

Applied Research Ethics Case Workshop

Pinehouse First Nation

Pinehouse is a predominantly Métis and Cree-speaking community located approximately 500 km north of Saskatoon. With a population of around 1,000 residents, Pinehouse is known for its deep cultural roots, traditional land-based practices like hunting, fishing, and trapping, and a strong sense of community resilience. Despite these strengths, Pinehouse faces significant housing challenges. Issues such as overcrowding, aging infrastructure, high construction costs, and limited access to skilled labour and materials are persistent. Nearly a quarter of residents spend more than 30% of their income on housing, signaling significant affordability pressures. The community has also been actively involved in economic development partnerships, including a 2012 Impact Benefit Agreement with uranium companies Cameco and Orano. These partnerships have provided employment and investment but have also prompted ongoing discussion about equity, consent, and community benefit in extractive industries.

Research Description

This research project will examine housing in Northern Saskatchewan, its current state, and the existing supports and programs. Specifically, it will look at affordability and sustainability to create a toolkit that communities in Northern Saskatchewan can use when considering building or retrofitting homes. The end goal is to support more equitable housing in the region that addresses the challenges unique to Northern Saskatchewan, but also takes a strengths-based approach to look at the opportunities available and innovations occurring.

Research Design

- Environmental scan and academic literature review
- Interviews with builders, housing service providers, and local leaders
- Virtual (Zoom) interviews, audio-only, ~30–60 min
- Student researcher transcribes and codes interviews

Emerging Concerns

As the project evolves, several challenges arise:

- A provincial housing authority partner offers in-kind support and requests to review the toolkit before public release.
- The student researcher conducting interviews is from the region and has personal relationships with some participants.
- A regional economic development agency offers to help disseminate the toolkit but suggests including a section that highlights their affiliated contractor's modular home system as a "best practice."
- Community members want access to transcripts and decision-making on the final report, raising questions about data ownership.

Participant Roles

Each member of the group can pick one role and consider how the research team should respond collectively. Note that these are hypothetical roles, the actual case differed slightly from these descriptions.

Community Housing Coordinator: You work on the ground in a Northern Saskatchewan community. You're eager for this toolkit to reflect real challenges (overcrowding, cost overruns, and harsh winters) but you've seen past research projects come and go without leaving lasting value.

Provincial Housing Authority Representative: Your agency is co-funding the project. You want this toolkit to align with current policy goals and support upcoming funding decisions. You're also conscious of political messaging and would prefer the final product not include "negative narratives."

College Research Ethics Advisor: You're focused on maintaining strong ethical protocols: clear consent, secure data handling, and appropriate student supervision. You want to ensure that academic standards aren't compromised by partnership pressures.

Non-Profit Toolkit Implementation Partner: Your organization plans to use the toolkit to support housing builds across the North. You want the toolkit to highlight your modular model as a proven solution — and you're concerned that if it's left out, it will weaken your funder support.

Community Elder or Knowledge Holder: You bring lived and cultural expertise to the project. You're skeptical of extractive research and want assurance that the knowledge shared by your community will be respected, acknowledged, and controlled. You're wary of cloud-based data storage.

Student Researcher: You're excited to work on this project, but you feel caught between your supervisor, funders, and participants. You want to do the right thing but aren't sure how to push back when asked to prioritize political messaging over community voices.

Discussion

1. What concerns are emerging in this project and how serious are they?
2. Where do you see potential conflicts of interest — and how should they be managed?
3. How should the research team balance stakeholder input with research independence?
4. What does "giving back" look like in this project and is it currently happening?