Regional Energy Coach Program

Submitted By: Community Housing Transformation Centre



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Community Housing Transformation Centre

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: https://centre.support/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Canada

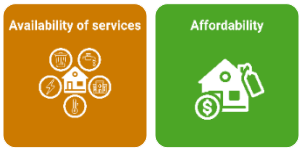
City(ies): Winnipeg

Start Year: 2021

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing & Climate Mitigation
- Technology & Digital Solutions in Housing

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Canada's affordable housing sector faces the dual challenge of aging infrastructure and rising operating costs, alongside the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Non-profit and co-operative housing providers often lack the technical expertise, funding, and institutional support required for energy-efficient retrofits, resulting in inefficiencies, increased costs for low-income tenants, and slow progress toward national climate goals. Existing policies tend to prioritize large-scale or new developments, leaving smaller community providers under-resourced. The Regional Energy Coaches (REC) program was established to close these gaps by offering tailored technical guidance, access to financing, and policy support. By strengthening local capacity and coordination, the initiative enables smaller organizations to implement sustainable energy solutions and advance equitable, low-carbon transitions in community housing.

Solution Developed

The Regional Energy Coaches (REC) program aims to enhance energy efficiency across Canada's affordable housing sector. It provides non-profit and co-operative housing providers with free, personalized coaching to guide them through every stage of energy-efficient retrofits or new construction projects. The initiative helps organizations lower utility costs, improve building performance, and extend asset longevity while contributing to national climate and housing goals. Its core objectives are to identify retrofit opportunities, integrate energy efficiency into ongoing maintenance, and support access to funding and financing. Delivered through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Green Municipal Fund under the Sustainable Affordable Housing program, REC coaches assist in preparing business cases, conducting virtual and onsite energy assessments, and developing funding applications. The program's innovation lies in its multi-level collaboration—linking national institutions, regional partners, and technical expertise—to create a practical, replicable model for sustainable, inclusive housing transformation.

Implementation

The REC program was implemented through a coordinated, multi-stakeholder partnership to strengthen the capacity of affordable housing providers in carrying out energy-efficient retrofits and new construction. Led by FCM through its Green Municipal Fund (GMF) and delivered by the Community Housing Transformation Centre (CHTC), the initiative mobilized a network of regional organizations serving as Energy Coaches across Canada. Partners hosting a REC include the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF) and the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), both involved since the pilot stage. Under REC 2.0, CHTC expanded delivery by engaging new partners to fill regional gaps, including Indigenous Clean Energy (ICE), the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association (MNPHA), Clean Foundation, and the Confédération québécoise des coopératives d'habitation (CQCH). Implementation began with

governance design, regional delivery planning, and partner selection, followed by recruitment and training of Energy Coaches, outreach to community housing providers, and creation of tailored tools and resources. Funded through FCM's GMF, with regional co-funding and in-kind support from housing associations and technical experts, the initiative was rolled out progressively to ensure equitable regional access. This collaboration built a scalable, resource-efficient model that reduces energy poverty, strengthens housing resilience, and supports Canada's emission-reduction goals.

Enablers & Obstacles

The REC program was driven by strong institutional collaboration and alignment with Canada's housing and climate priorities. Political and financial backing from the FCM's Green Municipal Fund created an enabling policy framework, while partnerships with the Community Housing Transformation Centre and regional organizations ensured localized expertise and community engagement. Access to building performance data and the use of virtual assessment tools further enhanced accessibility and efficiency. Challenges included limited technical capacity in smaller organizations, administrative complexity in managing multiple funding streams, and disparities in technical literacy. These were mitigated through simplified coaching materials, step-by-step application support, and flexible virtual engagement. The program's adaptive design and focus on capacity-building transformed these barriers into opportunities for institutional learning and sector-wide empowerment.

Results & Impact

Since its inception, the Regional Energy Coaches (REC) program has directly supported over 500 organizations across Canada, improving living conditions, reducing utility costs, and enhancing energy efficiency for thousands of households. Participants reported substantial reductions in energy use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, advancing Canada's commitments under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. During fiscal year 2024–25, average anticipated energy savings reached 51% for new builds and 36% for retrofits, with 1,490 tonnes of CO_2e/year avoided across Sustainable Affordable Housing (SAH) projects.

Since 2020, the Green Municipal Fund reports cumulative results of 70% average GHG reduction per project, 47% energy savings, and affordability co-benefits of up to $200/month in lower utility bills for tenants. Overall, 385 projects have been funded, supporting over 4,100 housing units and advancing planning for more than 31,000 additional units.

REC's coaching has been instrumental in enabling smaller, capacity-limited housing providers—typically five times smaller than the average SAH applicant—to pursue efficiency projects they otherwise could not. Beyond environmental gains, the initiative has strengthened local economies through green job creation and fostered social equity by reducing energy poverty among low-income and marginalized households.

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Replication & Scale Up

The Regional Energy Coaches (REC) model has been replicated across several Canadian provinces through collaborations with municipal networks and housing associations. Its adaptable framework—combining centralized coordination, standardized tools, and localized coaching—enables success in urban, rural, and northern contexts. Continued replication depends on stable funding, local implementation partners, and supportive policies, with strong institutional cooperation and regulatory frameworks promoting equity and energy efficiency.

The Regional Energy Coaches (REC) model has been replicated across Canadian provinces through municipal and housing partnerships. Its flexible, locally adapted framework supports urban, rural, and northern contexts. With stable funding, strong institutions, and policy alignment, REC can expand nationally and globally. The model—linking coaching, financing, and capacity-building—fits diverse policy regimes and emerging markets, addressing barriers to low-carbon, affordable housing worldwide.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has informed or been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments.

The REC initiative has shaped national and regional policy discussions on sustainable housing and energy retrofits. It influenced funding criteria under the Green Municipal Fund and informed pilot efforts to strengthen capacity in non-profit housing. Continued integration into provincial housing and energy strategies will deepen its impact. REC's outcomes align with emerging national and municipal trends embedding energy efficiency standards into building codes.

Lessons & Takeaways

Greater focus should be placed on simplifying administrative processes and improving outreach to small, rural housing providers. Strengthening data collection would enhance impact measurement and policy alignment. Toolkits and training materials now standardize coaching, build sector-wide capacity, and promote best practices. These resources help organizations track progress, share results with funders, and strengthen support for affordable, energy-efficient housing initiatives.