

What to Ask Before You Sign

Evaluating clean energy proposals

Clean energy proposals are arriving at Nation offices more frequently than ever. The difference between a strong partnership and a costly mistake often comes down to the questions you ask before anything is signed. This page provides a starting framework. It does not replace independent legal or financial advice.

PREPARATION

Before the meeting

Before meeting with any developer, take time to clarify your own position internally.

What are our community's energy priorities right now? Reducing costs, generating revenue, replacing diesel, creating jobs?

Do we have a community energy plan or economic development strategy? If so, the proposal should align with it. If not, be more cautious about committing.

What decisions require council approval, and what is our process? A good partner will respect your governance timelines.

Do we have access to independent legal and financial advisors? Seek them out before signing anything.

Have we been approached by other developers? Knowing your options gives you leverage.

RED FLAGS

- ⚠ A developer who discourages you from talking to other companies
- ⚠ Pressure to skip your governance process
- ⚠ Unwillingness to wait for council review

EVALUATING THE PROPOSAL

Questions about the project

What technology is being proposed, and at what scale? Ask for plain-language explanations, not just technical specs.

What stage is this project at? Concept, feasibility study, and shovel-ready are very different.

What permits and environmental assessments are required? Who is responsible? What happens if approval is denied?

What is the expected lifespan, and what happens at the end? Who pays for decommissioning and site remediation?

Where exactly would this be located? On reserve, traditional territory, or Crown land have very different implications.

What land or water impacts should we expect?

Has the community been meaningfully consulted about this site? A community info session is not the same as consent.

On environmental assessments

Ask whether the assessment was funded by the developer or independently. If the developer commissioned it, ask whether you can also commission your own review.

PARTNERSHIP AND OWNERSHIP

Questions about the partnership

How ownership, revenue, and decision-making are divided will shape your community's experience for decades.

What ownership stake is being offered? Equity ownership and revenue sharing without ownership are very different.

Is the ownership real, or contingent on conditions?

Can the Nation increase its ownership over time? Look for buy-up clauses.

What is the projected revenue over the project's life? Ask for a detailed financial model, not just a headline number.

How are costs deducted before revenue is shared? Net vs. gross revenue makes a big difference.

Will the Nation have access to financial statements?

What decisions require the Nation's consent? A board seat without a veto is not governance authority.

Can the developer sell its interest to a third party? Look for consent clauses on any transfer.

RED FLAGS

- ⚠ Financial models showing only best-case scenarios
- ⚠ The Nation bears risk but has no governance authority
- ⚠ Revenue formulas calculated after undefined management fees

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Questions about community benefit

How many jobs during construction vs. operations? Construction jobs are temporary. Operations jobs matter more.

What specific training will be provided? Written plan with timelines and certifications, not general promises.

Will the community receive electricity from this project? Some projects sell all power to the grid with no local benefit.

Is there a pathway to energy sovereignty?

Beyond the pitch

Ask for references from other Indigenous communities the developer has worked with. Talk to them directly. A track record matters more than a slide deck.

COMPARISON FRAMEWORK

At a glance

Category	Strong proposal	Should concern you
Ownership	Clear equity path with defined timelines	Vague promises with no written commitments
Revenue	Transparent model showing how money flows to community	Percentage offered without showing the calculation
Engagement	Co-developed plan with ongoing governance role	One meeting treated as adequate consultation
Employment	Specific hiring targets and training timelines	General commitment with no numbers
Environment	Independent assessment with clear remediation plan	Developer-funded study with limited review period
Exit	Funded decommissioning with community oversight	No mention of what happens when the project ends
Timeline	Reasonable review period with independent advisors	Pressure to sign quickly

BEFORE YOU SIGN

Readiness checklist

- Community has been meaningfully engaged and leadership has a clear mandate
- Independent legal review completed by a lawyer experienced in Indigenous energy projects
- Independent financial review conducted with sensitivity analysis
- Environmental assessments completed and community concerns addressed in writing
- Ownership, equity, and revenue-sharing structures clearly documented
- Governance roles and dispute resolution defined in the agreement
- Employment and training commitments written in with measurable targets
- Decommissioning responsibilities and costs addressed
- The Nation has spoken with other communities who worked with this developer
- No undue pressure to sign by a deadline that does not serve the community

Working with Unify Partners

If you have questions about a proposal you've received or want support evaluating your options, reach out at unifypartners.ca.

