



Prince Albert Grand Council: A Success Story



EGH Works for Homeowners

The initiative begins with a visit from an EGH energy advisor. An “energy professional,” the advisor conducts a home energy evaluation, analyses the results and proposes a series of retrofits to improve energy efficiency.

Recommended changes can range from minor upgrades (e.g. sealing cracks and gaps) to major renovations (e.g. replacing doors and windows) and will depend on the age and condition of the home. To complete an evaluation, the energy advisor gives the homeowner an EGH rating label and consumer information on how to reduce home energy consumption.

After the homeowner makes upgrades, the home is re-evaluated (called a “B” assessment) and given a new EGH rating label. In a final step, the advisor measures the difference between the original (baseline) energy rating and the final energy rating. The improvement pays dividends now and later – a cash grant for the improved energy rating and reduced heating costs for years to come.

Leading the Way to Change

The Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) is conducting a door-to-door campaign.



One house at a time, the Council is working to change the way First Nations residents think about building homes, conserving energy and caring for the environment. After winning a federal government contract to service their 12-band region under the Office of Energy Efficiency's EnerGuide for Houses (EGH) initiative, the Council has achieved some impressive milestones.

The organization guides the region's daily growth and development in education, health, engineering, justice and urban services. Established in 1983, the PAGC works on many fronts to improve life for 31 000 First Nations members living in northeast Saskatchewan.

A Call to Action

Like many communities located in northern and remote parts of Canada, residents in the PAGC district have already experienced the effects of climate change. From severe weather events causing everything from power outages to drought-like conditions, the changes are life-altering.

In a call to action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that contribute to climate change, the Government of Canada launched the EGH initiative. By offering expert advice and financial incentives to homeowners, the EGH initiative encourages individuals to reduce the energy consumption of their homes. In doing so, homeowners – and entire communities – can significantly reduce the volume of GHGs being released into the atmosphere.



The PAGC Answers the Call

When news of the EnerGuide initiative was broadcast by the First Nations National Building Officers Association (FNNBOA), Henry Felix was listening.

Director of Engineering and Technical Services at the PAGC, Mr. Felix recognized that the EGH initiative fit seamlessly with what the organization was already doing. Highly committed to continuous improvement, the Council's Engineering and Technical Services was researching new building technologies to improve the comfort, health and safety, and energy efficiency of the region's homes.

Mr. Felix met with PAGC housing inspectors, Vince Genereaux and Frank Bighead, to discuss the merits of the initiative. After weighing the risks and considering the benefits, the three colleagues recognized that an exciting opportunity lay before them.

Thinking Big

Participation in the EGH initiative seemed an obvious step for the PAGC. But Mr. Felix, Mr. Bighead and Mr. Genereaux had bigger plans. If the Council bid as a Service Organization for the initiative, they could educate residents about the benefits of energy conservation, generate revenue for council initiatives and, most importantly, build capacity (through training and the purchase of equipment) to offer the service far into the future.

Taking Stock

Before submitting a proposal, Engineering and Technical Services took time to evaluate *why* they should bid as an EGH Service Organization and *how* they could support such a bid.

Taking stock of their experience and expertise, the PAGC determined that:

They shared a common goal.

The PAGC was committed to providing expert advice and support to homeowners in the district. The Council was developing and standardizing house plans and specifications for the 27-reserve region. Their goal: to ensure that all homes, new or renovated, would be durable, comfortable, healthier and more energy efficient.

EGH Energy Advisors Wear Many Hats

To deliver the EGH service, the PAGC team assembled a team of four energy advisors and trained them to perform in the following roles:

Energy Professionals

Energy advisors are required to master a Code of Ethics developed by NRCan to conduct "A" (baseline) and "B" (follow-up) Energy Evaluations.

Leaders and Mentors

As a service provider for EGH, the PAGC is required to provide certified and experienced staff, infrastructure and training opportunities for program delivery. They are also responsible for recruiting new energy advisors and coordinating training workshops.

Administrators

To complete an energy evaluation, energy advisors must submit (electronic) evaluation data to Natural Resources Canada (NRCan); provide a report and energy-rating label for the homeowner; and (if applicable) submit an application for a grant.

Quality Controllers

To maintain the integrity and high standards of the EGH program, the PAGC is responsible for certification and, if necessary, decertification of EGH energy advisors.



They were equipped to do the job.

In a community of 31 000 First Nations residents (27 percent of Saskatchewan's First Nations membership), no organization was better equipped to serve the region. With 22 years of experience serving their First Nations members, the Council had the in-house expertise, supporting infrastructure and cultural understanding to serve the 12-band district and beyond.

They wanted to be part of the solution.

As an organization serving a large sector of northern Saskatchewan, the PAGC was keenly aware of climate change and how the consequences would affect northern residents. Doing nothing was simply not an option.

The PAGC wanted to be part of the solution. To lead this solution would offer significant benefits to the community they serve. Key benefits would include revenue for other PAGC initiatives, control over the future of housing and community development, and the ability to build capacity for sustainable improvements.

Setting the Example

Despite some unexpected curves in the road, the PAGC has achieved notable success in delivering the EGH service.

The Council's hard work and perseverance caught the attention of Neil MacLeod, Director General of NRCan's Office of Energy Efficiency. In a letter to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), Mr. MacLeod commended the PAGC's four energy advisors as "Champions" for EGH among First Nations nominees.

In recognition of the PAGC's work with the EnerGuide for Houses initiative, he nominated Council director Henry Felix to the "Circle of Honour." Mr. Felix won the award and was proud to share the honour with fellow members of the Engineering and Technical Services team.

Since the PAGC began delivering and promoting their EGH service, six other First Nations communities have followed their lead and are now successfully delivering the service.



A Learning Curve

As the first Aboriginal organization to successfully deliver the EGH service, the PAGC encountered more than a few challenges along the way.

The first obstacle was nearly a “show-stopper” for the PAGC. To serve as an EGH Service Organization, the contractor must purchase “Errors and Omissions” insurance. This type of insurance is difficult to obtain and very expensive. Ever resourceful, the Council shopped around until they found an acceptable price and policy. However, Mr. Genereaux maintains reservations about the high cost of this insurance. He suggests that contractors should explore the possibility of self-indemnification.

A second challenge was one of a cyber sort. Team members struggled to install and get acquainted with HOT2®XP* software – the program used to record energy evaluation data. And just when things appeared to be improving, a new version contributed to the loss of 20 “A” assessment files.

Wiser for the experience, Mr. Genereaux offers the following advice: Hire a computer programmer to set up HOT2XP2.6; print hard copies of upgrade reports as you go; and keep the “Energy Advisor Workshop Kit” handy – it’s a great reference tool!

* HOT2 is a registered trademark of Natural Resources Canada.

A Bid to Save Energy

With support from head office and their 12 bands, the PAGC prepared a bid. They downloaded the Request for Proposal from the government MERX Web site (on line bidding for government contracts) and drafted a bid that included the following:

- Letters of support from the 12 bands of the PAGC
- Application for a Procurement Business Number
- Corporate business plan featuring EGH activities
- List of potential partners and/or sponsors
- Quality Assurance Plan
- List identifying energy advisors
- Proposed plan to train energy advisors
- List of housing units to be evaluated
- Price proposal

In a bold move, the Council purchased a \$4,000 blower door, the key piece of equipment needed to conduct an energy efficiency evaluation on a home. Win or lose, they decided it would be a worthwhile investment for their community. Their actions spoke loudly: They were committed to their goal and willing to take a risk to make it happen.

A Winning Attitude

With approval from their Council Chiefs, the PAGC entered the federal government’s Canada-wide competition to serve as an EGH Service Organization. After diligently preparing their bid and assembling a diverse and qualified team, they finished just short of a win. They did not, however, throw in the towel. Instead, they fine-tuned their submission and re-entered a “set-aside” competition, geared specifically to First Nations organizations. This time their efforts paid off. With a victory in hand, the PAGC made plans for the challenging task ahead.

Training the Trainers

Members of the PAGC Engineering and Technical Services team began training immediately to form an EnerGuide for Houses Service Organization. With a solid background in home-building techniques, they gained expertise in a number of other areas.

Through a series of workshops provided by NRCan’s energy consultants, the members learned how to conduct a home “energy evaluation” using a blower door, HOT2®XP energy assessment software and various other measurement tools. They also learned about NRCan’s “house as a system” approach to conserving energy and reducing heating and cooling costs.

“Champions” of Energy Efficiency

As a trained and certified energy advisor for the PAGC, Mr. Genereaux describes himself as a “Champion of Energy Efficiency.” An important aspect of the job, he explains, is to educate homeowners – or in the case of the PAGC, Housing Authority Managers – about the benefits of making homes more energy efficient.

The Team

The Engineering and Technical Services team mirrors the community it serves – First Nations members come from one of four sectors (Swampy Cree, Denesuline, Plains Cree/ Dakota and Woodland Cree) where residents speak up to three different native languages (Dakota, Dene and Cree).

The team works out of a small, well-equipped office on the Opawakoscikan reserve, in the heart of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Once the dormitory of a First Nations residential school, the building has been retrofitted to provide office space and meeting rooms for the 15-member team.

Beyond nice office furniture and an inspiring mandate, people are the heart of any organization. The EnerGuide team members – Mr. Felix, Mr. Genereaux and Mr. Bighead – are all personable, engaging and very committed to their work. The PAGC is a leader among First Nations.



Proud of Their Achievements

PAGC team members say that their greatest satisfaction comes from creating a new awareness about energy efficiency. Through one-on-one discussions and organized conferences, the four inspectors have earned tremendous support for the EGH initiative in their First Nations community and beyond.

The Prince Albert Grand Council has also made great strides in their goal to build capacity. Not only have they developed a new expertise to promote energy efficiency at home, their energy advisors are in demand elsewhere. Mr. Genereaux and Mr. Bighead have received numerous requests to help train and mentor in Aboriginal communities across Canada.

Mr. Bighead, however, is sensitive to the fact that each First Nations community has its own belief system and must embrace change accordingly. “At the PAGC,” he says, “we do things at a speed that works for us.”

And things *are* working for the PAGC. By all accounts, they’re working very well.

Streamlining Travel Costs

Geography poses a significant challenge for the PAGC. The district it serves is vast (approximately one third of Saskatchewan’s land mass), and travel costs to remote communities run as high as \$2,000 per inspector. To streamline expensive travel costs, the PAGC piggybacks home inspections for several programs (e.g. EGH and CMHC’s Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program) and tries to plan (and book) travel well in advance.

Get Informed and Take Action

To find out how homeowners in your First Nations community can reduce home energy costs and help slow the effects of climate change, visit the EnerGuide for Houses Web site: energuideforhouses.gc.ca.

For additional information about the Prince Albert Grand Council’s programs and achievements, visit: pagc.sk.ca.



The digital mosaic of Canada which appears on the cover of this publication is produced by Natural Resources Canada (Canada Centre for Remote Sensing), and is a composite of individual satellite images. The differences in the density of vegetation are illustrated through shading.

Natural Resources Canada's Office of Energy Efficiency
Leading Canadians to Energy Efficiency at Home, at Work and on the Road



The One-Tonne Challenge asks Canadians to reduce their annual greenhouse gas emissions by 20% or about one tonne.

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Aussi disponible sous le titre :
Le Prince Albert Grand Council : Une histoire de réussite

Cat. No. M144-105/2005E
ISBN 0-662-41659-7



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