

First Nations Utilities Request for Expression of Interest

The First Nations Clean Energy Opportunities (FNCEO) initiative is accepting Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from First Nations interested in forming a utility that would currently fall under the regulation by the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC) as a public utility. EOIs submitted through this process will provide insights into the priorities of First Nations and inform future work on a regulatory framework for First Nations Utilities (FNU). Additionally, the FNCEO is intending to partner with the University of Victoria's research initiative Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) on a study assessing the financial viability of FNU models in B.C. Applicants who submit an EOI may be asked to partner on the study.

Study Purpose

The study will analyze different potential utility models proposed by First Nations to provide valuable insights on the financial viability of current or future utility models. Financial viability means the utility's ability to provide safe, reliable, and affordable service to its customers on a long-term basis and make a reasonable rate of return (comparable to other utilities in B.C.).

The proposed models may involve, for example, acquiring a part of an existing utility's assets to serve existing and new customers, developing new infrastructure to serve new FNU customers or operating a micro-grid to serve a First Nation. This is not an exhaustive list.

Benefits

The study is anticipated to produce conclusions that are relevant for specific First Nations who agree to participate in or contribute to the study, broadly for all B.C. First Nations, and for the development of policy options. To support participation in the study, First Nations partners may receive capacity funding from Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions (ECS).

Study Participation Eligibility

For the purposes of this study, ECS is considering the criteria below for inclusion. Larger, more complex models may be considered for future studies.

Eligible applicants include:

- First Nation(s) in B.C.
- Legal entity owned by a First Nation (majority First Nations owned) in B.C.

For participation in the study, the utility model:

- Must service a First Nation or multiple First Nations in B.C.
- Must provide clean energy products or services.

- May provide transmission service by First Nations to an industrial customer. This is different than a large-scale vertically integrated utility and would be eligible for the study (for example a First Nation building a new transmission line at the edge of the grid to serve a mine, oil and gas or industrial customer).

Utility models that would be ineligible for the study may include:

- Utilities that are fundamentally Independent Power Producers (i.e., providing power to other utilities and not to First Nations).
- A large-scale vertically integrated utility that develops transmission system expansions intended to provide service to a broad area of the province (for example, BC Hydro's North Coast Transmission Line) will not be eligible for the study due to anticipated complexity. Proposals of this nature will not be assessed under this study.
 - However, First Nations are encouraged to submit EOIs for these types of proposals to inform the ECS of their interests and initiate a dialogue.

Study Selection Criteria

The study selection committee will prioritize inclusion of a variety of utility models and may consider the following criteria:

Suitability - and alignment with the intended purpose of the ACET study which is to assess the financial viability of the proposed utility model.

Replicability - and the potential to be adapted to other areas or contexts. Preference may be given to submissions that demonstrate the ability to be scaled or applied in various settings.

First Nations are invited to submit an EOI regardless of the state of readiness of their proposed utility model to continue dialogue to explore First Nation interests in owning and operating energy utilities.

Study Process

For participation in the study, EOIs should be submitted to the FNCEO inbox, ICEO@gov.bc.ca by 11:59 PST on February 14, 2025. Applicants must include a copy of the attached EOI Response Form.

The FNCEO may reach out to individual applicants, as needed, to review information provided as part of the response and confirm understanding of the proposed utility model. ECS and First Nations Energy and Mining Council (FNEMC) will select study partners from the EOI applicants with input from ACET and First Nations advisors based on the selection criteria noted above. Researchers will work with First Nations to develop study plans tailored to the needs of each partner. Consent from the First Nation will be required prior to sharing the First Nation's information beyond these participants.



Ministry of
Energy and
Climate Solutions



EOIs selected to be in the study will be contacted in early 2025 to move through the research intake stage.

Questions can be directed to ICEO@gov.bc.ca.