



Evaluation of Indigenous Skills and Training Program

**EVALUATION SERVICES
AUDIT AND EVALUATION**

August 2019



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Indigenous Skills and Training: Overview of the Evaluation

This report presents the results of the evaluation of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Indigenous Skills and Training Program (hereinafter referred to as the IST Program). The evaluation was undertaken by Evaluation Services, Audit and Evaluation Sector at CMHC as part of CMHC's Five-Year Evaluation Plan (2018 to 2022). The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Program Evaluation Standards adopted by the Canadian Evaluation Society and was guided by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) Policy on Results (2016). The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a credible, reliable, and timely assessment of the IST Program that will:

- Assess key lessons learned and performance results; and,
- Identify and propose actions for improving the program in future years.

This report presents the evaluation findings on relevance and effectiveness, as well as economy and efficiency of the IST Program, covering the reporting period of FY 2017/18 through FY 2018/19, with a focus on the achievement of outcomes for the FY 2017/18 period. This is the first discrete evaluation of the IST Program.

Overall, the evaluation found:

1. There is a high demand for housing skills training in First Nation communities to address the high incidence of on-reserve housing adequacy and suitability needs.
2. Housing manager retention and community buy-in continue to be key barriers; national IST activities such as the Housing Manager Programs and On-the-Job Training Initiative are helping to address these barriers by strengthening the professionalization and recognition of the housing manager role.
3. An area of potential continued growth for the IST Program is in the facilitation of partnerships between First Nation housing managers and communities to promote increased self-determination in housing, aligned with federal government priorities (e.g., National Housing Strategy).
4. A key success factor for program delivery has been frequent communication and strengthened relationships between CMHC specialists and First Nation communities to deliver custom supports and more support is needed in the form of increased communication about IST Program offerings, in-person visits to First Nation communities, and follow-up supports for program participants.
5. Inefficiencies of administrative processes, data collection systems, and staffing structures may be constraining program economy and efficiency.
6. Time-limited and uncertain funding are constraining the program's potential for long-term impacts to First Nation housing skills and conditions.

Program Description

CMHC has been involved in Indigenous Skills and Training (previously referred to as Aboriginal Capacity Development) since the 1970s. The IST Program assists First Nation communities to acquire the skills, training, and resources needed to achieve their housing objectives. The program is delivered across Canada and each region has flexibility in their delivery process for the program. In 2016, the IST Program received enhanced funding (\$10 million over two years) under Budget 2016 and CMHC introduced a more targeted approach to delivering the IST Program. To address the varying housing skills and development needs of First Nation communities, CMHC currently supports the following activities:

- Professionalization of the First Nation Housing Manager role (e.g., Housing Manager Programs);
- Development and delivery of training activities (e.g., workshops and on-the-job training);
- Development and delivery of information and best practices sharing activities (e.g., conferences);
- Development of, and support for, school-based resources; and
- Facilitation of partnership-based activities between First Nation housing managers and other stakeholder groups.

Evaluation Methodology

Document, Data, and Literature Review

This included a review of key background documents, literature, program documents, and program data. The documents and literature reviewed included research reports, government reports, and publications authored by Indigenous organizations (e.g., the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health and the First Nations Information Governance Centre).

Data sources included First Nation Housing program data, such as performance and financial information, as well as government data sources on Indigenous housing and socio-economic indicators (e.g., Census data).

Key Informant Interviews

A total of 26 key informant (KI) interviews were conducted from January to February 2019. This included 23 interviews with CMHC program management and staff from national and regional offices; and 3 interviews with external stakeholders including 2 trainers and 1 member of the Board of Directors of the First Nations Housing Professionals Association.

Selection criteria were used to ensure there was a sufficient cross-section of CMHC program management and staff by geographic region and position.

Survey of Program Participants

A telephone survey was conducted of IST Program participants from December 2018 to March 2019. Targets for participant contacts were stratified across regions and activity types using budget tracker data.

Telephone surveys were conducted with a total of 121 IST Program participants (35% completion rate). Participants surveyed represented 102 First Nation communities across Canada. This included surveys with 63 participants in the Prairie and Territories Region, 26 participants in British Columbia, 21 participants in Ontario, and 11 participants in the Province of Quebec and Atlantic Region.

Scale to Summarize Quantitative Data

Percentage of Respondents	Qualitative Equivalent
0 – 25%	A few
25 – 50%	Several
50%	Half
51 – 75%	A majority
75 – 90%	Most
90% +	Almost all

Evaluation Limitations

Limitation	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Limited reliability of program data	Data gathered for the IST Program has a potential for bias as data entry is conducted by individuals involved in the program.	The evaluation was designed to supplement program data with other data gathered through key informant interviews and the survey of program participants to better understand program impacts.
Inconsistencies within the data	The evaluation identified inconsistencies in how IST Program data is collected and how data is defined.	The evaluation reviewed program data to identify indicators common across regions and years and re-categorize data, where possible, to strengthen the comparability of data. Survey participants were also asked to validate program activities and provide additional details on the activities.
Limited data on the achievement of program outcomes	Very little data is regularly collected on program outcomes and impacts (e.g., participant follow-up surveys). As a result, there is limited quantitative data to support evaluation findings on the achievement of program outcomes.	The evaluation relied mostly on interview, and survey data to infer relative impacts for different outcomes.
High dependence on interviews	Evaluation evidence gathered through key informant interviews was primarily opinion based and thus subjective.	The evaluation triangulated different lines of evidence to the degree possible. In cases where interview data was provided, KIs were asked to support their opinions with examples and other evidence. In the report, it was made clear when findings relied heavily on interview data.
Limited timeframe scope to assess achievement of outcomes	One fiscal year is a short time to report on the achievement of outcomes particularly since it takes several years for skills and training activities to result in community-level impacts, and the time period coincided with major program changes. This limited the ability to analyze trends over time.	The evaluation mitigated this limitation by comparing survey results and outcome data over multiple years, where available.

Evaluation Questions

The key evaluation questions (EQ) that were examined are as follows:



Relevance

Is there a continuing need for a program to foster housing-related capabilities in First Nation communities?

To what extent are intended program outcomes consistent with federal government and CMHC priorities?



Effectiveness

To what extent has the program contributed to the achievement of intended outcomes?



Economy and Efficiency

Is the program being delivered to clients in an economical and efficient manner?

To what extent has the program reached its target groups?

Are there more economical and efficient ways to design an Indigenous Skills and Training Program?

Evaluation Findings: Relevance

There is a high incidence of adequacy and suitability-based housing need in First Nation communities compared to the rest of Canada, with a particularly high incidence in the Prairie region. **If left unaddressed, demographic trends suggest the on-reserve housing shortage could grow to 130,000 housing units needed by the year 2031.** The housing conditions and needs of First Nation communities are complex and interconnected with socio-economic, historical, and systemic challenges related to health, education, remoteness, and labour market attachment.

Proper and efficient maintenance, management, and governance of housing portfolios can contribute to improved housing conditions. However, it is challenging to recruit, retain, and train dedicated housing managers on-reserve. As a result, **there is a high demand and an ongoing need for the IST Program to foster housing-related capabilities in First Nation communities**, since it offers flexible housing-related training and strengthens the professionalization of First Nation housing managers. Eighty-five percent (85%) of First Nation survey participants indicated that the IST Program was useful or very useful in helping them achieve their housing goals.

The intended outcomes and objectives of the IST Program are aligned with federal government responsibilities outlined in legislation and priorities related to housing, reconciliation, and skills and are complimentary to other federal housing skills

programs. Intended program outcomes are also aligned with CMHC plans of: co-developing housing plans in partnership with First Nation communities and priorities related to: experimenting with new affordability ideas, increasing access to housing data to help individuals make housing decisions, and tailoring solutions to specific housing needs.

Evaluation Findings: Effectiveness

Overall, the program **met its goal** of assisting First Nation communities to **acquire the skills, training, and resources needed to achieve their housing objectives**. The IST Program contributed to a great extent towards the achievement of some intended outcomes and made progress towards others. The program helped First Nation communities to:

- Learn about and share housing information, tools, and best practices, particularly in housing administration with other First Nation communities through various in-person program activities and virtual networks.
- Enhance housing management accountability mechanisms, through the roll-out of the Housing Manager Programs, which have seen a high level of uptake and interest and enhanced the recognition of housing managers in communities.
- Acquire housing skills, training, and resources, particularly in housing administration and technical skills through various housing workshops and the On-the-Job Training Initiative.

- Improve their ability to manage their housing portfolios on reserve, through the implementation of housing policies and make progress in their ability to maintain and build housing.

The program was somewhat less successful in assisting First Nation communities to adopt information, tools, and best practices particularly due to barriers external to the program such as a lack of community capacity and buy-in and since these changes take time. CMHC's First Nation Housing (FNH) information materials such as FNH YouTube videos, newsletters, and posters were also less impactful. The program contributed to improved housing outcomes to some extent, though it is too early to see longer-term results.

The IST program did not significantly contribute to enhanced partnerships between First Nation community housing managers and stakeholder groups (e.g., other First Nation communities/organizations, government departments, educational institutions, technical bodies, and private companies). However, the program has only recently focused on partnerships and First Nation housing managers are keen to strengthen and develop new networks.

Evaluation Findings: Economy and Efficiency

The IST program is **becoming more economical and efficient** through the strategic delivery of new national programs, while balancing regional needs and best practice

approaches. The increased availability of community and program participation data has enabled the IST Program to be delivered more strategically. However, inefficient administrative processes, data collection systems and tools, and competing staff responsibilities are constraining program economy and efficiency.

The program **reached its target groups to a great extent**. The strategic delivery approach focused on strengthened relationships and tailored solutions achieved a high level of program reach and satisfaction among its target groups. An estimated 82% (508/620) of all First Nation communities in Canada participated in IST Program activities in 2017/18. Almost all housing managers surveyed (93%) reported they were somewhat to very satisfied with how they work with a CMHC specialist to discuss their community training needs and make a housing skills and training plan and satisfaction rates increased over time.

The evaluation identified ways that the IST Program could be more economical and efficient. There is a need for CMHC specialist staff to dedicate more time to communication about IST Program offerings, in-person visits to First Nation communities, and follow-up supports for program participants. There is a need to refine and focus monitoring of program participation (particularly GBA+ groups) and outcomes, and to make data management systems more efficient, reliable, and useful. There is a need to review the timing of funding cycles to ensure they align with First Nation community needs. Lastly, there is a need for long-term, predictable funding for the IST Program to address the high need and demand for housing skills training among First Nation communities and enable the achievement of long-term outcomes.



Evaluation Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The IST Program should be considered for long-term, predictable funding. Further investigation should be considered to determine the appropriate level of program funding to enable the effective achievement of long-term outcomes.

Recommendation 2

CMHC should consider reviewing administrative processes, data collection systems, and staff roles and responsibilities at the account representative and specialist levels to ensure an efficient and effective use of staff resources.

Recommendation 3

CMHC should develop Key Performance Indicators tied to IST Program outcomes and reach (particularly with respect to GBA+ groups) to make performance data more efficient, reliable, and useful to program management, staff, and First Nation communities.

Recommendation 4

CMHC should consider reviewing the timing of funding cycles to ensure they align with First Nation community needs.

