

First Nation involvement in renewable energy projects in BC

What you need to know:

First Nations in BC are participating in diverse and sustainable renewable energy projects and are interested in expanding their involvement. First Nations are using renewable energy projects to achieve economic, social, political, and environmental objectives. However, barriers, such as a lack of financing and community readiness, make it difficult for them to expand their participation in the industry.

What is this research about?

First Nations in British Columbia (BC) are active participants in renewable energy development. However, little research has been done on the role and impact of First Nations in this sector. To address this, the BC First Nations Clean Energy Working Group partnered with researchers at the University of Victoria's School of Environmental Studies to conduct a province-wide survey.

The researchers set out to answer four questions:

- How are First Nations involved in renewable energy development?
- How would First Nations like to be involved in renewable energy development?
- What barriers are First Nations experiencing in relation to renewable energy development?



Solar installation on the roof of the Haida Heritage Centre in Haida Gwaii (Photo credit: Dana Cook, with permission).

- What are the potential impacts of a decelerated renewable energy industry?

What did the researchers do?

The research team invited 203 First Nations and several Tribal Councils to participate in an online survey.

Participants were recruited via in person, email, phone, Facebook, and listservs, and formal invitations were sent to each First Nation community. The survey consisted of four sections: Operational Projects, Projects in Development, Projects under Consideration, and Capacity Building.

The researchers received 105 responses. Each survey response was reviewed, and researchers followed up as needed to ensure completion and consistency.



What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that some respondents have extensive experience in the industry, while others are not sure how to get started. However, there is widespread interest in being more involved in renewable energy development. The survey revealed three barriers that respondents face:

- Lack of opportunity by BC Hydro programs: A decline in BC Hydro's interest in facilitating independent power production has resulted in difficulty in securing electricity purchase agreements (EPAs) for renewable energy projects.
- Financing: Although there are a few programs and funds available to First Nations for project development, the respondents indicate that they struggle to access this limited funding and thus experience financial challenges throughout their projects.
- Community readiness: Some respondents identified the need for more skills, capacity, and knowledge to start and carry out a project.

Suggestions for overcoming some barriers include policies and programs developed in collaboration with First Nations to support all stages of project development. Responsiveness to the distinctive aspirations and capacities of each Nation is essential. The findings also demonstrate that First Nation communities participate in renewable energy projects for reasons beyond economic development, such as to become more self-sufficient and to foster community pride.

How can you use this research?

This study provides a foundation for future research to inform decision- and policy-making, as more responsive and effective policies and programs are necessary to ensure First Nations can build on their momentum in the renewable energy sector. Current research is underway investigating how First Nations identify the benefits of renewable energy development for their communities, as well as their priorities going forward.

About the researchers

Dana Cook and Eryn Fitzgerald are University of Victoria (UVic) graduate students in the School of Environmental Studies.

Karena Shaw is a UVic Associate Professor and Director of the School of Environmental Studies.

Judith Sayers (Kekinusuqs) is a UVic Adjunct Professor in the School of Environmental Studies and Gustavson School of Business.

Keywords

First Nations; Indigenous; British Columbia; renewable energy

Citation

Cook, D., Fitzgerald, E., Sayers, J., and Shaw, K. (2017). *Survey report: First Nations and renewable energy development in British Columbia*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.

Content for this Research Snapshot was co-created by [UVic's Research Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization unit](#) and Dr. Karena Shaw, Dana Cook, Eryn Fitzgerald and Dr. Judith Sayers.

Territory acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.