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SUPPORTING NEW ENERGY AND CLIMATE STAFF

1. INTRODUCTION

Municipal departments responsible for energy and climate play a crucial role in driving sustainability initiatives and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Canadian communities. However, these departments often face challenges when it comes to training and supporting new staff.

New staff often need time to familiarize themselves with various aspects of their job: relevant policies, ongoing projects, leading

practices, partners and stakeholders, and support networks. This gap in knowledge, experience and relationships can lead to issues including delays in decision-making, duplication of effort, reduced efficiency and decreased effectiveness in achieving energy and climate goals.

To address this challenge, municipalities should have strategies in place for succession planning, knowledge retention and onboarding and training of new energy and climate staff.

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2. SUCCESSION PLANNING AND KNOWLEDGE RETENTION

By implementing strategies for succession planning and knowledge sharing, municipal departments can better retain critical institutional knowledge, experience and relationships. The following strategies have emerged as leading practices:

2.1 Documentation and sharing

- Encourage employees to regularly document their processes, methodologies and lessons learned to create a knowledge repository for their roles and projects. This repository should live in a shared file system to ensure information is centralized and accessible.
- Establish regular knowledge-sharing sessions, workshops and staff check-ins to disseminate knowledge across the department.
- Keep team members informed about ongoing grant and loan applications, project updates and capacity-development opportunities. Assign a team member to be a fill-in for community of practice meetings and training workshops should the project lead be unable to attend.

2.2 Mentoring and succession programs

- Develop mentoring programs that pair experienced staff with junior employees to foster knowledge transfer, skill building and relationship development. Identify employees with potential for specific roles and support their career development for when these roles become available.

3. ONBOARDING AND TRAINING NEW STAFF

Onboarding and training programs ensure that new hires can quickly become productive members of the department by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and relationships. These steps outline an effective onboarding and training process:

3.1 Pre-arrival preparation

- Develop a detailed onboarding plan that includes goals, objectives and timelines.
- Assign a mentor or supervisor who will guide and support the new staff member throughout the onboarding process.
- Provide pre-arrival reading materials and resources so that new hires can familiarize themselves with the municipality and the department's work. Include materials that provide important context such as municipal energy-management plans, climate-action plans, departmental procedures, meeting minutes or documents saved to the knowledge repository (see 2.1).

3.2 Orientation and departmental familiarization

- Conduct an orientation session to provide an overview of the department's structure and functions as well as its recent, ongoing and future initiatives and work plans.
- Arrange meetings between new staff and relevant internal partners and external stakeholders. This will help them build relationships and learn more about collaborative efforts. Internal partners could include department staff, senior staff or interdepartmental committees. External stakeholders could include advisory and public steering committees or community groups.

3.3 Job-specific training

- Based on the job requirements, identify areas where the new staff member could benefit from additional training. This could be in soft skills like communication, leadership and teamwork, or technical skills such as using energy modelling software and GHG accounting tools.
- Build a training program to address these areas. Municipalities with limited resources or that want to supplement their existing training opportunities can direct staff to external training and peer-networking programs (see Table 1) or to FCM’s [Guide for Municipal Climate Change Staff](#), which provides a road map for new staff working in energy and climate roles.

- Regularly review the new employee’s progress and provide constructive feedback to support their professional growth.

3.4 Ongoing professional development and networking

- Encourage all staff to take advantage of external training opportunities and participate in peer networks, both of which can help broaden perspectives, enhance skills, and advance learning across the department. These opportunities can be useful for all municipalities, especially those with limited internal training programs. The table below provides examples of leading professional development and networking opportunities for municipal energy and climate staff.

TABLE 1: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

<u>FCM GMF Learning Centre</u>	The FCM GMF Learning Centre is a hub for municipal sustainability resources, events and training.
<u>Canadian Institute for Energy Training (CIET)</u>	CIET offers a wide range of training programs related to sustainable energy.
<u>Clean Air Council (CAC)</u>	CAC is a network of 39 municipalities and health units from across Ontario. CAC members work collaboratively to develop and implement actions to do with clean air, climate change, sustainability and resilience.
<u>The Corporate Energy Managers Community of Practice (CEM COP)</u>	The CEM COP is a network of managers from across Ontario who work on municipal energy-efficiency and green-energy projects.
<u>Community Energy Association (CEA)</u>	CEA is a member-based, non-profit organization working to help communities reduce emissions, conserve energy and progressively transition to a resilient, low-carbon economy.
<u>Partners for Climate Protection (PCP)</u>	The PCP program is a national network of more than 400 municipalities with the shared goal of taking action against climate change and reducing local GHG emissions.
<u>ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability</u>	Local and regional governments across the global ICLEI network represent a wide range of cities, towns and regions. Collectively, they form a dynamic force advancing sustainable urban development worldwide.
<u>QUEST</u>	QUEST Canada is a national non-profit that supports communities in Canada on their pathway to net-zero.

In addition, the Community Buildings Retrofit (CBR) initiative offers resources, events and training opportunities to help staff through the net-zero transition. For example, the [CBR Advisory Service](#) connects energy management experts across Canada to improve community retrofit projects, while the [CBR resource library](#) contains many practical resources to support local facility upgrades.

4. HOW SUPPORTING NEW STAFF SETS YOUR ENERGY PROJECTS UP FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Energy-savings projects in municipal buildings often have long-term net-zero goals that stretch across five, 10, even 20 years. Staff turnover is inevitable over such time frames, so having processes in place to ensure continuity is key to success. Developing plans to support a smooth transition also boosts your team's resilience to external change by donors and private and public partners, including funding organizations such as the Green Municipal Fund.

Climate mitigation and the path to net-zero are long-term initiatives that will, in many cases, be multi-generational for both municipalities and their partner organizations. Building this reality into planning remains a crucial step in reaching our collective goals.