

Housing Authorities

Some models to consider



HOUSING AUTHORITIES

Improving Housing Operations

Many First Nations are changing the structure of their housing operations to help reduce or prevent political interference. While a Housing Authority may improve efficiency and decision-making, it is not necessarily an automatic solution. Even a fully independent housing authority may have a board of directors composed of community members who may have a conflict of interest, or who have been appointed by Chief and Council.

Below, an overview of four types of housing authorities you may want to consider before deciding on a new structure:

COMMUNITY-BASED INCORPORATED HOUSING AUTHORITY

Makes all significant housing decisions

This model has the most structural autonomy. The housing authority is a separate body with the power to sign contracts and possibly take on debt. It reports to a board or committee composed of members of the community, which can include members of the Band Council. Through the board, the housing authority is accountable to Chief and Council but is capable of making all significant decisions about the housing program. The housing authority may be responsible for more than one reserve or community within a First Nation.



Benefits of this model include:

- Housing decisions are made independently from political leadership.
- Housing appeals may become more objective.
- Housing staff have autonomy in day to day operations.
- Band Councils can focus on areas other than housing that are important to their communities

Challenges may include:

- Possibly high initial investment costs.
- Would require significant and ongoing support from political leadership.

TRIBAL COUNCIL OR REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

Responsible for housing in several communities

This model has the same degree of autonomy as the Community-Based Incorporated Housing Authority, but is responsible for a regional housing program and is accountable to more than one Chief and Council. The regional housing authority reports to a board or committee of Chiefs from the First Nations who are members of the Tribal Council. One challenge with this model is that it removes the housing program from individual communities. This can make it difficult for communities to influence housing programs and services.

Benefits of this model include:

- The Tribal Council is already a functioning organization.
- Housing decisions and appeals may become more objective.
- Band Councils can focus on areas other than housing that are important to their communities.

Challenges may include:

- Potentially significant costs for transition, planning and implementation.
- May be dependent on the existence and overall success of the Tribal Council.
- Its mission can overlap /conflict with the Tribal Council's mission.
- Requires continuous support from all communities.

UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITY HOUSING AGENCY

Delegated authority

This model has less structural autonomy and has no legal structure allowing it to act independently. If the relationship with Chief and Council is good, the agency may be delegated significant authority. Some decisions would involve Chief and Council.

Benefits of this model include:

- Housing decisions and appeals may be more objective.
- As its authority is delegated, community members may have more opportunities to express their needs.
- All participating communities may pool efforts to increase and enforce rent collection, thus increasing community cash flows.
- Band Councils can focus on areas other than housing that are important to their communities.

Challenges may include:

- Housing operations are effectively outsourced.
- May require extensive consultation with the community.
- Potentially significant costs for transition, planning and implementation.
- May not prevent future political interference, as authorities are delegated

FIRST NATION HOUSING DEPARTMENT

Least autonomous

This model is structurally the least autonomous, as it is essentially a department of the First Nation government. Any board or committee will have only advisory influence. The Chief and Council and First Nation senior management may delegate considerable power to the housing director and staff. In this case, the housing director typically reports to the senior manager of the First Nation, who then reports to Chief and Council. Structure is only one dimension of autonomy. Depending on the relationships, significant or operational autonomy can also be granted to any structure through the community housing policies and procedures.

Benefits of this model include:

- Little to no costs for transition, planning and implementation.
- Bands continue their role in managing housing affairs.

Challenges may include:

- Problems with significant rental arrears and bad debt expenses may remain unsolved.
- Political interference may continue.

For more information on this and other housing management topics, be sure to contact your CMHC Specialist.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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