

Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development Project

Case Study

Northern Village of Pinehouse

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One of the key actions in Saskatchewan's Growth Plan 2020-2030 is to grow Indigenous participation in the economy. The success of this action depends on Indigenous nations in Saskatchewan building and maintaining their economic development activities. The Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development project provides made-in-Saskatchewan tools for Indigenous communities to build the governance foundation that will support long-term economic development. An important part of the project involves capturing the experience of Saskatchewan Indigenous communities through case studies and toolkits based on this experience.

The case study in this document was developed by a team of researchers and their affiliates at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. The project is funded by the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Trade and Export Development.

The case studies are designed to be used first and foremost by Indigenous communities across Saskatchewan. The premise of the work is that economic development stories need to be shared among those involved in economic development, both in the community where the economic development activities take place and in other communities looking to undertake economic development. It is important to focus on what has and has not worked. One of the long-term goals is to develop a set of resources that is Indigenous-led and available to Indigenous communities across the province and the country. The cases may also be used as governance training components and/or strategic planning exercises, as well as in teaching.

The case studies combine material from websites and other publicly available sources with material gathered through interviews with leaders and representatives involved in economic development activities. The interviews last between two and four hours and involve a small group of economic development leaders in the community. The questions asked focus solely on the corporate entities and activities that have been developed, and those interviewed are asked questions in their role as a corporate leader.

When approaching community leaders and representatives, we begin with an informal discussion. If the leaders and representatives indicate an interest in participating, we proceed with sending them a formal letter of introduction, which they can use to obtain official permission to proceed. We know communities receive many requests for information, and they do not always see the results of the work that is undertaken. Our goal is to ensure that the case study is shared with the community in a way that is beneficial. To this end, a draft of the case study is shared with the community, and the case study is not finalized until the community gives its agreement. Once a set of case studies have been developed, leaders from the communities involved will be given the opportunity to discuss the findings.

We would like to thank the leaders and representatives for their time and effort. Their knowledge and insights are critical to understanding economic development in Indigenous communities.

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The Northern Village of Pinehouse: Building Economic Capacity

Economic development through community engagement, collaboration, and capacity building

Overview and Key Learnings

For over 25 years, the Northern Village of Pinehouse (NVP) has used a blended economic development approach to create successful partnerships and be an active participant in economic development in northern Saskatchewan. A key benefit of these initiatives has been increased year-round employment. This case study profiles NVP's approach to economic development and community capacity building, an approach that can potentially be of use to other Métis communities in the region.

NVP's approach to development is based on:

- (1) self-determination through community collaboration;
- (2) investment in the local and greater community;
- (3) partnerships;
- (4) active governance and seeking of new opportunities;
- (5) continued traditional land use and stewardship.

The community owns and manages several for-profit and non-profit entities that provide programs and services to community members. To successfully deliver these supports, NVP'S leadership recognizes the need to integrate Western business practices and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Because NVP lacks a legally recognized land-base or signed Treaty, which is a current Métis reality, grassroots diversification is used to support economic development and social programs. The community is working to demonstrate historical and current land use to obtain legal land bases. The connection to the land is foundational for the cultural wellness and economic prosperity of the community.

The key outcomes of NVP's approach are:

- bringing economic and employment benefits to the community based on local feedback;
- engaging land users and Elders, as honoured knowledge keepers, to connect people with the land, language, and culture through constant consultation and inclusion in conversations;
- ensuring and supporting leadership consistency;
- capitalizing on partnerships such as agreements with Cameco and Areva (now Orano);
- reinvesting in the community while retaining resources to remain sustainable;
- investing in human resources through training and education programs;
- using own resources to protect culture and language.

Background and History

Often referred to as Pinehouse Lake or Pinehouse, NVP is a rights-bearing Indigenous community on the western shore of Pinehouse Lake. Pinehouse refers to itself as an end of the line community – it is accessed only by the road that goes through to the northern mining operations. The municipality was founded in the 1930s by primarily Métis and Cree people who moved from traditional homesteads and cultural livelihoods along the northern Churchill River area when their unceded land was confiscated through governmental policies. This migration resulted in significant cultural disruption, including loss of language and traditions, economic costs, and a decline in overall health. The number of people who

spoke the Cree/Michif languages and retained their cultural traditions declined as Western practices, including the use of English, were adopted to mitigate the risk of being marginalized by Western economic opportunities. The formerly self-reliant, traditional lifestyle was transformed into a cycle of dependency, high unemployment, and despair. For 40 years, the community struggled to overcome these losses.

In the 1970s, the community's prospects began to change when high-grade uranium was discovered in the region and the industry was developed by Cameco Corporation (its McArthur River/Key Lake mine and mill tandem operations were the largest in the world at the time). Despite the development of these and other large infrastructure projects on the land traditionally used by Indigenous people, consultation between the community and developers was markedly absent. Although community members were hired at the mines, their jobs were low paying, entry level, casual, and inconsistent. Advancement was blocked because the mining industry hired only English speakers with formal Western training and certification for management positions. As a result, the community received few benefits from these economic ventures; this lack of access to benefits prompted the community to take action to promote transformative change and self-determination.

In the late 1980s, NVP leadership recognized its residents were not thriving, and discussions to build a better future led to visioning and strategic planning.¹ Highway 914N, which runs through NVP, had been constructed in the late 1970s to access the mining sites in the region. The wages in air transportation, trucking and hauling, catering, infrastructure, site development, construction, and waste management were typically higher than those in entry level labour positions and had the capacity for advancement. The community started to look for opportunities to increase business development, partnerships, and employment opportunities in the mining industry.

In the early 2000s, several key legal cases prompted businesses and partners within the mining industry to include the Duty to Consult and Accommodate in their mandate and practices. As part of the long-term rental of Crown land requirements, mineral surface lease and human resource development agreements needed to be secured to ensure that the northern residents were engaged in and benefitted from the industry development.² Recognizing the potential of these developments, strategies were developed to capitalize on them. Community leadership addressed the knowledge and experience gaps in key areas. The response was to engage consultants to provide guidance, training, and strategic planning support to build capacity within the community. This practice of learning alongside experts to develop skills that can be passed on in the community continues today. The last 20 years were also a time of significant cultural change as Western practices were adopted to fully participate in economic development.

Demographics

NVP delivers programs, services, and opportunities to approximately 1,013 residents, the majority of whom are Métis. All community members have access to the services, regardless of Indigenous declaration.³ The community is relatively young, with 70% of the residents under 40 years of age; at the same time, the number of Elders who retain the culture and language is decreasing. Table 1 presents statistics on NVP's demographics.

According to the 2016 Census, the NVP median income for individuals was \$24,224, with fulltime workers making on average \$53,120. Almost 20% of the population received median government transfers of \$6,336. The employment rate grew from 35.3% in 2001 to 42.7% in 2016. During the same

time, the unemployment rate dropped from 32.8% to 22.5%. The top areas of employment are mining, trades, transportation, education, and health care.⁴ The community follows a practice of having individuals gain experience and develop skills through apprenticeship or volunteer work in construction and infrastructure development projects. This hands-on learning approach has been key to economic engagement, participation, and growth.

Table 1. Pinehouse Population Demographics 2021

Demographic Group	Number
Métis	690
First Nations	310
Inuit and non-Indigenous	13

Economic Development Model

Traditional economies like NVP have typically depended on seasonal activities such as commercial fishing, trapping, hunting, plant gathering, outfitting/guiding, and tourism. At this time there is limited potential for these traditional activities to become viable economic development opportunities, largely due to their labour-intensive nature and low profit margins.⁵ In addition, geographic isolation has made full-time employment challenging to access and retain. To address these challenges, NVP is looking to mining, forestry, construction, and fire suppression as key economic development sectors. To prepare community members with the skills needed for these careers and to increase employment opportunities, NVP frequently offers education and trades training programs.⁶ For example, the community has partnered with Gabriel Dumont Institute on trades programs to train workers and to train the trainer in the areas of carpentry, heavy duty mechanics, camp services, and safety tickets.⁷ An important cultural component of this process is to have Indigenous trainers who speak the language. Once people from the community are trained, they can pass on that training to other community members.

The community refers to the economic development model that it uses as blended, describing it as a consensus building model that combines Indigenous and Western cultures. This model follows Western rules and principles while integrating Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. Key to the success of this model is community involvement in the initial stages of all economic proposals. Engaging the community early on is culturally responsive and gives the residents the opportunity to have a voice. Through experience, NVP leadership has found that decisions *with* the community rather than *for* the community are both more effective and more likely to be accepted.

Governance Structure

The governance structure of NVP is complex. Policies are established by an elected Mayor and four council members who govern the municipal services, hire staff to manage daily administration, control land development and zoning, borrow money for municipal improvements, and set taxes and rates to help cover the cost of services.⁸ There is also an appointed deputy mayor, administrator, and Elder. The nominees must be NVP residents. The last election was held in 2020.⁹ NVP refers to itself as a direct program and service provider.

The community is legislated by the Northern Municipalities Act, 2010. Although the residents have used the large tract of land surrounding the community (roughly 15,000 square kilometres) for years, the

Municipality of NVP is located on Crown Land and so is subject to provincial legislation and permission must be obtained through official channels for changes. However, there is an understanding that while the Saskatchewan government enforces the laws, the community has never extinguished their usufructuary rights. In 2011, NVP leadership commissioned the “Use and Occupancy Mapping Survey of Pinehouse.” Elders were central in developing this traditional mapped territory through their role as knowledge keepers of the land; historical usage helped to determine occupancy and traditional land use. Using this map, community members can identify specific areas and associated activities, such as hunting, fishing, and plant gathering. This map is also part of the process review that is currently underway to legally gain land bases.

Section 35(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982 established the Métis as a distinct group with existing Aboriginal rights.¹⁰ The Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S) represents the Métis citizens in the province. The province is divided into 12 regions; NVP is in MN-S Northern Region III (Table 2 provides a list of the Métis locals in the region).¹¹ The provincial Métis governments in Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario elect the Métis National Council (MNC).

Table 2. Métis Nation-Saskatchewan Northern Region III Locals

Beauval (Sipishik) #37	Île-à-la-Crosse (Al La Baie) #21
Canoe River #174	Jans Bay #38
Cole Bay #41	Patuanak #82
Dore/Sled Lake #67	Pinehouse (Kineepik) #9
Green Lake #5	Sapawgamik #176

The Treaty areas in the region are Treaties 6, 8, and 10. The closest First Nations to NVP are English River (198 km NW) and Lac La Ronge Indian Band (188 km E). NVP did not sign a Treaty.

In 1983, Pinehouse members started Kineepik Métis Local 9 Inc. (KML) to have conversations to identify main areas of concern and discuss plans to address them. This process of engaging and consulting with members evolved organically to the current state where KML is a non-profit, rights bearing entity and a political advocate for the community. Although KML has this advocacy role, all decisions are made jointly with NVP. The coalition leadership consists of an elected president, vice-president, and board of directors. Elections are held every four years. Through community consultation and engagement, KML responds to the high unemployment rate, low educational levels, and significant societal issues present in the NVP region. In addition to consulting with the community, KML engages with government and industry on activities affecting NVP to ensure that the Duty to Consult and Accommodate process is followed. Whenever possible, the positive aspects are addressed first, followed by the challenges to set a proactive, solution-based tone. Besides the official consultation work, KML also governs the culture, recreation, health, and wellness initiatives. Table 3 outlines the governance structure in the Pinehouse community.

Table 3. Pinehouse Governance

Population	1,013+ residents
NVP Municipality	Elected mayor and four council members, deputy mayor, administrator
Kineepik Metis Local #9 Inc. (KML)	Elected president, vice-president, and board members (4)
NVP/KML Coalition/PBNLP/PHC	President, vice-president, and board of directors

Structure and Approach to Governance and Decision-Making

Community Consultation

As mentioned, the Pinehouse community decided to pursue business development, partnerships, and employment opportunities in the mining industry in the 1980s. This goal was accomplished through NVP and KML collaboration. NVP and KML jointly act as a collective voice and often refer to themselves as “the community.” They lead economic development, manage the businesses and organizations, and provide programs and services to the residents. The positions of NVP mayor and KML president are currently held by the same person, resulting in effective communication and ensuring adherence to the core vision and values. The wellbeing of the community and land are critical drivers for decision-making.

The leadership has established an organic process to encourage residents to take ownership of the issues and to provide feedback and support. Community consultation increases engagement and ensures that the decisions and initiatives align with resident feedback.¹² Since 1999, weekly meetings involving the various Pinehouse organizations (interagency committee) have been held as forums to share information about the community’s social issues. As well, monthly meetings are held to identify needs and issues and to assess existing programs and services. Elders are integral to the decision-making process along with contributing to the education, growth, and strength of the community. Funding for these meetings aligns with the provincial government’s First Nation and Metis Consultation Policy Framework, Duty to Consult First Nation and Metis Communities.¹³ The associated expenses are documented for accountability and transparency. Sharing meals, learning opportunities, and bringing in speakers have contributed to the high turnout rate and engagement.

On Mondays, the prevention planning meeting takes place, and once a month, there are Reclaiming Our Community (ROC) meetings. ROC is a rebranding initiative undertaken in 2012 by the interagency committee to frame the community’s vision, mission, and strategic goals. Every organization involved with the community is required to attend the ROC meetings, which are open to the public. Over time the ROC committee has created a transparent and growing body of knowledge about the community’s strategic priorities. ROC recently formed eight subcommittees to strategically focus on key areas including the economy, infrastructure, and workforce development. The shared leadership will also develop skills, build capacity, and create succession plans.

Profit Generation Via PBN Construction

The community has recognized the importance of generating sustainable profits while developing skills and leadership capacity to build a better future through development of a self-governing economy. PBN Construction (formerly Pinehouse Business North LP) was established in 2007 as an NVP wholly owned for-profit business. PBN has a board of directors, including three external experts and four community members. The mandate is to create wealth and opportunities for the community, with a focus on the northern mining sites. PBN supplies and services the mining industry, road construction and maintenance, land clearing, construction and renovations, sandblasting, and community improvement initiatives.¹⁴ PBN has grossed over \$200 million in revenue and employs many Pinehouse residents.

PBN profits are split between growing business capacity, establishing community development, and developing infrastructure. Economic and employability options are created for the residents through developing entrepreneurship opportunities and taking advantage of expanding market opportunities. A

significant outcome of PBN was a growing confidence and willingness of the community to take risks and start new ventures to improve the social fabric of the community (e.g., creating a housing corporation to address housing needs), and in investing and returning investments and profits to the community. The community owns 99.99% of PBN shares.

Cameco/Orano Collaboration Agreement

An important part of the economic development plan is the 2012 collaboration agreement that KML signed with Cameco Corporation and Areva Resources Canada Inc. (now Orano), two uranium mining companies operating in the area. Two main factors helped to set the conditions for the partnership: (1) the legal obligation for Cameco to consult with Pinehouse;¹⁵ and (2) the Occupancy Land Map demonstrated historical, traditional use of the land.

The purpose of the agreement was to formalize a long-term, working partnership and to adhere to the Duty to Consult federal policy. The framework for the agreement was built around four guiding pillars: workforce development, business development, community engagement and investment, and environmental stewardship. As part of the agreement, Cameco committed to continue to employ Pinehouse citizens, contract with Pinehouse businesses, and invest in the community.¹⁶

The signing of the collaboration agreement was a critical turning point. The intention of this agreement was for the community to build capacity to access contracts and earn profits for sustainable growth and diversification. The money was not distributed in lump sums; instead, its allocation was carefully and deliberately planned and utilized through business development. Recognizing the leverage and capacity this funding could create, the community developed strategic plans to support the agreement and invest the Cameco funding instalments, starting with working with the Royal Trust Corporation of Canada to create spending allocation guidelines. The next step was to create the Pinehouse Community Trust and Trust Advisory Panel (TAP), which included community members to review and approve applications. This process ensures that the funds are used according to the framework and are accounted for.¹⁷

In 2020, the community allocated the Cameco funding instalment to three main areas: workforce development (\$3.4 million), community investment (\$226 thousand), and business development (\$957 thousand).¹⁸ Benefits include increased employment, support and service of the mining sites, enhanced training options, and improved social and cultural opportunities.¹⁹ Table 4 provides a list of the economic and community infrastructure and improvements that have been developed from the Cameco Agreement, partnerships, and profits from related economic development initiatives.

Table 4. Agreement and Partnerships Community Development and Infrastructure

Modern arena with artificial ice (PBNLP)
12-unit Elders' housing complex (Pinehouse Housing project)
Community hall upgrades (Pinehouse Housing project)
New 29-lot subdivision (PBNLP)
Annual Elders' Gathering (NVP/KML)
Muskwa Recovery Lake program (opportunities to participate in 42-day healing journey (NVP/KML)
Student scholarships (CA)
Trades training and education programs (CA)
Pinehouse recreation (NVP/KML)
Cultural programs (NVP/KML)
Re-vegetation project (PBNLP)

The Pinehouse Housing Corporation

The Pinehouse Housing Corporation (PHC) is a 100% NVP-owned property management business. It was created to move away from the externally controlled provincial housing entity, address homelessness, and to build opportunities for home ownership. According to the 2016 Census, 52% of NVP residents rent their place of residence, with many indicating a preference for home ownership.²⁰ Since incorporating in 2014, PHC has partnered with the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) to secure long-term loans and mortgages in land parcels around the community and to undertake construction on multiple projects.

SHC also addresses housing concerns for people with low incomes through a variety of programs and services, including affordable rentals. Many of the loans and mortgages are forgivable, reducing the debt load for the homeowner. There are also rent-to-own options. PHC assists in helping residents qualify for mortgages through financial counseling to pay down debt. Helping people to become homeowners creates an additional tax base for NVP and instills a sense of pride from owning property.

PHC's home construction arm is led by Pinehouse businesses and employees. Projects include Judille's Place (12-unit Elders' complex) worth \$1.5 million, renovations of four solar homes, and construction of 26 energy and solar-efficient Tiny Homes (three-, four-, and six-plexes).²¹ These construction projects provide residents with the opportunity to be involved in the construction of their own home (sweat equity) and to develop skills and trades experience.

Other Initiatives

Pinehouse Co-operative is a locally owned gas bar, food store, and post office. Its profits are reinvested in its various activities, returned to the members as patronage payments, and/or donated to the community.

A non-profit initiative, CFNK FM 89.9 Radio, was established in 1986 by KML to communicate in the Cree and Michif languages to local and remote community members. In 2014, federal funding, along with a new tower and streaming service, enabled the enterprise to reach a growing audience across Canada and abroad.

Table 5 shows the profit and non-profit entities in NVP.

Table. 5 Pinehouse Profit and Non-Profit Entities

Profit	Non-profit
PBNLP Construction	Kineepik Métis Local #9 Inc.
Pinehouse Housing Corporation	CFNK FM 89.9 Radio
Pinehouse Co-op Food Store	
Pinehouse Co-op Gas Bar	

Other Funding Sources to Support Economic Development

The community uses funding from Saskatchewan government programs, projects, and initiatives to further its economic development. One of these initiatives is the five-year pilot project headed by the Clarence Campeau Development Fund (CCDF) focusing on identifying areas of strength and areas that require support in Métis communities. As part of this project, the Métis Community Capacity Strategy

(MCCS) was developed. NVP signed on with this initiative to support existing businesses and to create new businesses, wealth, and employment opportunities. Part of MCCS's role is to consult with the Northern Research Group (NRG) to support economic development capacity building strategies.²² This funding is used to create self-sustaining wealth generation, which then results in social improvements in the community.

NVP has also accessed SaskMétis Economic Development (SMEDCO) as a source of funding to support its growth and independence. SMEDCO was established in 1987 as the economic development arm of the MN-S to support entrepreneurs, business development, and counseling. Pinehouse has used SMEDCO funding to support PBN, PHC, the Co-op stores, and KML initiatives.²³

Table 6 lists the main funding sources available to NVP, outside of the typical municipal resources.

Table 6. NVP's Main Funding Sources

Cameco/Orano Collective Agreement
PBNLP Construction
Pinehouse Housing Corporation
Provincial revenue sharing grant
Rental income from community programs
Saskatchewan Housing Corporation
Clarence Campeau
SaskMétis Economic Development Corporation
Metis Nation Saskatchewan – federal funding

Accomplishments and Outcomes

Community Initiatives and Impact

NVP and PBN's resilient planning networks and sound businesses practices have stood them in good stead in recent years, as is shown in their ability to withstand recent challenges, including the pandemic, mining downturns, and major project losses. Retaining sufficient savings from profits have helped the businesses stay afloat. Other strategies include divestment of existing equipment, reducing overhead costs by centralizing operations in Saskatoon, and consolidating management staffing. Expanding industry diversity and new client bases helped to secure contracts with the Ministry of Highways which will provide further training opportunities, job security, and capacity-building. New client work with SaskEnergy and SaskPower offers opportunities beyond the general and maintenance contracts.

PBN continues to provide high quality services and skilled manpower to the Cameco sites. In 2020, 75% of PBN labour hours were filled by community members, generating \$2 million in wages. Dividends of \$400 thousand were given back to the community through in-kind and cash donations to support elders, residents, sports and recreation, and cultural events.²⁴ Language revitalization is a key area of support as this is the main form of communication with the elders who help to ground the community on the land. While the employment, training, and skill development benefits of partnering with the mining industry are valued, building management capacity is an ongoing issue as people leave to work on the sites. Agreements for commitment to long-term training strategies to manage needs in partnership may help to support staff retention in the community.

NVP is continually planning for continued development and potential partnerships such as with the Denison Mines Wheeler River Project in northern Saskatchewan. Other projects include industrial development to support industry (exploration) and infrastructure projects (rRoads), an office complex, a youth recreational facility, additional housing, and replacement of the clinic and school. Profits and funding are leveraged back to support the health and wellness of the community, ensuring it stays self-sustaining, value-driven, and grounded in Indigenous identity. The community receives many proposals and chooses those in which it can be a major stakeholder or the controlling entity which aligns with the goal of governing the mapped, traditional lands.

NVP has built a successful blended model for economic development and governance. Using this model, the community now participates fully in the regional economy and is a widely sought-after partner in a growing number of industries.

Notes

¹ Bruno-Bossio and Pullen (2013).

² Saskatchewan.ca (2022).

³ NMS (2011).

⁴ Statistics Canada (2016).

⁵ NMS (2011).

⁶ DPRA (2013).

⁷ Cameco (2022).

⁸ Saskatchewan.ca (2022).

⁹ NVP Website (2022).

¹⁰ Centre for Constitutional Studies (2021).

¹¹ MN-S Region 3 (2022).

¹² Kineepik (2022).

¹³ Saskatchewan.ca (2022).

¹⁴ PBN (2020).

¹⁵ CA (2018).

¹⁶ Saskatchewan.ca (2022).

¹⁷ Cameco (2014).

¹⁸ Cameco (2020).

¹⁹ DRPA (2013).

²⁰ Statistics Canada (2016).

²¹ PHC Report (2018).

²² Eagle Feather News (2017).

²³ SMEDCO (1987).

²⁴ PBN Report (2020).

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