty, as well as sophisticated and contemporary cultures and visions for a sustainable future (Kalt, J. 2024; Kalt, J., Besaw Medford, B., and Taylor, J. 2022; Wilson-Raybould, 2022; INAC, 2016). First Nations are now successfully asserting agency and leadership to transform systems in the context of nation-building and reconciliation. Examples of Indigenous business innovation and leadership are emerging alongside First Nations movements, which are having monumental impacts across Canada's government, governance and institutional change (Indigenous Homes Innovation Initiative, 2021; David Suzuki Foundation One Nature, 2021). A shift in media tone is evident as Canada acknowledges and learns about the reparations needed and the strengths of Indigenous approaches to address systemic issues through movements like Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), #EveryChildMatters, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's work for Indian and Residential School Survivors, Land Back and recently, the Survivors Circle for Reproductive Justice. These all contribute to transformations in public awareness and drive change at every level of government and in the operations of businesses and organizations. These Indigenous-led movements are engaging in truth-telling and, albeit slowly, dismantling unintentional ignorance and public attachment to detrimental narratives, racism and discrimination. These movements, guided by Indigenous principles and strengths, challenge colonial systems to confront their denial, apathy and misconceptions, and to move beyond land acknowledgements and apologies (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. 2019; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2025).

The application of UNDRIP in Canada is two-sided, on one side are calls for the return of Indigenous jurisdiction over lands taken, aiming to re-establish political authority and Indigenous economies and enable systemic change in land governance. These nation-building movements create an existing climate for Indigenous-led system transformations. ***Good governance, proactive strategic planning and community engagement leading to social and economic developments are lessons applied in best practices for redesigning housing on reserve***. On the other side, the spirit of the intent might be right but the colonial approach of pre-determining and dictating the structure and processes for rollout continue to impede development and often lead to program failures.

Findings & Discussion

The literature reviewed for this study incorporates best practices in housing since the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation's 94 Calls to Action. In this context, housing professionals working on reserve, provided they have built their capacity and possess the necessary tools and skills to collaborate with leadership, could strategically address the highly complex housing challenges that, if resolved, can transform and enhance Indigenous economic markets and improve the health and well-being of all community members.

One key theme is that First Nations communities (on- and off-reserve), and their visions for the future are diverse. The size, location, proximity to urban centres and history of a First Nation create varying capacities, challenges and opportunities for self-determination regarding housing and economic

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development. Consequently, the literature reflects substantial variation across housing conditions, capacities and strategies. However, many (if not most) rely on outside consultants and additional funding from multiple jurisdictions, resource development or academic projects. The literature that focuses on building capacity within communities offers a unique opportunity to view housing as an economic market within First Nations, illustrating the ripple effect of adequate and accessible housing on the health and well-being of the community.

There are numerous organizations and established communities to draw from as they enhance strategic planning and proactive solutions for accessible and inclusive housing for all members. Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of works consulted and reviewed in preparing this report. The most promising examples are included in this discussion, featuring projects that approach strategic planning for meeting the entire continuum of housing needs on-reserve as a business model. Various elements of collaboration across community sectors that integrate social enterprise and social-impact economic principles have successfully built community capacity to support training, employment and design in various aspects of planning, building and operating housing. The information gathered from this review is pertinent to developing housing professionals in their capacities and community roles, categorized into four main best practice areas.

1. Community-led approaches
2. Good governance practices
3. Indigenous economic and business principles
4. Horizontal multi-sectoral planning

Community-led strategic planning, community engagement and internal capacity-building support the development of on-reserve teams administering housing strategies and operations, essential to sustainability and self-determination over the future state of housing.

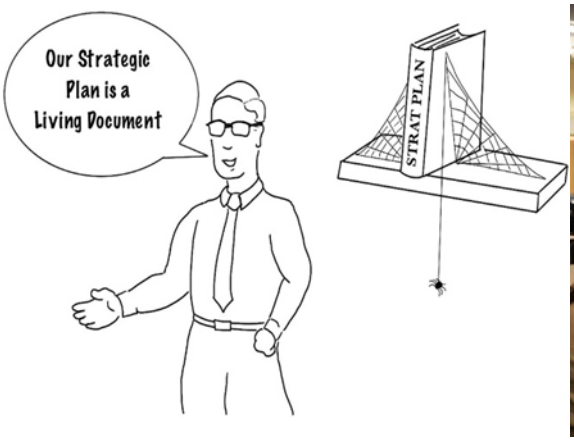

Image: Consultant-led strategic plan www.linkedin.com/pulse/strat-plan-shelf-craig-plain

Image: FNHPA workshop enhancing housing management capacity for First nations organizations www.tbnewswatch.com/spotlight/fnhpa-programs-tools-and-resources

The literature demonstrates that planning to meet housing needs on reserve is inconsistent and often relies on external resources. Various efforts are underway to tackle the complexity of housing inadequacy, involving numerous service providers, companies and government agencies. Many case

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studies from First Nations communities are available online, differing in size and geography (FNHPA member communities offer a representative sampling of these strategies and may provide valuable insights). Appendix B contains a list of FNHPA members and non-member communities reviewed during this process study. Additionally, case studies exist representing communities collaborating to develop regional housing authorities and, within this context, comprehensive housing strategies, such as those in the territories and Inuit regions of northern Quebec and Labrador, including but not limited to the YKDFN Housing Strategy, the Igluliuqatigiingniq: Nunavut 3000 Strategy. In general, these examples include small, medium and large-scale projects.

> **Small-scale** efforts involve hiring a consultant to create a strategic plan with the community council, typically costing between $5,000 and $25,000. The capacity of departmental and executive staff to implement these plans is essential for carrying out report recommendations and action plans. The involvement of housing and other department managers varies.
>
> **Medium-scale projects**, often involving academic and non-profit organizations, can foster significant creativity and community engagement while offering various options and solutions to housing issues. However, securing funding and ensuring the sustainability of these initiatives present challenges, as grassroots teams often have limited support from elected community leaders. Adherence to existing governance protocols and processes is also necessary for gaining leadership buy-in and support for jurisdictional approvals to advance long-term implementation.
>
> **Large-scale efforts** by First Nations typically occur when funding of $750,000 or more is available to hire a company to develop a Comprehensive Community Plan in partnership with leadership, usually over three years. Other large-scale planning initiatives may include land use and community development plans linked to revenue-sharing agreements in resource development, impact benefit agreements and various environmental and socioeconomic agreements. With substantial resources come opportunities for capacity building, which lead to promising outcomes within these case studies. However, limited access to this type of funding or capacity can create a divide between those with resources and those without.

All these efforts present strengths and opportunities for a more significant impact on shaping the future of community well-being. Case studies showcasing best practices within these approaches illustrate that building internal capacity, maintaining long-term consistency in staff, implementing strategic actions and fostering holistic collaboration within the community are key to achieving desired outcomes.

For housing professionals working on reserve, the more prepared and able they are to respond proactively to being involved in community-led strategic planning, the more success and motivation there is in operationalizing and getting ahead of day-to-day housing emergencies. This allows them to fully implement strategic activities and engage community members in training, employing and building indirect markets around housing.

Good governance practices that challenge the legacy of the Indian Act and address systemic patterns of dependency and dysfunction in band leadership and administration involve policies and

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protocols that encourage greater democratic participation, accountability and transparency (Abele, F. 2007). There has been significant discussion about the necessity of separating politics from daily operations. Housing professionals and other departmental staff work toward specific objectives and must possess enough resilience to adapt to changes that occur during leadership election cycles. Research and community-driven literature emerging from the Indigenous Community Planning Master's program at UBC is anchored in community living, capacity building and involvement. A fundamental element of their work is Comprehensive Community Planning, which encompasses leadership and governance transformation aimed at accountability, transparency and sustainability (2025).

The Harvard Project presents global research outlining the conditions under which Indigenous communities develop sustainable pathways toward their social and economic goals. It establishes that assertions of sovereignty succeed when there is the capacity to maintain a robust government that distinguishes politics from daily operations and program management. Furthermore, executive members responsible for daily operations and program management must have confidence that their governance institutions provide stable decision-making rules and equitable protocols, policies and procedures that empower their departmental roles in promoting strategic priorities.

AFOA Canada and its regional chapters are devoted to enhancing capacity within First Nations communities in management, finance and governance. AFOA boasts a growing membership of First Nations professionals, including elected leaders, financial officers, band executives and representatives from Indigenous organizations who participate in workshops and continuing education events. For new programs and community economic development to take root and genuinely sustain improvements in First Nations' socio-economic conditions, policies and procedures that align with First Nations' contemporary culture must be implemented. Moreover, leaders need to embrace the sophistication of their community members and organizations by being open to their new knowledge that may challenge their assumptions and solutions. In some cases, housing initiatives on reserves build in housing authorities and boards of directors who possess the necessary sustained governance structure. Housing professionals would benefit from training and workshops focused on governance, policies, protocols and communication for decision-making so they can confidently approach their communications, budgets, strategies and reporting priorities to leadership while effectively operationalizing within their teams.

Indigenous economic and business principles are essential to housing solutions. One of the most serious consequences of the federal government's control over First Nations reserves is the treatment of housing as a service, which creates a gap in leadership, community knowledge, capacity and understanding of home ownership and housing as a business. This presents the ultimate two-way street conundrum: The federal government must transform its approach to supply and demand budgeting for on-reserve housing, which is grossly inadequate to provide the continuum of housing necessary on reserve. At the same time, First Nations members need to move beyond the belief that a free house is a treaty right and instead assert their sovereignty and self-determination to meet their community's needs.

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Some First Nations have embraced homeownership programs, revolving loan funds and mortgage initiatives, as well as the creation of industry and economic opportunities related to housing planning, building, operations and maintenance. The results have been encouraging in creating an economic market and supporting community members in achieving their social determinants of health.

First Nations repeatedly demonstrate that applying business and commercial strategies can enhance social conditions, improve community well-being and support employment and training. Moreover, the commitment to social enterprise and sovereignty among First Nations indicates a restructuring of colonial capitalist approaches, transforming an economic market that incorporates contemporary culture and community needs as foundational elements to enhancing their socioeconomic conditions.

BC First Nations have substantial examples of significant strides in offering affordable housing across a continuum of options. One area of focus is homeownership and below-market housing stock. Other organizations and projects have worked on developing businesses related to sustainable building materials, furniture and houseware and horizontal housing with commercial and service organizations on the main floor of apartment complexes. Several across the country have established construction and trades training programs directly linked to housing initiatives.

Prioritizing multi-sector collaboration on housing is foundational to improving community safety, health, education and economic conditions. As housing is a fundamental social determinant of health, addressing the complexities of housing issues will lead to better health, educational outcomes and economic conditions on reserve.

Federal funding and programs generally approach housing on reserve from a supply-and-demand perspective. First Nations that typically adhere to INAC standards and program outlines manage housing as an independent department. However, affordable housing that meets individuals' needs has been shown to reduce healthcare costs, enhance educational outcomes and create job opportunities.

Through holistic planning and collaboration among multiple stakeholders and jurisdictions, housing can have a ripple effect across community priorities. The Indigenous Housing Horizontal Initiative focuses on building resilience on- and off-reserve by uniting diverse expertise and understanding the needs of all community members from the vantage point of sectors involved in family and community life. This includes planning for a comprehensive continuum of housing and neighbourhood needs while being better equipped for healthcare (such as palliative care and housing for dialysis), business development (as housing needs are addressed, community members can pursue business and job opportunities to provide goods and services) and social support (such as recovery homes focused on aftercare, shelters for those under-housed or elder-assisted living). A horizontal approach to housing and household needs also entails the need for a comprehensive community profile: Assessments that may include population projections, health and education analytics, new evaluation metrics, mapping and designs to improve neighbourhood safety. Developing a robust community profile and needs assessment is essential in paving the way for strong

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horizontal and multi-sector involvement in housing strategies (International Association of Impact Assessment, 2025; BC Indigenous community-led planning mentors, 2024). FNHPA understands the importance of a well-developed housing needs assessment and currently offers resources in this area. The reality is a well-defined needs assessment not only supports establishing priorities and actions but also supports the evaluation and monitoring of socioeconomic conditions and how the plan is meeting community needs as the continuum of housing is built and operationalized.

Conclusion

FNHPA is one of the innovators committed to improving housing conditions for First Nations across Canada. They accomplish this by supporting First Nations housing professionals through a thorough assessment of their resource and skill needs, as well as the challenges and opportunities for empowerment. Additionally, they contribute to the development of tools and resources to better assist professionals responsible for addressing their communities' housing needs.

The literature highlights the significance of building community capacity and implementing strong governance practices that promote democratic participation and facilitate sustainable long-term planning and action plans to achieve goals. It also stresses the importance of operational independence and viewing housing as a business opportunity. The reality is that these opportunities are as unique as each First Nations community across Canada. FNHPA can provide a library of resources, create networks and build the capacity of housing professionals through targeted training and the development of materials and templates to enhance and support community-led processes. These will incorporate value-added sustainability practices along with transparent and accountable policies and procedures, even amidst the ebb and flow of political leadership cycles. FNHPA is making an important contribution through tools in strategic planning, policy and accountability, increasing self-determination while reducing reliance on external processes still rooted in colonial approaches.

Table 1 Literature Review themes and proposed FNHPA opportunities for building members' capacity and supports

Priority Theme	**FNHPA Opportunity to Develop resource:**
Good Governance: • AFOA has tools and training in governance, financial management and strategic planning for First Nations' elected and executive teams consistent with the benchmarks and standards set out by best practices (including the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development).	Establish a relationship pathway for housing professionals to access **strategic planning and governance training**: • Create a toolkit for individuals that includes: • Templates and examples of policies, procedures and reporting for good governance, as well as proper protocols for communication and decision-making with elected leadership • Benchmarks and standards for evaluation/metrics tracking, file management and communication.
Multi-sector collaboration in Housing Needs and Planning • Review and compare FNHPA pre-planning and needs assessment resources with other case studies and recent BC CCP/ICP tools for enhancements	Conduct a **review of the FNHPA Needs Assessment** presentation/tools: • A multi-stakeholder committee will review and develop needs assessment tools and templates that incorporate multi-sector input and outline

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	various best practices across the housing continuum.
Community-Led Strategic Planning: • Review of Community Housing Strategies and Survey Results from FNHPA Membership (2023 study) • Review of online community housing strategies and comprehensive community plans developed since 2020 • Review Canada's Community Housing Transformation Centre materials. • Review of AFOA Strategic Planning training modules	**The creation of Case Studies** (see Appendix C as a potential template): • Include key planning elements, frameworks and links and provide templates, lessons learned and mentorship/motivation to other member communities • Propose starting with three case studies across small, medium and large communities: o Small: TBD (e.g. Whitefish River) o Medium: TBD o Large: TBD (e.g. Opaskwayak Cree Nation) **Create a compendium of worksheets and tools** for pre-planning, planning, implementation and evaluation, modeled after AFOA and BC training/workshops.
Indigenous Economic Business Principles: • Housing as a business model (Haab) • BC Indigenous Housing Society	**Social Enterprise Library: Source and link a network and reports of best practices:** Resources to guide housing managers in creating and connecting to social enterprise.
Priority Theme	**FNHPA Opportunity to Develop resource**
	Infographic dispelling myths and building community awareness around housing markets: Dispelling myths of on-reserve housing and showing where First Nations have built housing as a business model, creating spin-off businesses and employment, and enhancing well-being in the community.

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Appendix B: Questionnaire

FNHPA Housing Survey 2025 QUESTIONS: *A questionnaire for those in First Nations housing management and operations on strategic planning readiness*

Email *optional

About this survey [Preamble]

The goal of this survey/interview is to understand current First Nations strategic planning capacity involving housing and learn from the range of strategies being used in First Nations communities. This range spans from proactive models, such as comprehensive community planning and extensive community level planning, to little to no planning and reactive approaches characterized by "firefighting" daily issues.
We invite you to share your insights around recurring concerns, best practices and recommendations for housing planning and strategy development. If you have any materials that you would like to share, such as existing tools or case studies, please email them or provide a link or paper copy to the research team at annekegillis@gmail.com, or link them as part of this survey.

1. What is your role in housing?
    a. Housing Manager
    b. Housing Portfolio — Councillor Industry Expert
    c. Housing Authority Management First Nations CEO/Manager Other:
2. How would you say your community is doing for current strategic planning, management and operations of housing?
   1 star = in constant reactive mode characterized by "firefighting" daily issues
   7 stars = Proactive model, with extensive community level planning and staff that can respond to daily issues and prepare for future plans.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strategic Planning questions:

3. Does your community have an active and operational housing plan or strategy?

   Yes / No Other:

   a) What year was your housing plan/strategy last updated?
   b) What is the name of your housing strategic plan?
   c) Can you describe the resources used and the process of developing the plan/strategy?
   d) Are you/housing involved in the following community strategic plans?
   - Comprehensive Community Plan Land Use Plan
   - Chief and Council Strategic Plan
   - Economic Development Strategy (developing training, contractors and housing enterprise)
   - Health/education/justice/social services planning
   - Other

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4. What are your community's current strategic planning and primary goals for future housing development?
   What resources are you accessing to help achieve these goals?
   What, if any, factors prevent you and/or your community from advancing plans?

Planning component of housing management and operations

5. For each of the following, please explain how your community plans for each of these aspects of housing management and operations.
   a. Housing Administration
   b. Property management/home maintenance policies (including human resource/staff involvement and developing, enforcing, evaluating and involving tenants):
   c. Collaboration with related sectors: public services, land management, economic development, social services, health, justice and education (i.e. training/education, transitional planning, accessibility, service coordination, landscaping and beautification enhancements)
   d. Resources, supports and planning opportunities
6. What, if any, are your concerns or identified areas where available capacity and resources fall short in meeting the community's housing goals?
7. What would be the top three requests for planning needs to improve your community's housing sustainability?
8. What solutions have you/your community implemented to meet community housing needs? and what has worked best with your membership?
9. Are there any other recommendations you would like to make for the development of resources and tools to support housing and community strategic planning?
10. Would you like to participate in an interview or focus group?

Please leave your contact information here if you replied yes to the above:
Miigwech, thank you so much for your participation.
*Opportunity to leave any additional final comments or attachments was provided.

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