

POLICY BRIEF

Sustainable Jobs for Indigenous Clean Energy Action

Laura Cameron, Freddie Huppé Campbell,
and Mackenzie Roop¹
August 2024

Key Messages

The federal government has passed the Sustainable Jobs Act to advance support for workers and communities affected by the energy transition and harness the opportunities of a low-carbon economy. To address existing socio-economic inequities and the disproportionate impacts of fossil fuels on Indigenous communities, as well as to meet the federal government's commitments to transforming its relationship with Indigenous Peoples, sustainable jobs efforts must intentionally advance Indigenous self-determination. This is vital to ensuring Indigenous Peoples are well positioned to capitalize on clean-economy opportunities.

This brief provides recommendations, grounded in lessons and successes from Indigenous Clean Energy's programs and experiences, to inform how federal sustainable jobs programming and investments can be implemented to support Indigenous-led solutions in clean energy and energy efficiency. Recommendations include the following:

- **Advance joint governance and co-design implementation:** Ensure shared decision making with Indigenous nations or governments, co-create sustainable jobs programs, and ensure accountability to Indigenous communities.
- **Support Indigenous definitions of “sustainable jobs”:** Enable flexibility for communities to create jobs to meet their needs and address multiple intersecting crises through initiatives ranging from clean energy to revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and languages.

¹ The authors thank reviewers Chris Henderson, Alienor Rougeot, Ana Guerra Marin, Megan Gordon, Lynne Couves, and Emily He for their comments, as well as Serene Parenteau for research support.



- **Enable Indigenous equity:** Create adaptive and flexible funding mechanisms, include funding set-asides for Indigenous Peoples, provide long-term and multi-phase project support, prioritize Indigenous procurement, and support access to clear, updated information.
- **Scale up Indigenous workforce capacity building:** Improve access to education and training, create supportive working conditions and environments for Indigenous employees, support opportunities for mentorship for early-career workers, and include wrap-around supports, such as childcare provision, in program design.

1.0 Introduction

The energy transition is underway and presents immense challenges and opportunities for workers and communities across Canada. Understanding the opportunities and impacts of this transition for Indigenous communities in Canada is particularly important, given the fraught legacy of fossil fuel development on Indigenous lands and Canada’s responsibilities and commitments to respect Indigenous rights and governance. It is also essential to support the many Indigenous communities that rely on revenue and employment from fossil fuel projects on their territories.

Despite being disproportionately impacted by climate change and extractive industries, Indigenous Peoples are leading the way in responding to climate impacts and transforming energy systems (Reed et al., 2024). Indigenous Nations and communities are the majority holders of clean energy assets outside of Crown and private utilities in Canada, emerging as leaders essential for achieving a net-zero future (Gall et al., 2022; Henderson, as cited in Halm, 2022). There are nearly 200 medium-to-large renewable energy projects and an additional 1,700–2,100 small projects with Indigenous ownership, partnership, or other involvement in Canada (Gall et al., 2022).

To support the continued participation and leadership of Indigenous Peoples in transitioning energy systems and fostering climate resilience, federal sustainable jobs programs and investments must be created through partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and embed the right to self-determination. Sustainable job efforts are an opportunity to address the inequities that colonialism and fossil fuel extraction have imposed upon Indigenous Peoples while building upon and advancing the growing stream of Indigenous-led clean energy and climate solutions. If pursued with respect for the self-determination of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, federal sustainable jobs and transition policies could respond to calls for “bold action... [with] the necessary tools and support to advance decolonization and decarbonization” (Reed et al., 2024). To do so, planning and policies around sustainable jobs should account for the ways in which cumulative climate impacts intersect with ongoing legacies of colonialism to affect the health, culture, language, knowledge transfer, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples.



Sustainable jobs policies should support Indigenous Peoples working in high-emitting and transition-vulnerable sectors—for instance, in the oil and gas industry, where Indigenous Peoples comprise 6% of the workforce (Government of Canada, 2021). Moreover, these policies should address the broader systemic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy and workforce to address the reality that Indigenous Peoples are more likely to experience shock and risk to job security in a transitioning economy (Chernoff & Cheung, 2023; Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 2022).

A number of Indigenous organizations and communities have made recommendations or comments regarding the Sustainable Jobs Act and Action Plan. Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation has called upon the federal government to “establish measures that account for and advance the unique Rights, circumstances, needs and interests of Indigenous Peoples in the transition to a net-zero economy” in developing the Sustainable Jobs Action Plan (Standing Committee on Natural Resources, 2023). Others have cautioned that reframing the approach from “just transition” legislation to the more narrow “sustainable jobs” focus risks missing opportunities to address broader inequities through the energy transition (Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023).

Adding to this conversation, this brief provides recommendations grounded in lessons and successes from Indigenous Clean Energy’s (ICE’s) work supporting Indigenous employment capacities in the energy transition to inform how sustainable jobs legislation and investments can be implemented to further advance Indigenous-led solutions. The following sections outline federal commitments to Indigenous Peoples in the Sustainable Jobs Act and related laws and declarations before detailing a series of recommendations to work toward fulfilling these commitments through sustainable jobs policies and investments.

2.0 Bill C-50 and Indigenous Peoples

Bill C-50, An Act Respecting Accountability, Transparency and Engagement to Support the Creation of Sustainable Jobs for Workers and Economic Growth in a Net-Zero Economy, is federal legislation passed in June 2024. The bill establishes federal governance mechanisms, including the Sustainable Jobs Secretariat and Partnership Council, to support “skills development, training, retraining and economic development and diversification, as well as national, regional, federal-provincial and federal-territorial initiatives” related to sustainable jobs (Government of Canada, 2024). It commits the government to creating a Sustainable Jobs Action Plan in 2025 and every 5 years following to direct investments and programs aimed at creating jobs and supporting workers through the transition.

The legislation makes several references to Indigenous Peoples; however, it includes few specifics on how the federal government will involve Indigenous governments and groups regarding sustainable jobs. The bill’s preamble states the federal government’s commitment under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA) to collaborate with Indigenous Peoples and take Indigenous knowledge into account when carrying out the purposes



of the bill. How that collaboration will be pursued and what form it will take is not specified, though there are three seats for Indigenous representatives on the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council to advise the minister through a process of social dialogue. The act also includes a principle of inclusion, aiming to remove barriers to employment and support job creation for Indigenous Peoples and other equity-seeking groups. The interim and forthcoming Sustainable Jobs Action Plans are required to identify gaps in labour market data relating to Indigenous Peoples and responses to those gaps, as well as identify Indigenous-led initiatives related to sustainable jobs.

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology (2024) studied the draft bill and also raised concerns about the lack of details regarding Indigenous participation. The committee concluded that “the bill’s wording suggests an optional approach to Indigenous knowledge, which contradicts the principles of UNDRIP. UNDRIP emphasizes that Indigenous peoples have the authority to determine which projects are developed on their lands, their locations, and their ownership” (Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology, 2024). The Committee strongly urged the government to “respect Indigenous peoples as rights holders and adhere to UNDRIP and free, prior, and informed consent,” recognizing that “Indigenous peoples are not just collaborators; they are leaders with the right to make decisions about their lands and waters” (Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology, 2024).

In the implementation of the act, the government should address the gaps in the legislation and uphold Indigenous rights and jurisdiction in sustainable jobs policy. Much more must be done to ensure that Indigenous Peoples do not continue to be excluded from climate policy processes (Indigenous Climate Action, 2023).

Box 1. A note on equity-seeking groups

Care should be taken not to lump Indigenous Peoples together with all other “equity-seeking groups” since Indigenous Peoples and nations have distinct rights, as affirmed by Canada, such as through the UNDA and subsequent federal legislation. Indigenous rights are distinct from the broader category of human rights, as they are rooted in Indigenous Peoples’ unique experiences (Kulchyski, 2013). Rather than conflating the two, the principle of intersectionality should be considered, recognizing that Indigenous Peoples may also belong to other minority identities, and these intersections may affect their participation in education and employment. Because of this intersectionality, the concept of “equity” in the Sustainable Jobs Act must move beyond the idea of a minimum quota and take greater intention to avoid obscuring Indigenous-specific needs and rights by grouping them with other marginalized communities. Furthermore, distinction-based diversity within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit should also be respected and upheld in sustainable jobs work.



3.0 Other Federal Commitments Relevant to Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Jobs

The federal government has several additional legal commitments related to Indigenous Peoples and employment that are relevant to sustainable jobs efforts and should be considered in the implementation of Bill C-50. The 2023 interim Sustainable Jobs Plan includes commitments to support Indigenous-owned clean energy projects and develop a National Benefits-Sharing Framework to ensure communities benefit from resource projects on their lands (Natural Resources Canada, 2023).

Obligations relevant to sustainable jobs under the UNDA Action Plan include the following:

- increasing equity, inclusiveness, and awareness of Indigenous culture within federally regulated workplaces;
- increasing the economic participation of Indigenous Peoples in resource development;
- increasing Indigenous participation and authority in matters regulated by the Canada Energy Regulator;
- improving outreach to Indigenous communities to increase access to Government of Canada benefits and programs;
- supporting Indigenous women’s entrepreneurship, self-determination, and economic reconciliation; and
- awarding at least 5% of all federal contracts to Indigenous businesses (Department of Justice Canada, 2023).

Several federal departments are tasked individually and collaboratively with these actionable commitments and are required to report their progress annually.

Under Canada’s enhanced nationally determined contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, the government has committed to supporting rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities that currently rely on diesel by providing them with clean, reliable energy by 2030 (Government of Canada, 2021). The government also committed to increasing funding for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous Guardians initiatives. Both commitments can lead to the creation of sustainable jobs under the leadership of Indigenous Peoples if properly implemented. As the NDC describes, “Indigenous climate leadership means investing in the agency of Indigenous Peoples and communities, supporting Indigenous led and delivered solutions, equipping Indigenous Peoples with equitable resources, and ensuring appropriate and timely access to funding to implement self-determined climate action” (Government of Canada, 2021). Canada is obligated to coordinate and enforce these standards outlined under the UNDA and its NDC across regulations, laws, and policies.



Canada is also a signatory to the Organization of American States' (2016) American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ADRIP), which outlines the fundamental and minimum rights of Indigenous Peoples, including with respect to labour, workforce development, and economic pursuits. These rights include equal opportunities for employment, training, and capacity building and the right to association, including through trade unions and collective bargaining. Similarly to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ADRIP outlines the state's obligation to act to promote employment of Indigenous Peoples and recognize "the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired" (Organization of American States, 2016).

Alongside Canada's legislation and commitments regarding Indigenous Peoples, employment, and economic development, there are notable gaps and barriers. For example, Canada has not ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization, despite other nations recommending it to do so in Canada's recent Universal Periodic Review of its human rights record (Universal Periodic Review Info, n.d.). Canadian labour and employment standards also exacerbate gaps in addressing and respecting Indigenous-specific rights in some respects. Harmonization is needed to close major gaps in employment and labour standards with Indigenous rights across provincial and federal policies, regulations, and legislation.

In addition to the obligations in these specific federal commitments and laws related to jobs and economic development, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people have distinct rights which must be respected and upheld as written in treaties and land claim agreements (Reed et al., 2024).

4.0 Advancing Indigenous-Led Sustainable Jobs and Transition Initiatives

Lessons and best practices from ICE programs can help inform sustainable jobs policies in ways that advance the federal commitments laid out above. For over 8 years, ICE has been delivering Indigenous-specific programming to support job creation, capacity building, and equity for Indigenous Peoples in clean energy and energy efficiency. ICE's diverse programs, which range from sectors such as zero-emission vehicles to building energy efficiency, have demonstrated success through responsive, cross-cutting, and gap-filling curriculums. While ICE continues to expand its national programming, the following keystone programs focus on youth, community housing efficiency, project acceleration, and employer connections:

- **Community housing efficiency.** The Bringing it Home program supports skill-building and community-led projects in the housing sector, a critical sector for energy efficiency and local sustainable job creation. The program works with community-based projects to enhance energy efficiency for new and retrofitted homes and facilities and provides simultaneous capacity-building programming that actively responds to project-related questions and needs.



- **Employer connections.** Generation Power is a program developed by and for Indigenous youth pursuing energy careers through workplace placements. The program connects youth with employers and is delivered in cohorts so participants can share knowledge, skills, and experience. The program covers up to a 75% wage subsidy (up to CAD 30,000) for employers and also provides employer-side training and support to grow organizational retention and inclusion.
- **Project acceleration.** 20/20 Catalysts Program is an award-winning program connecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community energy “Catalysts” to a network of mentors and coaching specialists involved in clean energy project development—both on- and off-grid—such as solar and wind farming, hydro, bioenergy, microgrids and storage, and energy efficiency upgrades. Over the last 7 years, ICE has trained more than 100 people through its Catalysts Program. The program is successful due to a mix of essential wrap-around supports and networking elements needed to help get projects off the ground. It provides practical and applied learning about renewable energy projects, community energy planning, business management, and advanced energy systems.
- **Youth leadership.** ImageGENation is a program designed by and for Indigenous youth who are involved in clean energy projects or interested in starting one. It advances Indigenous youth’s vision and voices in the transition toward a sustainable future by transforming that vision into meaningful project-based action.

The following recommended action pathways are drawn from successes and lessons learned from ICE programs over the years to inform skills development; training and retraining; economic development and diversification; and national, regional, federal–provincial, and federal–territorial initiatives related to sustainable jobs.

4.1 Action Pathways

For sustainable jobs activities to support Indigenous self-determination, they should advance (1) joint governance and co-designed implementation, (2) Indigenous definitions of sustainable jobs, (3) Indigenous equity, and (4) Indigenous workforce capacity building, with a consistent lens of responsive and adaptive policy-making. The following recommendations highlight specific steps toward these principles.

These recommendations should be adopted by the federal departments and bodies engaged in sustainable jobs, including Natural Resources Canada and its Sustainable Jobs Secretariat, Employment and Social Development Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Regional Development Agencies, and other bodies with mandates related to sustainable jobs.



4.1.1 Advancing Joint Governance and Co-Designed Sustainable Jobs Implementation

Exemplify Joint Decision-Making

Shared decision-making requires full, informed participation from relevant Indigenous nations, not only as stakeholders but as decision-making partners. Joint decision making should be upheld with respect to sustainable jobs programs that engage Indigenous Peoples and the development of green industrial strategies and projects to create those jobs. This is particularly important in the context of energy and resource projects that are carried out on Indigenous lands or waters. With Indigenous leadership involved in decision making at every step—from utility regulation, infrastructure ownership, partnerships, and policy development—decarbonizing energy systems can help to advance decolonizing power structures (Doyle et al., 2022; Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023).

The process for joint decision making on sustainable jobs should be made clear. The three Indigenous seats on the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council are an important venue for participation, but these do not replace the federal government’s obligations to nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationships with Indigenous Peoples. These relationships cannot be delegated to the council members. Indigenous governments and workers should also be involved in social dialogue on energy transition at the local and regional levels, with dedicated funding to support full and sustained engagement.

Co-Create Sustainable Jobs Programs and Policies

Indigenous Peoples must be involved in the design and development of sustainable jobs programs to ensure successful outcomes for Indigenous workers, employers, and communities. This process should uphold the principle of “nothing about us without us” (Bellegarde, as quoted in Weber, 2016) and follow protocols and guidance of Indigenous Nations or governments (e.g., the Métis National Council’s [MNC’s] (2024) *Co-Development Principles*). This requires equipping Indigenous Peoples with equitable resources to enable their participation from the outset. The increasingly common practice of providing resources alongside federal funding programs to support community capacity building, applications, and participation is a step in the right direction (e.g. Government of Canada, n.d.). Without upfront partnership and co-creation, policies risk reproducing the inequities that are present in current resource industries. For instance, research found that policies to support a just transition for coal workers and communities were most likely to benefit white, Canadian-born men (reflective of their disproportionate representation in the workforce) but did not sufficiently support racialized workers in industries indirectly reliant upon coal production (Mertins-Kirkwood & Deshpande, 2019).

Ensure Accountability to Indigenous Peoples

There should be clear transparency on sustainable jobs regarding decision-making powers, information flows, priority areas, and resource allocations, including as it relates to Indigenous



Peoples. Mechanisms for Indigenous workers and communities to provide feedback and input into the Sustainable Jobs Action Plan and investments should be made clear and accessible, with transparency around how that feedback is incorporated. Ensuring clear and transparent communication before, during, and after policies are created and implemented can help build trust and relationships.

4.1.2 Supporting Indigenous Definitions of “Sustainable Jobs”

Support Indigenous Definitions of “Sustainable Jobs”

It is important to allow flexibility in what is considered a “sustainable job” by Indigenous Peoples to be adapted and shaped to the specific contexts and needs of the communities. For instance, Indigenous Peoples who participate in seasonal land-based activities such as hunting, fishing, and harvesting may seek more flexible wage labour jobs that allow them to take time off at certain times of the year in order to maintain their land-based practices.

More broadly, the definition of “sustainable jobs” must offer space for Indigenous knowledge systems that prioritize the long-term health and resilience of their communities, lands, and cultures. Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge is increasingly understood to be central to Indigenous-led climate solutions (Cameron et al., 2021; Indigenous Climate Action, 2022) and thus, for some communities, language revitalization and land-based learning may be the sustainable jobs they pursue. These jobs and pathways emphasize the preservation of Indigenous cultures, lands, and ways of life in service of building resilient and thriving communities for generations to come and may not fit within state forms of economic development or conventional unionized and salaried employment structures. It is essential that Bill C-50 and associated federal policies reflect opportunities for Indigenous definitions of sustainable jobs.

The creation of sustainable jobs for Indigenous communities must also recognize the unequal access to basic necessities such as drinking water, adequate housing, electricity, and healthy foods that many communities face as a result of colonialism and chronic underfunding (King & Yesno, 2023). These immediate needs should be prioritized in the context of job creation, understanding that climate resiliency and vulnerability are fundamentally intertwined with access to food, water, and infrastructure. Addressing these disparities also provides ample opportunities for job creation. For example, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Climate Strategy provides many calls to action at the intersection of climate, infrastructure, and well-being, such as providing funding for culturally appropriate, energy-efficient, and resilient housing in First Nations to address homelessness and overcrowding (AFN, 2023). Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami’s (ITK’s) Climate Change Strategy similarly identifies economic opportunities through integrated action on health, education, and climate (ITK, 2019). ICE’s *Enabling Efficiency* report provides specific recommendations to the federal government to better support capacity building, training, and careers in energy efficiency in Indigenous communities (ICE, 2023).



4.1.3 Enabling Indigenous Equity in Sustainable Job-Creating Projects

Support Indigenous Ownership and Partnership

Historically, Indigenous Peoples have been largely marginalized or excluded from ownership of energy projects in Canada, and despite being increasingly involved in large-scale renewable energy, they are still often not majority owners (Hoika et al., 2021). Supporting Indigenous equity in clean energy, energy efficiency, and other sustainable industries where communities seek to engage is essential to upholding Indigenous jurisdiction and addressing current disparities in revenue and benefits from projects. The AFN and MNC have both called for long-term, low-cost, low-risk, and reliable support to increase First Nations and Métis participation and equity in the low-carbon, renewable economy (AFN, 2023; MNC, 2024). ITK's (2019) Climate Change Strategy also invites action to increase Inuit ownership and governance of energy systems in Inuit communities. Supporting Indigenous communities' participation and ownership in energy generation, transmission, and distribution can also advance energy independence, energy security, and sovereignty (AFN, 2023; Doyle et al., 2022).

The National Benefits-Sharing Framework, as highlighted in the interim Sustainable Jobs Plan, is important to ensure that communities benefit from resource projects on their territories but is insufficient on its own. Moving from benefit sharing to supporting Indigenous equity and ownership is essential as a means to uphold Indigenous sovereignty, jurisdiction, and decision making regarding projects on their lands. The new federal Indigenous Loan Guarantee Program is a critical step forward and can be leveraged and expanded upon to support Indigenous-led renewable energy and sustainable jobs projects. Additionally, Indigenous clean energy entrepreneurship and businesses must be supported through intentional financing and mentorship streams, such as business tax credits for expenditures in Indigenous clean energy apprenticeships.

Include Set-Asides for Indigenous Peoples

As other Indigenous organizations have called for, there must be dedicated funding and financing bodies to support Indigenous governance and projects related to the energy transition and sustainable jobs (AFN, 2023; Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023). For instance, the Sustainable Jobs Training Fund should have specific, distinction-based allocations for training by and for Indigenous Peoples. Dedicated discussions on distinction-based funding will help support self-determination in Indigenous job creation and pursuits and work to address unequal representation of Indigenous Peoples in the workforce. It is critical to have targeted fiscal and administrative support for the increased participation of diverse Indigenous Peoples and equity-seeking groups in a net-zero economy, including opportunities for economic growth and the creation of good-paying, high-quality jobs.

Create Flexible and Supportive Funding Mechanisms

Funding and financing to support Indigenous leadership and engagement in sustainable jobs and associated industries should have sufficient flexibility and avoid being too prescriptive or having time-intensive reporting requirements. Rather than managing funding recipients through



extensive reporting, government agencies could collaborate with recipients in early project phases to offer information and support project design. It is critical to ensure that Indigenous Peoples can tailor the funding to meet their communities' needs and context. Flexible or rolling application deadlines have also been found to be helpful for Indigenous communities.

Provide Long-Term Funding and Project Support

Stop-and-start funding programs and/or funding that only covers upfront costs create limitations when it comes to long-term employment and the success of projects. Multi-phase funding—covering all stages of a project, from capacity building to feasibility to implementation—provides greater support and certainty for project success. The Indigenous Off-Diesel Initiative (IODI) is a good example of this. Gaps in funding for sustained capacity building and operations can lead to stalled projects or a lack of sustained Indigenous employment.

Several key programs are scheduled to sunset and should be renewed for the long term, such as the Strategic Partnerships Initiative administered by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC-SPI), Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities (CERRC), and the GI Smart Grid, which have been flexible in important ways in adapting to various geographic, social, cultural, and political contexts. Funding through such initiatives is critical to enable greater community-based leadership and success in clean energy projects.

Prioritize Indigenous Procurement

In designing procurement policies related to sustainable industries, the federal government should give particular consideration to Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurship. This is consistent with Canada's UNDA commitment to award at least 5% of all federal contracts to Indigenous businesses. Price adders for energy generation and transmission are one mechanism to support Indigenous-owned renewable energy project uptake by adding an incentive to support Indigenous equity. For example, the Green Energy Act in Ontario put in place a price adder that increased power sale prices on bids from projects with Indigenous ownership or partnership, resulting in an increase in Indigenous-owned or co-owned energy projects in the province. However, this must be paired with capacity-building supports to ensure community participation in projects and their success over the long term.

Support Access to Updated and Clear Information

Sharing information related to sustainable jobs and renewable energy project creation in a clear, accessible, and centralized forum is needed for communities looking to pursue their own projects and chart the best path forward. Information related to available funding for projects, how-to guides and lessons learned, labour market data and modelling, training and education opportunities, and sustainable economic development planning resources are often valuable but hard to find. Support for navigating information and funding pathways across various federal bodies is also needed. Sacred Earth Solar's *Just Transition Guide* provides a strong foundation for case studies of Indigenous-led clean energy and energy-efficiency projects that could be



scaled up and more widely distributed to support knowledge exchange between communities (Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023). Similar calls for information exchange on just transition have been made by Tribes in the United States (Yazzie et al., 2024). The information should be shared in a way that meets communities' needs and is accessible.

4.1.4 Scaling Up Capacity Building in the Indigenous Workforce

Improve Access to Education and Training

For successful and long-term sustainable jobs, there is a need to scale up specific and responsive capacity-building programs for Indigenous workers and entrepreneurs in the clean energy and energy efficiency sectors. Indigenous Peoples should have access to transferable skills programs and accessible co-developed education. By the right of self-determination, Indigenous Peoples must be involved in the design and development of curriculum to create the most effective outcome.

The Sustainable Jobs Action Plan should look to fill current and future capacity gaps by and for Indigenous Peoples in areas such as trades, entrepreneurship, education, and outreach. Programs should strive to simultaneously be broad enough to have low barriers of access and specific enough to effectively increase technical skills. There is also a need to continue education programs that offer incentives for on-reserve Indigenous communities to build their own project development capacity (Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023). Indigenous training programs in this field have been run by ICE, Iron and Earth, and others. Federal programs should support organizations with expertise in delivering training specifically designed with and for Indigenous Peoples, alongside union training centres. This could include Indigenous training initiatives through the Sustainable Jobs Training Fund and the sustainable jobs stream of the Union Training and Innovation Program, such as Indigenous clean energy career and skill development grants, cross-sector grants for cultural revitalization related to clean energy, Indigenous emergency management funds, and land restoration and protection supports.

Create Supportive Working Conditions and Environments for Indigenous Employment

The design and implementation of sustainable jobs policies should ensure there is a healthy workplace environment for Indigenous employees and employers in the clean and renewable energy sector. These should meet or exceed the standards articulated in federal commitments in the UNDA and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.² The first step to fostering supportive work environments is to ensure non-Indigenous federal government employees have adequate cultural sensitivity training (e.g., diversity, equity, and inclusion and decolonial approaches; Indigenous trauma theory; Medicine Wheel and/or Life Cycle teachings; trauma-informed care through an Indigenous lens). This should be carried forward to inform the design of federal policies or programs that involve Indigenous Peoples, for instance, requiring employers who receive federal funding for sustainable jobs to take concrete actions to ensure safe

² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action are available at <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>.



and supportive working conditions for Indigenous employees and upholding Indigenous rights in the workplace.

Support Mentorship for Early-Career Sustainable Jobs

Indigenous youth are the largest growing youth population in Canada and an integral part of Canada's current and future workforce (Statistics Canada, 2018). ICE programs and networks illustrate the importance of professional mentorship for Indigenous youth, connecting early-career employees with suitable organizations in the field and building a community of experts and practitioners to foster mentorship and opportunities. Federal investment should support spaces for mentorship, particularly to provide technical support and connect people in specific trades.

Include Wrap-Around Supports

Including wrap-around supports in sustainable jobs programs can help Indigenous Peoples overcome barriers they may face that would impact their employment. The federal government should ensure that recipients of federal funding related to sustainable jobs build wrap-around supports into their programs. These supports should be designed by Indigenous Peoples to be specific and sensitive to their needs and interests. Examples of wrap-around supports that have been impactful in capacity-building programming are childcare, animal care, living wages, involvement of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, health supports, transportation costs, and rent support. ICE programs have demonstrated that providing flexible and supportive program frameworks has allowed participants to overcome barriers and engage fully in the programs.

5.0 Conclusion

Sustainable job policies and investments must be developed in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and adhere to Indigenous jurisdiction to avoid repeating the harms of the current fossil fuel-based economy in the industries of the future. Enacting joint decision making, supporting Indigenous definitions of sustainable jobs, enabling Indigenous equity in energy and transition projects, and scaling up workforce capacity-building and educational programs are four key pathways to supporting Indigenous leadership on sustainable jobs. Programs to support Indigenous sustainable jobs should be delivered at scale to meet the opportunity and need. Ideally, this work should help grow Indigenous Peoples' ongoing efforts related to labour and livelihoods, building and restoring economies, and developing strategies for climate action and adaptation (see, for example, AFN, 2023; MNC, 2024). It is not simply about inclusion. As Reed et al. (2024) describe: "Indigenous Peoples have our own methods, decision-making processes and systems, and we are experts within those systems. These systems should be respected, acknowledged, supported and implemented." In this way, the goal of creating sustainable jobs through decarbonization can and must proceed in tandem with decolonization.



References

- Assembly of First Nations. (2023). *Assembly of First Nations national climate strategy*. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/77556e1d9da51db7/original/2023-Climate-Strategy-Report.pdf>
- Cameron, L., Mauro, I., & Settee, K. (2021). “A return to and of the land”: Indigenous Knowledge and climate change initiatives across the Canadian Prairies. *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 41(3), 368–388. <https://doi.org/10.2993/0278-0771-41.3.368>
- Chernoff, A., & Cheung, C. (2023). *An overview of Indigenous economies within Canada*. Bank of Canada. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/sdp2023-25.pdf>
- Department of Justice Canada. (2023). *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act: Action plan*. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/ah/pdf/unda-action-plan-digital-eng.pdf>
- Doyle, B., Jacobs, D., & Jones, C. (2022). *Decarbonizing electricity and decolonizing power: Voices, insights and priorities from Indigenous clean energy leaders*. David Suzuki Foundation. <https://david Suzuki.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/DSF-CPP-Indigenous-Engagement-Report-2022.pdf>
- Gall, L., Henderson, C., & Morrison, T. L. (2022). *Waves of change: Indigenous clean energy leadership for Canada’s clean, electric future*. Indigenous Clean Energy & Canadian Institute for Climate Choices. <https://climateinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ICE-report-ENGLISH-FINAL.pdf>
- Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Wah-ila-toos: Clean energy initiatives in Indigenous, rural and remote communities* [Program descriptions]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/reduce-emissions/reducing-reliance-diesel.html>
- Government of Canada. (2021). *Canada’s 2021 nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement*. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Canada%27s%20Enhanced%20NDC%20Submission1_FINAL%20EN.pdf
- Government of Canada. (2024). Bill-C-50: An Act Respecting Accountability, Transparency and Engagement to Support the Creation of Sustainable Jobs for Workers and Economic Growth in a Net-Zero Economy. <https://www.parl.ca/documentviewer/en/44-1/bill/C-50/royal-assent>
- Hoicka, C. E., Savic, K., & Campney, A. (2021). Reconciliation through renewable energy? A survey of Indigenous communities, involvement, and peoples in Canada. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 74, art. 101897. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101897>
- Indigenous Clean Energy. (2023). *Enabling efficiency: Pathways and recommendations based on the perceptions, barriers, and needs of Indigenous people, communities, and organizations*. Natural Resources Canada. <https://indigenouscleanenergy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Enabling-Efficiency-Report-December-2023.pdf>



- Indigenous Climate Action. (2022). *Indigenous-led climate policy: Phase 2 of ICA's Decolonizing Climate project* (Executive summary report). <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e4b5ae8628564ab4bc44c/t/6398ff330c89ce4c8a1fdb3f/1670971189814/Executive+Summary+DCP2+2022-12-12.pdf>
- Indigenous Climate Action. (2023). *Decolonizing climate policy in Canada: Report from Phase 2, Part 1*. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e4b5ae8628564ab4bc44c/t/6572ef1200810a3f9b708453/1702031212873/DCP+Phase+2+Part+1.pdf>
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2019). *National Inuit climate change strategy*. https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ITK_Climate-Change-Strategy_English.pdf
- King, H., & Yesno, R. (2023). *Federal budget 2024: An Indigenous accounting*. Yellowhead Institute. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2024/04/22/>
- Kulchyski, P. (2013). *Aboriginal rights are not human rights: In defence of Indigenous struggles*. ARP Books.
- Laboucan-Massimo, M., Rickerby-Nishi, F., Demeris, N., & Shafazand, S. (2023). *Just transition guide: Indigenous-led pathways toward equitable climate solutions and resiliency in the climate crisis*. Sacred Earth Solar, Indigenous Climate Action, Power to the People, & David Suzuki Foundation. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9860bf77b9034bc5e70122/t/6555222edcea4d681ccf0454/1700078320040/Just+Transition+Guide.pdf>
- Mertins-Kirkwood, H., & Deshpande, Z. (2019). *Who is included in a just transition? Considering social equity in Canada's shift to a zero-carbon economy*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces. https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2019/08/Who%20is%20included%20in%20a%20just%20transition_final.pdf
- Métis National Council. (2024). *Weaving resilience and building Métis climate leadership: The Métis national climate strategy*. <https://www.metisnation.ca/uploads/documents/MNC-%20Climate%20Strategy%20Report%20-FNL%20digital-Part1.pdf>
- Natural Resources Canada. (2023). *Sustainable jobs plan*. <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/transparency/reporting-and-accountability/plans-and-performance-reports/sustainable-jobs-plan/25381#s5f>
- Organization of American States. (2016). *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. <https://www.oas.org/en/sare/documents/DecAmIND.pdf>
- Reed, G., Fox, S., Littlechild, D., McGregor, D., Lewis, D., Popp, J., Wray, K., Kassi, N., Ruben, R., Morales, S., & Lonsdale, S. (2024). *For our future: Indigenous resilience report*. <https://oestr-backend-prod.azurewebsites.net/server/api/core/bitstreams/d96f9df3-4434-4d38-b1b2-72c34fc96489/content>



- Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. (2022, April). *Barriers to economic development in Indigenous communities*. Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 44th Parliament, 1st Session. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/INAN/Reports/RP11714230/inanrp02/inanrp02-e.pdf>
- Standing Committee on Natural Resources. (2023, December 1). *ACFN and the need for sustainable jobs and a net-zero economy*. Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/RNNR/Brief/BR12773392/br-external/AthabascaChipewyanFirstNation-e.pdf>
- Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. (2024, June 13). *Twenty-third report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (44th Parliament, 1st Session)*. SenCanada. <https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/SOCI/Report/133123/44-1>
- Statistics Canada. (2018). *First Nations People, Métis and Inuit in Canada: Diverse and growing populations*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-659-x/89-659-x2018001-eng.htm>
- Universal Periodic Review Info. (n.d.). *Recommendations received by Canada*. [https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/library/?q=\(allAggregations:lf,filters:\(state under review:\(values:!\(%27ayppdufx2if%27\)\)\),from:0,includeUnpublished:lf,limit:30,order:desc,sort:creationDate,types:!\(%275d8ce04361cde0408222e9a8%27\),unpublished:lf\)](https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/library/?q=(allAggregations:lf,filters:(state under review:(values:!(%27ayppdufx2if%27))),from:0,includeUnpublished:lf,limit:30,order:desc,sort:creationDate,types:!(%275d8ce04361cde0408222e9a8%27),unpublished:lf))
- van Halm, I. (2022, October 24). *How Indigenous communities lead Canada's energy transition*. Energy Monitor. <https://www.energymonitor.ai/policy/just-transition/how-indigenous-communities-became-major-players-in-canadas-energy-transition/>
- Weber, B. (2016, March 2). *'Nothing about us, without us': First Nations want say in climate change policy*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/2554145/nothing-about-us-without-us-first-nations-want-say-in-climate-change-policy/>
- Yazzie, K. C., Whyte, K., Begay, S., Glavin, J., Jones, T., Leni-Konig, K., Pratte, C., Madden, D., Reicher, D., & Field, C. B. (2024, April 11). Opportunities to grow tribal clean energy in the US. *Science*, 384(6692). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adk8298>

© 2024 The International Institute for Sustainable Development and Indigenous Clean Energy
Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

This publication is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) is an award-winning, independent think tank working to accelerate solutions for a stable climate, sustainable resource management, and fair economies. Our work inspires better decisions and sparks meaningful action to help people and the planet thrive. We shine a light on what can be achieved when governments, businesses, non-profits, and communities come together. IISD's staff of more than 200 people come from across the globe and from many disciplines. With offices in Winnipeg, Geneva, Ottawa, and Toronto, our work affects lives in more than 100 countries.

IISD is a registered charitable organization in Canada and has 501(c)(3) status in the United States. IISD receives core operating support from the Province of Manitoba and project funding from governments inside and outside Canada, United Nations agencies, foundations, the private sector, and individuals.

INDIGENOUS CLEAN ENERGY

Indigenous Clean Energy (ICE) is a not-for-profit that advances Indigenous-led capacity building and collective action in Canada's clean energy transition. The organization does this by supporting Indigenous leadership and broad-based collaboration with communities, energy companies, utilities, governments, development firms, clean tech innovators, the academic sector, and capital markets. ICE's work includes providing clean energy capacity building and project development support, promoting Indigenous youth clean energy leadership, building connections for clean energy impact, and sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration.

IISD Head Office

111 Lombard Avenue, Suite 325
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3B 0T4

Tel: +1 (204) 958-7700

Website: iisd.org

X: [@IISD_news](https://twitter.com/IISD_news)

