



**There's a seat for you in the circle.**

# A Call for Strategic Investment in Indigenous & Rural Water Health



Having guided Community Circle's evolution over 16 years—from NSERC Strategic Network to Networks of Centres of Excellence, and now as an independent non-profit supported by ISED's Strategic Science Fund—I am pleased to report on our transformative first year advancing Indigenous-led innovation and entrepreneurship across Canada's First Nations and rural communities.

## Fostering Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Youth Leadership

Our Board will prioritize building the next generation of First Nations innovators and entrepreneurs. Through our expanding Operators' Walkthrough Lab (OWL) platform partnership with Canadore College's Indigenous-centered programs—including the School of Indigenous Studies and Indigenous-led technical training—we can reach 700+ Indigenous learners annually, with emphasis on youth capacity building. Our "Mobilizing Clean Water" Innovation Challenge will catalyze young entrepreneurs to develop community-owned solutions, proving Indigenous youth are not just future leaders—they drive innovation today.

## Co-Innovation Success Stories

This year's achievements—including lifting 12+ year boil water advisories in six First Nations—showcase the power of co-innovation partnerships. By positioning Indigenous communities as innovation partners rather than project recipients, we delivered results where conventional approaches failed. Our AI-powered training platform integrates traditional knowledge with cutting-edge technology, creating solutions that respect Indigenous sovereignty while solving real-world challenges.

## Call for Strategic Investment

As Canada advances major infrastructure investments, we urge all levels of government—working with Federal, Provincial, and Territorial partners across departments beyond Indigenous Services Canada—to allocate meaningful funding for Indigenous entrepreneurs, including youth and innovators developing community-appropriate solutions across energy transitions, water systems, digital connectivity, AI, and capacity building. These community-led innovations consistently outperform top-down approaches while building economic capacity, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and sustainable infrastructure.

## Looking Forward

Our independent audit confirmed responsible financial management, with full SSF utilization and \$552,067 in matching funds secured. As we expand into complementary infrastructure domains, we remain guided by our core principle: sustainable solutions are best developed when Indigenous communities lead innovation.

Our ancestors understood prosperity comes from solutions that honor the land and strengthen community. Today's challenges demand the same wisdom—innovation rooted in respect, relationship, responsibility, and reciprocity. We are ready to scale these transformative partnerships, knowing that when Indigenous communities lead innovation, all Canadians benefit.

**Irving "Bing" Leblanc, P.Eng., FCAE**

Chair, Board of Directors & Chief Innovation Officer

Community Circle on Scaling Business Innovation for Humanity



# Community Success Over Product Scaling: Accelerating Indigenous-Led Innovation

Community Circle's inaugural Strategic Science Fund year marks a pivotal expansion beyond water infrastructure to pioneer community-centered innovation. We're developing a scaling approach that prioritizes community success over product scaling—essential when one in five Canadians live in rural regions.



## Proven Impact Through Partnership

Our program-based approach has served 20 Indigenous communities, eliminating boil water advisories in six First Nations—some persisting over 12 years—with zero project failures and strong community satisfaction.

Beyond infrastructure, we have been co-creating Indigenous-led innovation incubators with communities whose entrepreneurial capacity conventional approaches overlook. Together, we've built ecosystems spanning generations: youth contributing technological perspectives, public works staff sharing system realities, and leaders bringing governance expertise. This evolution from consultation to genuine partnership creates transformative outcomes.

## Capturing Market Opportunity

We stand at the intersection of growing demand for community-specific solutions and the inadequacy of centralized approaches. Traditional models designed for urban density consistently fall short of serving rural and Indigenous communities needing decentralized solutions. Knowledge generated through Indigenous partnerships creates immediate value for rural developments, intentional communities, and specialized infrastructure worldwide. Our 18-year government partnership proves participatory co-innovation delivers superior outcomes at lower cost with fewer failures than conventional methods, but expanding this impact requires deliberate strategic investment from visionary partners.

## Strategic Vision

Our holistic water-health approach brings new lenses to AI, Energy, and knowledge mobilization. Water-health infrastructure links directly to energy, connectivity, education, health, food systems, and culture. We're pioneering community-led energy self-determination and advancing decentralized solutions. As Canada invests over \$2 billion in AI, we're ensuring rural and Indigenous communities aren't left behind while positioning ourselves at the forefront of ethical integration. Our approach weaves technical expertise, social understanding, and traditional knowledge into solutions impossible through conventional means. Critical to success: supportive environments where Indigenous entrepreneurs, innovators, and youth build capacity for meaningful partnership in complex projects.

## The Strategic Moment

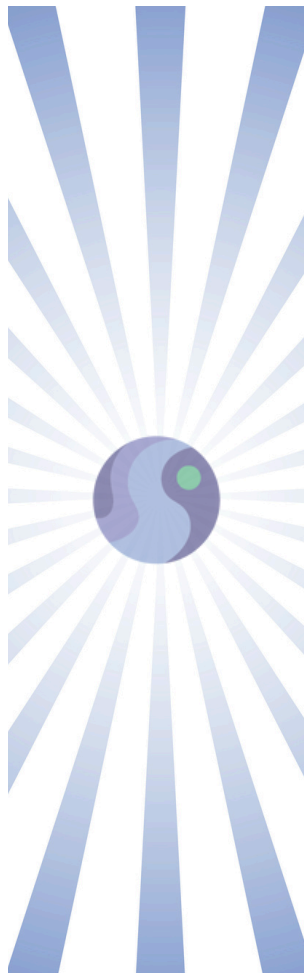
Trends toward localized, community-responsive infrastructure create unprecedented opportunity. We're not just serving communities—we're pioneering methodologies defining how humanity builds its future, creating partner value while empowering communities to thrive on their own terms. Indigenous partnerships provide ideal environments for incubating innovation—collaborative work that amplifies partners' impact far beyond independent efforts, building transferable knowledge and evidence across diverse global contexts.

## **Keyvan Maleki,**

Chief Executive Officer, Community Circle on Scaling Business Innovation for Humanity



# Executive Summary



Community Circle completed its first Strategic Science Fund year, advancing water-health solutions for Indigenous and rural communities through co-creation partnerships. This success has enabled expansion into broader infrastructure challenges, including decentralized energy and digital equity. The expansion applies proven Indigenous-led methodologies while ensuring community ownership and culturally appropriate technology transfer. By centering Indigenous communities in decision-making, Community Circle creates scalable models that promote long-term capacity building and systemic change.

Community Circle's work directly supports multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals through targeted Indigenous-led initiatives. Under Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), the organization develops culturally appropriate water treatment technologies and builds local capacity for sustainable water management. Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) is addressed through decentralized renewable energy solutions and community-led energy self-determination. The organization also supports Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by fostering Indigenous innovation ecosystems and transferring suitable technologies that strengthen community resilience.

Climate action (Goal 13) is integrated into all initiatives, with solutions designed to improve community adaptation and mitigation efforts. Finally, Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is achieved through Community Circle's collaborative co-creation model, which brings together Indigenous communities, international experts, government, and industry partners to develop sustainable and scalable solutions that respect Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

## Key Achievements

- Building collaborative partnerships (Anchor Centres) with three First Nations: Norway House Cree Nation, Manitoba [Decentralized Water Solutions], Lytton First Nation [Climate Vulnerabilities and Resilience Opportunities], British Columbia, and Nipissing First Nation [Emerging Water Contaminant], Ontario
- Engaged over 400 participants across eight international knowledge mobilization events
- Secured \$1,385,742 in cash matched and leveraged funding (2.02:1 ratio to SSF funding)
- Providing training for 45 First Nation community public works and water operators in small water systems operations [Operators Walkthrough Lab, OWL]
- Indigenous Youth Team in Water Innovation Challenge, Canadore College, Mobilizing Clean Water!
- Support Youth Water Program and Decentralized Water Systems, Kativik Regional, Nunavik, Quebec
- Support First Nation entrepreneurs – Water Security and Operation solutions.
- Support First Nation-owned AI Technology start-up, Kama.ai, to innovate in the water sector
- Joint knowledge mobilization and research collaboration with experts from Australia, the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Japan, Norway, Africa, and the USA.







**People, Places & Goals**

## Advancement of Specific Federal Priorities

Community Circle operates under four key strategic objectives that guide our mission to advance water-health solutions in Indigenous and rural communities across Canada. These objectives are strategically aligned with federal priorities and form the foundation of our work, providing the framework for measuring our annual progress and impact in support of national policy goals. Their interconnected nature ensures we address the complex challenges facing Indigenous and rural communities while building culturally appropriate, lasting solutions. This approach aligns with the National Indigenous Economic Strategy, federal commitments to self-determination, environmental sustainability, and equitable access to essential services across Canada.

### Objective 1: Strengthen Canada's capacity in the formulation and streamlining of water-health policy and legislation



Our policy and advocacy work focuses on creating an enabling environment for water-health solutions through comprehensive policy analysis and strategic advocacy. This objective directly supports federal priorities related to Indigenous reconciliation and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This year, we continued our efforts to understand the complex regulatory landscape affecting decentralized water-health initiatives in rural and Indigenous contexts, while building relationships with key policymakers to advance supportive legislation.

#### *Progress Indicators:*

- Baseline understanding of existing decentralized federal/provincial regulations
- Advocacy efforts for supportive decentralized policy adoption
- Collaborative dialogues between Indigenous communities and government

### Objective 2: Improve the quality and delivery of water-health solutions and services for Indigenous and rural communities



Through our community-centered approach, we work directly with Indigenous and rural communities to establish sustainable water-health infrastructure and services. This objective aligns with federal commitments to closing the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities and advancing rural development initiatives.

Our Anchor Centre model provides stable foundations for community-led initiatives, fostering local ownership and long-term sustainability of water-health solutions.

#### *Progress Indicators:*

- Forming the Anchor Centre in three First Nations communities in BC, ON, and MB
- Strengthened inter-community networks and collaborative projects
- Enhanced access to decentralized water-health technologies and training



## Advancement of Specific Federal Priorities (cont'd)

### Objective 3: Increase awareness of Indigenous values and rural issues while developing capacities, capabilities, and transparency



Our capacity-building and awareness initiatives honor Indigenous values while addressing the unique challenges faced by rural communities. This objective supports federal priorities around Indigenous self-determination, cultural preservation, and equitable access to health services.

Through knowledge mobilization events and skill-building programs, we work to strengthen community ownership of water-health issues and empower local leaders to drive sustainable solutions.

#### *Progress Indicators:*

- Knowledge mobilization events reaching rural and Indigenous communities
- Improved local capacity and active youth engagement
- Strengthened community ownership through empowerment and skill-building

### Objective 4: Advance co-innovation through strategic partnerships in Indigenous and rural communities

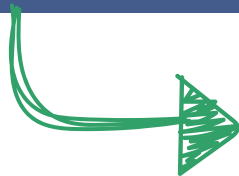


Our partnership and innovation work focuses on creating economic opportunities within Indigenous and rural communities while supporting the development of locally-driven water-health solutions. This objective directly contributes to federal priorities for Indigenous economic development, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Through mentorship, funding support, and skills development, we foster entrepreneurship that strengthens community resilience and self-determination.

#### *Progress Indicators:*

- Support the launch of new First Nations start-ups with mentorship and funding support
- Enhanced entrepreneurial skills through workshops and training programs
- Improved access to resources and networks supporting First Nations entrepreneurs



The interconnected nature of these objectives ensures that our work addresses the multifaceted challenges facing Indigenous and rural communities while building comprehensive, culturally appropriate solutions that can be sustained over time.



## Innovating Together



Community Circle has ongoing partnerships with several communities and organizations across 5 Canadian provinces and 1 territory, as well as international collaborations in Australia, France, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, South Sudan, the United Kingdom, and the United States - building on nearly 20 years of productive national and international partnerships.



## 2024-2025 People and Partner Highlights

Community Circle has advanced its mission of fostering social change through innovative theatre-based methodologies and community engagement initiatives. This year marked significant progress in addressing water insecurity, climate resilience, and infrastructure challenges in rural and Indigenous communities across Canada and internationally.



Katy Thorne of Tkemlúps te Secwépemc First Nation was honored as the 2024 recipient of the National First Nations Water Leadership Award at the Assembly of First Nations' National Housing and Infrastructure Conference in Calgary, Alberta. This recognition validates our progress on Objective 2 and Objective 3 through Katy's dual role as both an Indigenous entrepreneur and innovator in water-health education delivery.

Katy pioneered our Operator's Walkthrough Lab (OWL) platform, a suite of educational tools leveraging conversational AI and extended reality to enhance water management training for rural communities. As both technical contributor and voice of the application, she exemplifies how we support First Nations entrepreneurship while creating new mechanisms for delivering water-health education to remote areas.

Community Circle signed a comprehensive five-year partnership agreement with Canadore College, aligning with the college's School of Indigenous Studies. This partnership expands Community Circle's activities to central Canada and Indigenous communities in northern Ontario. Canadore College welcomes approximately 700 Indigenous learners annually and offers specialized programs including Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention, First Peoples' Aviation Technology, Indigenous Community and Justice Services, and Health Care Administration - Indigenous.

The college's First Peoples' Centre provides comprehensive cultural and academic support for Indigenous learners, with nearly 30 percent of Canadore's on-campus population celebrating Indigenous heritage from diverse nations. This partnership leverages Canadore's Innovation Challenge, which specifically addresses Indigenous entrepreneurship through its "Mobilizing Clean Water" focus area, fostering Indigenous water sovereignty and community-based solutions.



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Irving "Bing" Leblanc, a member of Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory and co-board chair and co-director for Community Circle, was elected as a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Engineering (CAE), recognizing his significant contributions to engineering and Indigenous communities. Community Circle has benefited deeply from Irving's leadership and indefatigable commitment to Indigenous water and community health innovation, and we've had the pleasure of co-creating with him since our inception in 2008.





# Update on Core Initiatives



## Research-Based Theatre (RbT) for Social Change

The Community Circle approach fundamentally breaks from traditional problem-solving paradigms by shifting from hierarchical, product-focused solutions to collaborative, service-oriented partnerships. While traditional methods involve centralized decision-making where organizations "tell communities what's best for them" through sequential, siloed processes, Community Circle uses Research-based Theatre to facilitate communities becoming active co-creators of their own solutions. This transformation from assumptions to validated learning has delivered measurable results where traditional approaches have failed. Community Circle has successfully lifted long-standing boil water advisories and built sustainable, community-owned solutions through transparent collaboration, recognizing that community experience is a critical measure of sustainability while creating capacity to build local economy.

Meanwhile, decades of conventional top-down methods have left rural communities still lacking essential infrastructure—from safe water and reliable energy to broadband connectivity and adequate housing—and unprepared for emerging contaminants, climate change, and other evolving challenges, despite numerous organizational efforts and government pledges.



### 2025 RbT events

Community Circle's RbT team collaborated with the Technical University of Munich to explore the influence of AI on human decision-making through theatre. .

At the AAAS Annual Meeting in Boston (February 2025), the Community Circle team used RbT to showcase how Indigenous and rural communities address critical challenges in water health, energy, AI, and climate change.



Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts (February 2025): 5-day research-based theatre with community and graduate students on water, energy, and community stories.

Institut de Créativité et d'Innovation, Université Aix-Marseille (March 2025)  
5-day arts-based, transdisciplinary work with doctoral students, community artists, and faculty on rural water and language insecurity.



University of Agder, Norway (March 2025):  
2-day research-based theatre with doctoral students, community artists, and faculty on water and energy in rural contexts.



## Water Systems and Climate Resilience



### Community Water Systems: Climate Vulnerabilities and Resilience

**Opportunities:** This initiative employs innovative theater-based methodologies to tackle critical water system challenges in Indigenous and rural communities. By focusing on climate vulnerabilities, the program works to strengthen community water infrastructure resilience through collaborative approaches. The project directly advances Objective 4 by fostering co-innovation through strategic partnerships with Indigenous and rural communities. It creates a dynamic ecosystem for collaborative innovation by expanding Anchor Centres and building networks with external partner organizations, ensuring that community-driven projects have the support and resources needed to address local water security challenges effectively.



**Pilot Study of Potential Treatment Options:** We led a comprehensive evaluation of innovative water treatment technologies for underserved communities, generating critical evidence to address water security challenges. This project directly advances Objective 4 by creating a collaborative ecosystem that brought together community stakeholders, industry partners, and regulatory agencies to co-develop sustainable and scalable solutions.

### The Operators Walkthrough Lab (OWL) Initiative

strengthened infrastructure management in remote communities through AI-powered virtual assistance and innovative training programs that built local capacity for public works operations. We launched a cutting-edge AI training platform specifically designed for rural and Indigenous communities, providing virtual guidance and immersive simulations of drinking water disinfection processes that enable operators to develop critical skills for ensuring safe water access.

To address official language requirements, we plan to complete French translations of all Operators' Walkthrough Lab materials, making technical training accessible to francophone communities across Canada. The development of French functionality is pending financial support or approval of our grant application to DIGITAL, as well as Indigenous Services Canada.

This initiative supports Objectives 2 and 3: to improve the quality and delivery of water-health solutions and services for Indigenous and rural communities, and to increase awareness of Indigenous values and rural issues while developing capacities, capabilities, and transparency. Over 45 First Nations water operators and public works personnel participated in piloting the OWL platform, demonstrating strong community engagement and validation of our approach.



## Policy and Advocacy Engagement



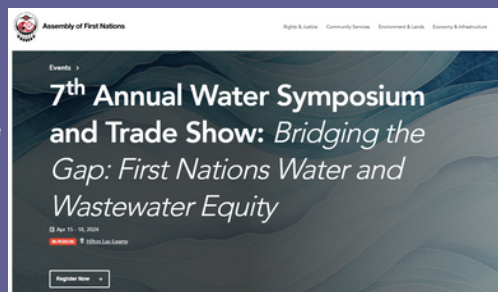
**Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Infrastructure Programs Forum (October 2024, Vancouver):** Community Circle shared success stories and joined national discussions on infrastructure planning, asset management, and housing in First Nations communities—advancing Objective 1 by informing water-health policy and legislation through collaboration with Indigenous partners and experts.



Indigenous Services Canada, Decentralised Drinking Water and Wastewater – *Expert Report: Technical issues, community-level risk identification, and management recommendations*. Community Circle contributed to ISC’s expert report, establishing the evidence and policy groundwork for decentralized water and wastewater solutions. We identified barriers and enablers, shaped preliminary recommendations, and laid the foundation for flexible, community-controlled legislation and regulation that supports water sovereignty and self-determined infrastructure.

### **Assembly of First Nations Water Symposium:**

Participated in community circle sessions at the 7th Annual symposium, “Bridging the Gap: First Nations Water and Wastewater Equity.” This supported Objective 1 by enabling culturally grounded dialogue, integrating Indigenous knowledge, and surfacing regulatory and implementation insights to strengthen evidence-based, streamlined water-health policy.





## Specialized Co-innovation Workshops

**Our Open Circle™ Series workshops use research-based theatre as the core methodology to create spaces for co-innovation on water-health infrastructure challenges in Indigenous and rural communities. We create embodied experiences where community members and international experts collaborate through performance to transform abstract knowledge into lived understanding. Innovation is fundamentally a cultural act, intersecting art, folklore, and engineering so that solutions emerge from cultural wisdom.**



Research-based Theatre enables participants to experience challenges directly, synthesize insights through storytelling, and rapidly prototype solutions in real time. The format cultivates cross-disciplinary collaboration, tolerance for ambiguity, and comfort with failure while creating empathetic connections that transcend data points. We create technically sound, culturally responsive solutions by resolving modern innovation's paradox: technology without artistry risks sterility, while art without innovation risks irrelevance. We develop participant-generated ideas into pilot projects within 18-24 months, ensuring actionable change that serves humanity through rigorous research and creative practice.

Recent examples include our AI in Rural Infrastructure Workshop (November 25–27, 2024), where 25 community leaders and international experts from 14 First Nations, Canada, the USA, and Australia assessed AI's role across technical, political, economic, social/cultural, and environmental dimensions, choosing 2025–2026 pilot projects for ethical deployment. Our Decentralized Water Solutions Workshop (October 29–31, 2024) brought together First Nations from BC, Ontario, and Manitoba with experts from Canada, the UK, the USA, Africa, and Japan to co-develop localized infrastructure models tailored to community needs. We develop all participant-generated ideas into pilot projects within 18-24 months.



## Next-Gen Youth Engagement

**Canadore Innovation Challenge (October 2024) launched the "Mobilizing Clean Water!" competition stream:** The Community Circle's Objective 3: Create mechanisms to support First Nations Entrepreneurship, advancing Indigenous values, and addressing rural challenges through comprehensive capacity building and entrepreneurship support that centres on Indigenous knowledge systems, while fostering economic empowerment.

Three First Nations teams participated in the Canadore Innovation Challenge's "Mobilizing Clean Water!" competition stream, launched in October 2024. This partnership with Canadore College exemplifies community-centered innovation, spanning a five-year period. The participating teams received dedicated mentorship, business development resources, and access to frameworks that integrate traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary entrepreneurship training, creating tangible pathways for First Nations youth to develop viable business ventures addressing water security, sanitation, and technical training needs.

By engaging First Nations teams as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries, the program validates its commitment to Indigenous-led innovation and economic empowerment, while demonstrating how educational institutions can serve as effective allies by providing resources and platforms that ensure community leadership drives development priorities. This approach creates sustainable economic opportunities within Indigenous communities while respecting cultural practices and decision-making authority, establishing a replicable framework for Indigenous-led innovation that extends beyond water challenges to address broader community needs, including housing, food security, and renewable energy.



## Professional Development and Training

The Assembly of First Nations and the National Operators Forum hosted a comprehensive session on April 15, 2024, bringing together water operators and operators in training to address critical industry challenges. Led by our board chair Irving Leblanc and facilitated by national water leaders Warren Brown and Katy Thorne, the forum covered essential topics including funding strategies, operational management practices, and professional association matters, while supporting the Community Circle's efforts to improve water-health solutions for Indigenous and rural communities (Objective 2) and increase awareness of Indigenous values and rural issues through enhanced capacities, capabilities, and transparency (Objective 3).

## Research and Academic Partnerships

The Climate + Water Research Symposium, hosted at UBC, directly advanced Community Circle's Objective 4 by demonstrating innovative theatre-based methods for water-health research and climate resilience while fostering new models of international and interdisciplinary collaboration. This symposium served as a cornerstone event for Climate Vulnerabilities Research, a multinational project funded by the New Frontiers in Research Fund, which exemplifies Community Circle's commitment to co-innovation by bringing together First Nations communities, including Lytton First Nation, with partners from Norway, the USA, Kenya, and South Sudan to co-create locally-informed climate resilience strategies specifically designed for Indigenous and rural communities. Through this initiative, Community Circle established the Research-Based Theatre Network, creating vital connections with theatre practitioners and researchers across North America, Europe, and Asia. This network positions Community Circle as a global leader in arts-based scientific and technology communication while directly supporting strategic partnerships that enable Indigenous and rural communities to co-innovate solutions for their unique climate challenges.

Leading international institutions including the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, Institut de Créativité et d'Innovation (Université Aix-Marseille), and University of Agder collaborated to deliver intensive workshops demonstrating Community Circle practices for engaging communities around pressing issues like water security and energy sustainability. These research-based theatre workshops brought together leading researchers and artists from Hong Kong, France, and Norway, creating dynamic opportunities for international knowledge exchange and collaborative learning. The transdisciplinary format attracted participants from diverse fields including science, health, engineering, arts, and education, enabling multifaceted approaches to complex global challenges. This methodological diversity proved essential for addressing the interconnected nature of water and energy issues, allowing participants to explore problems through varied theoretical and practical frameworks while gaining insights into how different regions and cultures approach similar sustainability challenges. Beyond addressing critical global issues, these workshops established lasting international connections that serve as foundations for future collaborative research projects. Participants gained broader, more nuanced perspectives on the explored topics, moving beyond local viewpoints to embrace truly global understanding of water and energy security challenges. The success of this international collaboration has created a framework for ongoing cooperation between institutions committed to innovative, transdisciplinary approaches to community engagement and global sustainability.







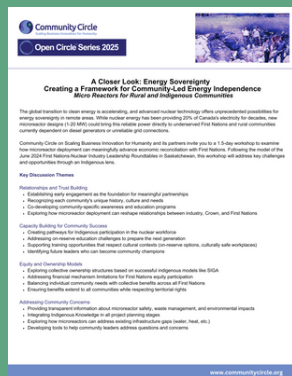
# Upcoming Strategic Initiatives

## New Initiatives for 2025-2026

Community Circle advances water-health solutions for Indigenous and rural communities through co-creation partnerships, and is expanding into decentralized energy and digital equity. This work applies proven Indigenous-led methods, ensuring community ownership and culturally appropriate technology transfer. By centering Indigenous decision-making, Community Circle builds scalable models for long-term capacity and systemic change. As technology reshapes society, rural and Indigenous communities risk being left behind in critical energy independence and digital transformation; without intentional intervention, they may miss key benefits while bearing disproportionate impacts.

The following initiatives are currently in development:

### Energy Self-Reliance: Creating a Framework for Community-Led Energy Self-Determination



Community Circle is developing a comprehensive framework for community-led energy self-determination through exploring decentralized solution options (including microreactors) in rural and Indigenous communities, with a particular focus on West Coast communities where decentralized solutions are more suitable due to their size and remoteness. Building on the successful model of the June 2024 First Nations-Nuclear Industry Leadership Roundtables in Saskatchewan, this initiative gathers 20-25 community leaders and international experts in facilitated small-group discussions using Research-based Theatre methodology. Preliminary conversations with NRCAN executives have helped shape this framework, which promotes open dialogue about challenges and opportunities and explores Indigenous perspectives on nuclear technology within culturally appropriate frameworks. Without reliable, affordable energy, rural communities face cascading limitations across essential services. Energy access is the critical infrastructure that enables all other community development. Microreactors offer compelling advantages: 92% capacity factor compared to 54% for coal and 37% for wind, walk-away safety features that require minimal operator intervention, versatility for heat generation and industrial processes, minimal land requirements, and significant economic opportunities. Indigenous peoples represent the fastest-growing demographic globally, making energy sovereignty a critical priority for sustainable community development.

### Exploring Domain-Specific Small Language Models for Rural and Indigenous Communities

This initiative tackles the urgent need for digital equity by bringing AI benefits to rural and Indigenous communities, which are often left behind in the digital transformation. This initiative focuses on creating AI solutions specifically suited to rural and Indigenous contexts, using domain-specific models and small language models with important input from First Nations data sovereignty principles. The initiative aims to support communities throughout their entire technology adoption journey, encompassing problem identification, exploring solutions, building requirements, and selecting suppliers. The thorough approach ensures that AI solutions are developed together with communities rather than imposed on them, respecting Indigenous data sovereignty while fostering local capacity for ongoing technology governance and innovation.



## Finances

Community Circle's major funding relationships are from both private and public sectors, including provincial and federal governments and generous private donors.

Funds received from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Strategic Science Fund: **\$564,985**

Strategic Allocation by Category:

- Knowledge/Technology Transfer: **\$356,912** (63.2%)
- Community Engagement and Events: **\$123,000** (21.8%)
- Operational Costs: **\$85,073** (15.0%)

Total Matching Funds Received: **\$409,067**

Total Leverage Funds Received: **\$143,000**

Combined Leverage Impact: **\$552,067** (98% of original SSF allocation)

