

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

SUMMARY REPORT



Full Report prepared by

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Methodology

This report focuses on Indigenous communities in B.C., both on- and off-reserve. The researchers conducted a literature review, interviewed nine experts with experience and knowledge related to Indigenous housing, and prepared case studies of three developments where community engagement contributed to new housing designs.² The researchers also attended the 2017 Joint Gathering, co-hosted by the Leadership Council of the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

¹ This report was written by students in the Masters of Public Policy program at Simon Fraser University, in partnership with BC Housing.

² These case studies are available in the full report.

Making a House a Home: Indigenous Engagement and Housing Design in B.C.

The purpose of this summary report is to address two central research questions:

- 1. What types of housing do Indigenous people want and need in their communities?**
- 2. What are some effective ways to engage with Indigenous communities about the housing they want and need?**

This report seeks to answer these questions by providing a series of best practices for engaging Indigenous communities in housing design initiatives. The report offers guiding principles for working with Indigenous communities on housing. It also suggests specific engagement methods and housing design criteria to consider.

Lu'ma Native Housing Society





KEY PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

The report found that meaningful engagement is a holistic process rather than a single action, based on relationship building and accountability. It begins by learning about the community and starting to build relationships that will guide and support the project engagement processes. Engagement does not stop once the consultation is complete — it is critical to maintain accountability and continued communication following project-specific engagement. Principles for successful engagement include:

- **Respect:** Recognize and honour shared histories, distinct world views, and all participants’ interests, including their safety and protection
- **Early engagement:** Include future residents at the earliest stage possible
- **Openness:** Provide open communication and transparency around goals and interests, including advising of any potential risks of participation
- **Consensus and collaboration:** Work together to build consensus and collaboration on solutions that are viable and make meaningful use of participants’ input, including representation in decision-making
- **Trust:** Build and maintain trust through action and accountability that supports the project and an ongoing and meaningful relationship

Before the Project: Foundations for Success

Meaningful engagement begins before you set foot in a community. Start with cultural sensitivity training, researching the specific community, determining the level of engagement required, obtaining buy-in from the leadership, and building and sustaining relationships. It is important to begin engagement through appropriate channels of communication (e.g. start by requesting a meeting with the community leadership), have a flexible schedule that allows communities sufficient time to deliberate, ensure informed consent at every stage of the engagement process, and participate in community events.

The OCAP® principles should also be used to guide the planning process. The community should have:

- Ownership of their cultural knowledge, data and information
- Control over all aspects of the research and information processes that impact them
- Access to information and data about themselves
- Possession and physical control of data

During the Project: Best Practices and Methods

Incorporating cultural practice and traditions is fundamental to successful engagement. Give consideration to:

- Indigenous supervision or representation on the facilitation team
- Inclusion of elder and youth perspectives
- A traditional ceremony (e.g. drumming, song, or prayer)
- Acknowledgement of traditional territories
- Use native language whenever possible (e.g. learn a few words, such as “welcome”)
- Honour other specific cultural practices, such as gift giving or using a speaker’s stick
- Respect the pace of the community



M’akola Housing Society



Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre

There is no *right* engagement process; each comes with merits and trade-offs. However, research shows that a mix of engagement strategies is most effective. That mix is informed by the community being engaged, the timeline, budget, and the level of representation and decision-making available.

Potential ways to engage with a community include qualitative interviews, home visits, focus groups, surveys, a design charrette or workshop, and a walking tour. Use a variety of exercises to draw out opinions about housing design needs and wants, including graphic facilitation, poetry, visioning exercises, and 3D modelling, as well as social media and Apps.

After the Project: Sustained Engagement

Engagement must extend beyond the specific engagement sessions. Accountability, follow-up, and action are critical to Indigenous partners, including an evaluation of the overall engagement process. The criteria to gauge success can include the number of people who attended, level of participation, empowerment (did people feel like they contributed in a meaningful way), usefulness (do the organizers have the information they need to move forward), and decision-making (did the organization/ collaborator make decisions because of this work).

Accountability means feeding the results of the engagement back to the community and supporting them as much as possible in taking next steps. At the very least, it means completing the tasks that were promised to the community.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING DESIGN

The report identifies the following core principles for successful housing design.

Diversity: Housing is designed to meet the diverse and unique needs of Indigenous communities and individuals. Designs are developed in close consultation with individuals and communities with specific needs in mind.



Flexibility: Housing designs are developed so that communities can modify, repair, and replace design elements with ease and minimal outside help. Designs should promote self-sufficiency.

Longevity: Housing is designed to be durable, sustainable, and require minimal maintenance.

Well-being: Housing designs consider the emotional, spiritual, and social impacts of housing as well as the fundamental physical and structural needs.

Housing Design Elements

The report presents five key areas for consideration when developing housing for Indigenous people.

- 1. Tradition and Culture:** Indigenous people want homes that reflect who they are. Design should account for intergenerational connection – to enable social, spiritual and practical teachings to be passed down – including teachings about housing and home maintenance. Design ideas should include flexible spaces to accommodate visitors and growing families, larger kitchens and dining areas for communal meals, and space to accommodate traditional practices, such as art, and equipment for hunting and fishing.
- 2. Climate:** Designing for the appropriate climate is a key area that needs improvement in Indigenous housing. A one-size-fits-all design does not work in B.C. due to its five distinct climate zones. There is a need to ensure that homes are built to withstand rainy and cold conditions to prevent mould and rapid deterioration. To protect a home from the elements, make sure that the building envelope is durable and built for the climate. Some key design ideas for consideration in wet climates include mould-resistant materials, a strong, effective building envelope that uses rainscreen technology, and a “wet room” for removing wet clothing and gear.
- 3. Affordability:** Square footage is directly related to affordability. Smaller homes can reduce both construction and long-term maintenance costs of a home. The focus should be on ‘good use of space rather than large space’. Additional design ideas include leaving some spaces unfinished until needed to allow for short-term affordability while providing capacity for growth, and using locally sourced materials.
- 4. Construction and Sustainability:** Good quality construction methods and materials are vital to the durability of new homes and help long-term sustainability. Sustainable building practices reflect a larger vision of Indigenous housing. Within many Indigenous cultures, a key focus is placed on regenerating the environment, not simply protecting it. Net-positive housing design, which fits within or gives back to the natural environment, reflects this greater theme. Design ideas include incorporating Indigenous building materials such as cedar planks and beams, using one size of doors and windows so they can be replaced easily, and designing for energy efficiency and accessibility.
- 5. Community Design:** Community design considerations can also encourage community cohesion and contribute to the inhabitants’ well-being. Design ideas include creating communal outdoor spaces, positioning buildings in clusters or circles around elders, spiritual leaders, and loved ones, and being able to accommodate a range of households, including elders and youth. Other factors to consider include landscaping (replanting native species and choosing low-maintenance or low-cost plants) and safety (slowing down street traffic). Symbolic choices and language are also important. Signs or street names that use Indigenous languages can help assert Indigenous space and identity.

Please contact BC Housing’s Research Centre by email research@bchousing.org to request the full report:

Making a House a Home: Indigenous Engagement and Housing Design in B.C.