

# What We Heard

## REPORT FOR NEW RELATIONSHIP TRUST ABOUT NEW BCICEI FUNDING ENGAGEMENT ON CONCEPTUAL PROGRAM DESIGN

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The British Columbia Indigenous Clean Energy Initiative (BCICEI) is a program funded through the Federal Government's Strategic Partnership Initiative (SPI) and the Province of British Columbia's CleanBC. The initiative supports both the federal and provincial governments' commitment to establishing a Nation-to-Nation relationship with Indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership. It has already provided over \$30 million to British Columbia (B.C.) First Nations and has been administered by the New Relationship Trust (NRT) since 2016. In the spring of 2023, the Province of B.C. announced a \$140 million endowment through BCICEI to support First Nations communities to develop small-scale clean energy projects that connect to the integrated grid. Before developing the program funding parameters, NRT hired our independent consulting company, Corfield & Associates, to lead engagement sessions that was facilitated in a manner to encourage culturally safe and relevant discussions about opportunities for and impacts from small-scale First Nations-led clean energy projects. Below we have summarized the main themes associated with the engagement parameters set out by NRT. We invited input during virtual engagement sessions, an in-person meeting, a virtual survey and input received through email and/or short interviews. In general, the engagement found the following:

- The program intentions need to be clear about the parameters of what can be funded as it is narrower than general BCICEI funding.
- Participants to the engagement had mixed reactions about which funding model would be best because different Nations have different needs to support success. It is likely best to leave the choice of model up to the applicant.
- There were mixed ideas about the scale of support per application group or First Nation. Some felt that a lower cap should be imposed so that more groups can benefit from funding but other participants in the engagement felt that lower caps would not be useful as Nation applicants would need to apply to numerous locations to raise the capital required, taking up valuable capacity.
- All engagement participants felt that at least 51% of companies should be owned by B.C. First Nations. Most thought that there should be efforts to prioritize those projects with shorter timelines to production and distributions.
- There were mixed opinions about if the funding should be made available in 2026 or 2028. Some felt that holding back would allow the Trust to grow and groups to get organized so that it would be fair for applicants to have time to prepare. Others felt that some groups have been waiting for a long time for a funding opportunity like this so the sooner the money is flowing, the sooner production and distribution can begin.

With this input, NRT can better design the funding parameters for this new endowment and First Nations can better participate in small-scale clean energy development projects.

# OVERVIEW OF ENGAGEMENT SCOPE



The new BCICEI program stream is intended to overcome the barriers that often hinder the competitiveness of smaller energy projects so that power projects led by First Nations can support economic development while contributing to the Province's clean energy goals.

“Without question, the climate crisis is devastating our planet, and it is necessary to accelerate the move to green our economy focusing on clean, renewable energy as soon as possible”

Grand Chief Stewart Philip, Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs

British Columbia (B.C.) is considered “the cleanest jurisdiction in western North America, with an average of 98% of its electricity generation coming from clean or renewable resources” (BC Gov, 2021). But electricity only supplies approximately 20% of B.C.'s energy, with 70% coming from fossil fuels and the remaining energy coming from biofuels (BC Gov, 2021). The Canadian and B.C. governments have many initiatives to try to transition energy use from fossil fuels to electricity, such as promotion of electric vehicles and electric heat pumps and other such initiatives. This, plus population growth in urban centers, has resulted in projections of increased demand for electricity by 15% between now and 2030 (BC Hydro, 2024). To meet increased demand, the Government of B.C. and BC Hydro are looking for new and innovative sources of clean energy to support a cost effective and reliable integrated grid for customers.

First Nations have inherent rights and constitutionally protected title, rights and Treaty Rights over lands and resources throughout B.C. In the engagement as part of this project, we heard clearly from participants that energy production and transmission has historically had negative impacts on First Nations' lands and resources. Today, according to the B.C. First Nations Energy and Mining Council, First Nations communities want to ensure that energy development is responsible and “protects the environment and ensures the cultural, economic and political well-being of First Nations in British Columbia” (FNEMC, nd). The B.C. Government has developed opportunities to support First Nations communities to develop clean energy to sell to the grid while ensuring that First Nations' values are reflected in projects. The British Columbia Indigenous Clean Energy Initiative (BCICEI) is one such opportunity and the program is informed by Indigenous leadership. There are other opportunities to develop clean energy for First Nations communities and support energy

sovereignty. Though we provided opportunity during virtual engagement sessions to touch on these topics, a full description of other opportunities is out of scope of this engagement.

The BCICEI is a program that has been administered by the New Relationship Trust (NRT) since 2016. With funding from Pacific Economic Development Canada and the Province of B.C., the BCICEI is set up to support the development of clean energy by First Nations communities and has so far awarded \$30 million to over 130 projects proposed by more than 90 First Nations. Funding priorities for the program includes

1. Job creation.
2. Community well-being.
3. Increased energy self sufficiency.
4. Revenue generation for First Nations.
5. GHG emissions reduction. And,
6. Clean energy developments in remote, off-grid, diesel dependent or end of line communities.

Until 2024, BCICEI has provided funding for project planning, small-scale energy and efficiency and pre-construction/pre-commercial operational activities. The clean energy

### **New BCICEI Funding**

In 2023, the Province of B.C. announced that they would contribute a \$140 million endowment to the NRT to expand BCICEI and further support small-scale, First Nation-led clean energy projects on BC Hydro's integrated electricity grid. NRT, the Province and PacifiCan, with technical input from BC Hydro, are developing a new program stream to support smaller Indigenous-led power projects that may otherwise not be competitive due to their smaller size. Once implemented, the new program stream is expected to draw down the \$140 million over several years. The new BCICEI program stream is intended to overcome the barriers that often hinder the competitiveness of smaller energy projects so that First Nations-led power projects can support First Nations' economic development goals while also contributing to provincial and federal clean energy and reconciliation goals.

## Corfield & Associates

projects supported so far include geothermal, hydro, solar, biomass, wind, demand-side management and other initiatives.

To determine how the funding would be disbursed, a Program Development team was formed to develop initial concepts, which were described in a Discussion [Paper](#). The Project Development team receives guidance from the BCICEI Advisory Committee, which includes executive representatives from NRT, PacifiCan, the Province, BC Hydro, First Nations/Indigenous communities, and Clean Energy BC. Before decisions relating to final program design were made, Corfield & Associates were hired to lead these early engagements about the funding to ensure that it respects the rights of First Nations by engaging early and often about the program. The main topics of engagement included Program Principles, Funding Models and Eligibility Criteria.



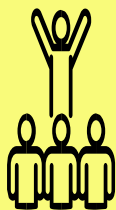
*“This work empowers First Nations communities across British Columbia to achieve clean-energy capacity. Today’s announcement also recognizes and respects the important role First Nations play as essential partners in transition to a net-zero energy economy”*

Wade Grant, New Relationship Trust commenting on the announcement in spring 2024

## WHAT WE DID

### Methods

Corfield & Associates, an independent consulting company with over 30 years of experience in facilitation and working on resource development strategizing, were hired to lead engagement and summarize input received into a report. Engagement included one in-person meeting at the Clean Energy BC Generate conference in Vancouver, four virtual engagement sessions, an on-line survey, multiple social media posts and written submissions and interviews. The Engagement occurred during May and June 2024. Note that participants came from a mixture of First Nations representatives, industry and consulting companies, Non-Governmental Organizations and staff from the Province, BC Hydro and New Relationship Trust who attended to present and participate in the discussion.



We hosted an in-person meeting May 24th, 2024 at CleanEnergy BC Generate Conference in Vancouver. The session attracted 97 people



From May through June 2024, we hosted 4 virtual sessions. Over 40 people representing First Nations and/or industry working with First Nations attended at least one of the sessions. Staff from NRT, BC Hydro and the Province of BC also attended to listen and answer questions.



We provided a link for an online survey. Twenty-two respondents filled out the survey, with the majority being from First Nations' communities and three from industry groups that worked closely with First Nations.



10 more groups participated by either providing written input or interviews. More groups were interested in interviews but we ran out of time.

## Cautions about engagement results

While the Discussion Paper and engagement sessions were well thought out and structured, the content was very specific and technical and only those participants with extensive knowledge in small energy development could meaningfully participate. Many people “checked-in” about the funding, but they were looking for general funding opportunities for First Nations communities to get involved in power generation and were not necessarily at a later stage of planning where they could provide meaningful input. We did receive some negative feedback about the detail of the survey but some positive feedback about the general information provided in the social media posts.

A barrier to effective engagement for this project was caused by the fact that many items that contribute to the effectiveness of this funding were not known. For instance, knowing the Benchmark price would help a First Nation participating in the engagement to understand if that price offered for electricity would be sufficient to cover costs of energy production. Also, there was not sufficient information about how this could work with other potential funding programs. Having more information about important factors that will drive this funding opportunity would help make engagement more effective.

# ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

The engagement centered around three main themes: Program Intention, Funding Models and Eligibility Requirements.



## First Nations' input into program intentions

The Discussion Paper stated that the intention of the program is to support the development of Indigenous-led, small-scale energy projects. Most of the respondents to the survey suggested that the intention is important to Indigenous communities and the program as suggested so far could meet the intentions if properly planned. However, some respondents to the survey and in the virtual engagement did not agree. Some of the reasons listed were because the funding was not sufficient to support all B.C. Indigenous communities to develop energy projects or because there wasn't clarity about if the program would meet the needs of the Indigenous communities and not just BC Hydro's needs to supply the grid. Since this funding is meant to support specifically selling to the integrated grid, that should be stated in the intention. For instance, the statement could be expanded slightly.



*The intention of the program is to support the following:*

- *the development of Indigenous-led, small-scale energy projects,*
- *the sale of this energy to BC Hydro's energy grid,*
- *projects that adhere to Indigenous principles of environmental sustainability*



*and cultural, economic and political well-being.*

According to First Nations participants in the engagement, it is important to be clear about the intention because during engagement, a lot of time was spent by Indigenous communities trying to better understand how this funding would meet their community's interests in energy production. For instance, some groups spoke about the following general principles of Indigenous-led green-energy production, some of which are met by this program funding and some which are not.

- Participation in clean energy projects within Indigenous communities is important for empowerment, self-reliance and economic reconciliation.
- Equity ownership provides control in own territories.
- Fairness and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities is important.
- Future energy development in the Province should be designed to further Indigenous reconciliation objectives.
- Many First Nations communities want to prioritize low rates for members and energy security for their communities, especially transitioning away from diesel in remote locations.

Many communities need support and education for project negotiation, financing, and generally navigating options within the clean energy sector.

Meanwhile, the Discussion Paper listed potential program principles such as to:

- Further Indigenous reconciliation objectives.
- Limit BC Hydro ratepayer impacts.
- Prioritize smaller projects that can connect to distribution lines on the integrated system.
- Value projects based on their contribution to the energy system.



To increase the likelihood of successful use of the \$140M, NRT should clearly communicate Program Principles and understand how it fits into the aspiration of First Nations communities for developing green-energy projects.

## Funding Model

A central question asked from the Discussion Paper was about what type of funding model would be most appropriate. The Discussion Paper presented two models:

### Option 1: Capital Costs

The new BCICEI program could contribute to a portion of the capital cost for projects, so that the EPA price can be equivalent to BC Hydro’s Benchmark price.

### Option 2: Electricity Purchase Agreement (EPA) Annual Subsidy

The new BCICEI program could bridge the EPA price and the project development costs. This bridge can ensure that the project would be viable, as smaller-scale projects do not have the same price efficiency as larger projects.

During the engagement sessions, and in the online survey, we asked participants the following questions associated with this model.

- 1. Do you prefer the EPA Annual Subsidy funding model or the Initial Capital Grant? Why?*
- 2. Should the program stream be limited to one model or the other? Or include both?*

Most respondents to the survey felt that the program stream should not limit which funding model was chosen as the best model may depend on the individual project. Further, some felt that allowing that choice better followed the principles of UNDRIP for self determination.

If a model had to be chosen, below are some pros and cons voiced by engagement participants for the Capital Costs Model:

	<b>Capital Costs Model</b>	<b>EPA Annual Subsidy</b>
<b>Pros</b>	“Better bang for the buck”	It is innovating in the landscape of support for energy projects whereas capital grants are available elsewhere.
	Lower debt repayment costs	It can increase projected annual revenues, allowing more flexibility

		and options for financing and partnership opportunities.
	Greater simplicity for financing	It will prolong the cash outlay for NRT, increasing the number of projects and Nations that can be supported.
	Offsetting early upfront costs will have more favourable impacts on project returns.	The Trust can grow through interest on the investment.
	Will provide the necessary capital to get the project started. This can be a First Nation community's contribution to a partnership.	Safer option in the long run since the project will be built before funds are provided.
	Covering initial costs can help reduce the early risk to Nations to develop projects.	
	This can finance the equity portion needed for a First Nations' community.	
<b>Cons</b>	It is susceptible to construction overages leading to projects being cancelled (and wasted BCICEI funds)	Without knowing the Benchmark price, it is hard to plan. how much will be required as a subsidy
	Some projects may never produce electricity, draining the \$140 million and reducing chances for other groups.	Nations have to work hard up front to secure up-front funding support and take a higher risk, so this funding model helps them get into energy production faster.
	Once a project is built, the Nation may sell their shares in the project, thus the support may not benefit Indigenous communities in energy production in the long run.	

## Eligibility for funding across B.C. First Nations Communities

In 2021, BC Hydro conducted engagement across the Province to develop a UN Declaration Implementation Plan to move towards reconciliation and to ensure that operations adhere to the themes outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Moving forward, BC Hydro has acknowledged “B.C. Hydro’s activities have had, and continue to have, impacts on land, water and the environment in Indigenous communities’ territories across the Province” (BC Hydro 2023). BC Hydro has heard that Indigenous communities want future operations to focus on minimizing impacts as well as achieving environmental benefits that have additional value. They also heard that First Nations communities are looking for support for their long-term economic aspirations. The Province of B.C. has worked with the Government of Canada and New Relationship Trust on this BCICI funding, which is meant as one activity to help support the long-term economic aspirations of some First Nations communities. We focused on three areas of equity for eligibility for funding: the scale of support, general eligibility requirements and timing of disbursement of funds.

### Scale of support

For this engagement, the following questions related to scale.

- 1. Should BCICEI focus on fewer but larger projects? Or smaller projects and more of them?*
- 2. Do you recommend fully funding a project? Or partially funding a project?*
- 3. Do you recommend a funding cap per project? Or per Nation? What amount?*

During engagement, we asked how the \$140 million can be disbursed in an equitable manner across Indigenous communities in B.C. We received responses to this issue by email, on directed interviews and during the engagement sessions. Everyone who spoke to this issue noted that \$140 million is insufficient. Costs of developing small energy projects are high, as are the costs of connecting to the grid. For instance, one Nation specified that for their particular projects being considered, preconstruction development costs are often \$5million or more. The pre-construction stage can be a challenging one to source money. Development costs are significantly more. The Nation above noted that the development costs would be about \$150 million. If the Nation could have a guarantee that they could sell the energy, then would prefer coverage of 25% of the development costs (\$37.5 million). This amount per project was close to a few other groups that provided estimates where their projects of less than 15 MW would prefer to seek capital grants of \$10-20 million in order to align their energy delivery cost with what is expected to be BC Hydro’s Benchmark price.

We also asked participants if the grant should support many at a smaller proportion or a few at a larger proportion. The majority of those that filled in the online survey felt that it would be more equitable to provide smaller amounts of support to many than to a few large ones. Many wanted more Indigenous communities to have the opportunities to get into clean energy production and they felt that providing funds to many groups would spread the risk better so that the funding would support successes. However, some respondents felt the opposite. They felt that not all BC Indigenous communities can develop clean energy for distribution because of their proximity to transmission lines or ability to develop clean energy at a scale for distribution. Instead, there should be myriad opportunities for some groups to develop clean energy for themselves and others could focus on supporting the grid. Further, costs are high and raising funds can, in itself, take up significant capacity so providing small amounts of funding would mean that groups have to look to many funding sources in order to raise the money for a single project. Instead, the \$140 million should focus on a few large projects and support them to success, paving the way for Indigenous-owned clean energy distribution that other groups could follow using funding that could become available in the future.

Most people participating in the engagement sessions that spoke about funding caps felt caps per Nation were appropriate so that other groups could participate in the program. Specific dollar amounts were not provided.

### Eligibility requirements

Participants in the engagement were asked the following questions to understand how to judge an applicant as eligible for funding. The categories included experience with BCICEI, scale of the project, project type and minimum percentage of ownership. Specifically, the participants were asked the following:

- 1. What percentage ownership should Indigenous communities have in a project supported under the new BCICEI funding stream? (e.g., 25% FN equity ownership?)*
- 2. How important is it to prioritize a higher percentage of Indigenous community ownership? Should projects fully owned by an Indigenous community have a higher priority than a project with 51% Indigenous equity? Why or why not?*
- 3. Should BCICEI prioritize projects that have already received BCICEI funding support for preconstruction activities (i.e., from existing BCICEI funding streams)?*
- 4. Should there be a priority for projects with a shorter project development runway to connecting to the BC Hydro grid and producing energy?*

During engagement sessions, most people voiced support for having at least 51% of a project owned by First Nations communities. In the survey, many respondents felt that close to

100% First Nations community ownership would be preferable. Many felt that this would ensure that the Nations were fully invested in seeing the project through and more likely to develop full capacity within membership to manage the entire life cycle of the energy project. Others said that it would ensure that First Nations communities were first and foremost in benefiting from this funding program. Further, having majority ownership would allow Nations to have more control over the project to ensure that it met the needs of their community first and the needs of other investors second. However, in the survey, only 62% of respondents felt this way. While the survey was not statistically significant, it did provide alternative points of view on the subject. Of those that didn't feel that 51% First Nations ownership was necessary, many said that it depends on the project and the capacity of the Nation to manage a project. Many of those that said that 51% wasn't necessary thought that ownership percentage could be a ranked criterion, but not the only one and thus lacking 51% ownership shouldn't disqualify a project. Other criteria, such as likelihood of success and First Nations' involvement in multiple aspects of the project could be more important.

Most participants in engagement felt that all projects put forward should be eligible, regardless of if they've received BCICEI funding in the past. Some respondents felt that having that as a criterion presented unnecessary red tape and some groups have found alternative funding to get to the stage that they are currently because BCICEI funding hasn't always been plentiful.

Most participants in engagement felt that BCICEI should prioritize projects that have a shorter project development timeline for connecting to the BC Hydro grid and producing energy. Some respondents felt very strongly that funding successful projects could lead to further investments down the road, as opposed to supporting speculative projects with less certainty of achieving commercial operations. However, some voiced distrust in giving BC Hydro more power to design the clean energy climate in B.C. than they already have. Many in the engagement felt that B.C. Hydro has a limited vision of energy production options, especially to serve more remote parts of the Province. In closed-camera sessions and interviews, people were critical of BC Hydro's track record of taking resources from Indigenous communities without giving back and they didn't feel that there was sufficient First Nations' oversight to energy production in B.C. in general. However, interconnection timelines are important and for this specific funding, most felt that supporting projects with higher probabilities of success was important.

### Timing of funding disbursement

Originally, this funding program was set to start in 2028. However, NRT wanted us to ask the following question:

*1. Would moving the starting date from 2028 to 2026 help? Why or why not?*

Most participants in engagement, and especially the survey, felt that moving the timeline to 2026 would be important. Many projects are ready to go and have been sitting on shelves for years since funding dried up. They could be dusted off and scaled up quickly and that would support economic development in First Nations communities. Some, however, worried that moving the start date up would reduce funding available over the long term since interest on \$140M could be significant.

## SUMMARY

In the course of approximately a month of engagement, we heard from participants across British Columbia about how new BCICEI funding could help First Nations communities to develop clean energy that could support the Province's electric grid. In general, participants were encouraged by the initiative of the NRT to engage early in program design. However, some felt that the lack of clarity around factors contributing to the program (e.g., the Benchmark price) and the narrow focus of the funding (e.g., to support the grid and not to support communities reliant on fossil fuel) hampered informed input. In general, most participants felt that choice for First Nations communities to design clean energy solutions would most align with UNDRIP and providing funding to projects with high likelihood of success could encourage more First Nations communities to engage in energy economic development.

If successful, this new funding stream will empower First Nations communities by fostering the development of small-scale energy projects that are both environmentally sustainable and culturally respectful. By supporting these projects, the program would not only contribute to a greener energy sector but also respect First Nations principles and traditional ecological knowledge, ensuring that the environmental practices align with the community's values and long-standing relationship with the land.

In addition to environmental sustainability, the program will prioritize the cultural, economic, and political well-being of First Nations communities. Economic empowerment is a significant outcome, as these energy projects could create jobs and generate income within the communities. Politically, the initiative will support self-determination by allowing First Nations communities to have greater control over their energy resources and infrastructure. Culturally, the program should be developed to honor and integrate Indigenous practices and wisdom, fostering a sense of pride and continuity in traditional ways of life.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information, please reach out to us at michellecorfield@shaw.ca or check out the website at <https://corfieldconsulting.ca>.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Themes outside of scope of engagement

Many people who provided comments during this engagement talked about themes outside of the scope of this funding but that is worth repeating. For instance,

- revenue-sharing from existing projects is needed,
- there is a need for relevant training and skill development to participate in, and develop, clean energy projects in remote communities,
- energy sovereignty is of high priority,
- not all Nations have equitable ability to connect to the integrated grid,



- cost of power for Indigenous communities' members should be lower,
- there should be more programs to support trials of alternative power for off-grid communities.

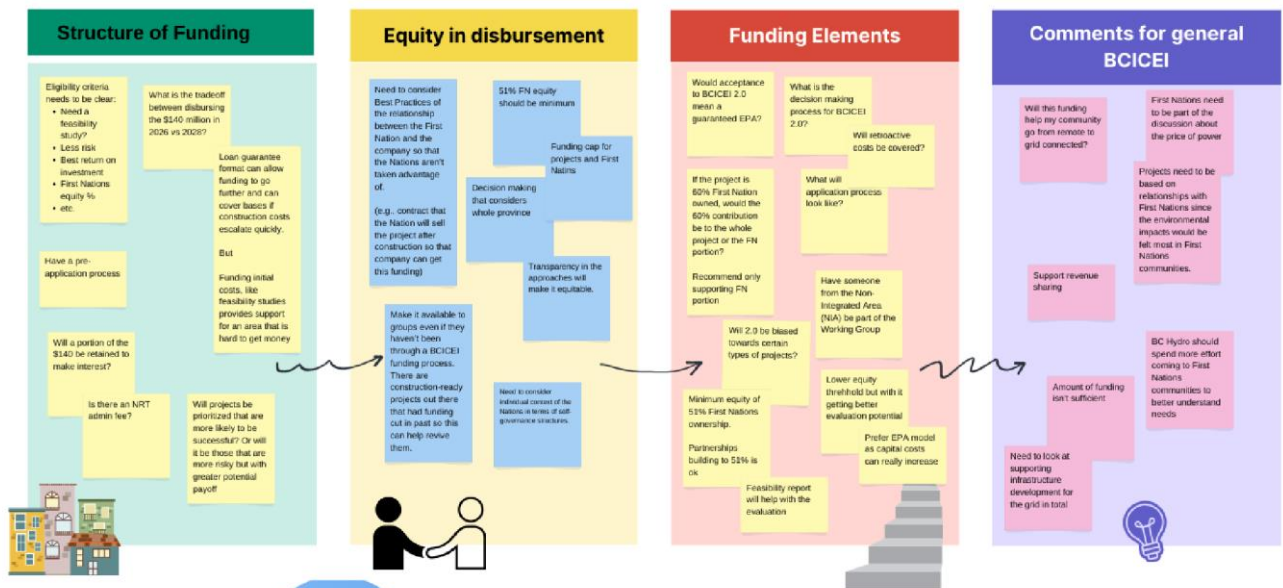
## Appendix 2: Survey Questions

1. Who do you represent while filling out the survey?
2. Is the stated intention important to First Nations and does the suggested program meet that intention?
3. Is the stated intention being met in the draft program stream as outlined in the Discussion Paper/Engagement sessions?
4. How important is it to prioritize a higher percentage of First Nations ownership in a project?
5. Should projects fully owned by a First Nation have a higher priority than a project with a 51% First Nations equity?
6. Do you prefer the EPA Annual Subsidy funding model or the Initial Capital Grant? Why?
7. Should the program stream be limited to one model or the other? Or include both?
8. Since funding is limited, should the new program stream focus on a few large projects or more small projects?
9. Do you recommend fully funding a project or limiting funding to partial funding?
10. Do you recommend a funding cap on either the project or per First Nation?
11. Should the new funding stream be limited to projects that have already received BCICEI funding support for pre-construction activities (i.e., from existing BCICEI funding streams)?
12. Would moving the starting date for the new BCICEI funding stream from 2028 to 2026 or 2027 help your project?
13. Should BCICEI prioritize projects that BC Hydro advises to have a shorter project development timeline for connecting to the BC Hydro grid and producing energy?
14. Do you have any other suggestions for the new program design to ensure equitable opportunities for First Nations?
15. If you would like to receive more information about this funding stream, please provide us with contact information below.

## Appendix 3: Overview of input from engagement sessions

May 24, 2024  
 May 31, 2024  
 June 11, 2024  
 June 13, 2024

# Engagement Themes



**Overall Ideas**

- Hard to provide input when the very important aspects, like BC Hydro rate, is unknown
- BC Hydro is offering less than they were 4-5 years ago, but the costs are going up, especially for small producers
- Hard to trust BC Hydro as programs change often
- Funding is not enough to support the vision that BC Hydro has
- The time it takes to get a project off the ground is hard for First Nations to finance