CECC

CECC Annual Community Energy Forum Report

Bringing together Canada's Community Energy Movement.

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INTRODUCTION

2025 marked the 3rd Annual Community Energy Forum and 2nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) for Community Energy Cooperative Canada (CECC). The forum is a national gathering to exchange ideas, build partnerships and advance community-owned energy across Canada. The event welcomed 62 participants, including 36 in person and 28 online, representing a diverse cross section of stakeholders such as indigenous leaders, academics, policymakers, students, renewable energy co-op (REC) leaders, and other interested parties. Together, they explored pressing issues and opportunities facing recs across Canada.

Prior to the forum, CECC members, board members, and staff gathered, many meeting in person for the first time, to review the year's accomplishments and make decisions for the coming year. This included the election of four new board members, joining eight returning members, marking the first full slate of board members in CECC's history!

The forum opened with a keynote address by Dr. Anna Berka, who provided an overview of the community energy landscape in Australia. She highlighted both similarities and differences with Canada and emphasized opportunities for mutual learning and collaboration between the two countries.

On the morning of Day 2, the focus shifted to the current realities and challenges facing renewable energy cooperatives in Canada. This included a talk with Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada, and a panel with REC leaders from across Western Canada. In the afternoon, the forum looked outward, featuring a team of researchers who presented findings from an international scan of community energy initiatives across six countries: Australia, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Through case studies, this session highlighted enabling policies and programs abroad, inspiring participants to envision the potential of RECs in Canada. The afternoon concluded with a session on Indigenous led community energy initiatives, exploring opportunities, challenges, and pathways for these communities.

INTRODUCTION

Day 3 began with presentations from Canadian researchers, who shared the most up to date research on community energy and renewable energy cooperatives across the country. This session provided attendees with a comprehensive perspective on the current Canadian landscape. The final session featured the Accelerating Community Energy Transitions (ACET) project team from the University of Victoria, who presented their work on advancing energy transitions, culminating in an ambitious proposal for Cumberland, BC, sparking imaginative possibilities for the future.

One of the key challenges in organizing the forum was developing an agenda that would engage such a diverse group of stakeholders. The event was, however, a success. Attendees reflected positively on the presentations and the overall experience. This report offers a window into the 2025 forum talks and the exciting world of community energy in Canada. The report features condensed summaries of each talk. For the full context of each talk, see the videos here.

KEYNOTE

Learning to Re-Anchor: Insights from Australia on Supporting Community Shared Ownership in the Renewable Energy Sector

Dr. Anna Berka is Lead Researcher at Community Power Agency, and Senior Lecturer at Massey University, with an affiliation at Griffith University's School of Environment and Science. She has worked as a practitioner, researcher and consultant in community energy and inclusive innovation over twelve years across a variety of countries, including the UK, India, New Zealand and Australia. She brings experience in impact evaluation and policy analysis and has an in-depth understanding of barriers, opportunities, delivery models, and enabling contexts for shared ownership and community energy. Anna charges the Community Power Agency's mission to build an evidence base for a transition to a post-carbon economy that puts environmental sustainability, civic enterprise, and local resilience centre stage.

In her talk, she spoke about the work of the Community Power Agency, which supports community energy and seeks to generate greater social, economic, and environmental benefits from projects. Their work includes consulting with community organizations to design projects, developing how-to guides, and conducting research to reduce barriers in the sector. She also provided an overview of the Australian energy context, including the social dimensions of the energy transition, particularly in isolated rural grids where energy poverty is widespread and prepaid electricity metering is common. She shared research on how different variables in community energy projects, such as financing mechanisms, legal structures, and ownership models, can influence the depth of community participation. She also outlined the current barriers in Australia, including limited market access, unstable financing, constrained local capacity, and the lack of suitable legal frameworks for shared ownership. She concluded with an overview of the current Australian context, highlighting shared challenges between Canada and Australia in advancing community energy.

Watch the keynote "Learning to Reanchor" here.

SESSION 1

Opening Remarks

In his opening remarks, Dr. Martin Boucher, CECC Founding President, recounted the story of the CECC, from its inception in Ottawa in 2023 to its current trajectory. He highlighted several key achievements, including securing over one million dollars in funding to support the organization's mission, the publication of multiple reports, hiring our first staff member, and the establishment of core business operations.

Dr. Boucher also outlined the areas of opportunity and growth for the REC sector in Canada, including the opportunities brought on by emerging technologies such as smart grids and data centres, opportunities for policy innovation from the provincial and federal government and business model innovation for the sector.

Talk with Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada

In her talk, Elizabeth highlighted the challenges of our current moment, including the impacts of climate change and the challenges to implementing climate-friendly policies. She spoke about national policy considerations, emphasizing the role of grassroots and community energy initiatives in shaping sustainable, democratic energy systems. She spoke about the challenges that renewable energy co-operatives face under the current monopoly system that favors large scale production. Finally, she highlighted the role of local energy as a tool to move towards a cleaner and democratic energy system.

Watch the Opening Remarks and the talk with Elizabeth May here.

SESSION 2

What We're Up Against: Challenges Facing REC Leaders

In this talk, leaders of renewable energy cooperatives across Western Canada spoke candidly about the challenges they currently face and provided avenues for improving the regulatory environment across Canada.

Jodi Conuel of Bow Valley Green Energy Cooperative (Alberta) discussed the organization's success over its five years of operation, including four successful projects and three awards. She also highlighted several ongoing challenges, including difficulties raising capital, barriers within the microgeneration program, a lack of paid staff, and limited public awareness of the organization.

Rob Baxter of Vancouver Renewable Energy (British Columbia) shared the organization's origins as a worker co-operative that sells and installs solar energy systems. VREC later created SolShare to make solar energy more accessible to a broader range of people. After years of working through regulatory barriers in British Columbia, they developed a model that allows them to sell electricity directly to host sites, effectively operating as a utility under the province's regulatory framework. Rob discussed the organization's current challenges, particularly project denials from BC Hydro, which have made growth more difficult.

Annette Dautel of Solar Power Investment Cooperative of Edmonton (Alberta) discussed their goal of expanding community solar power in Edmonton, with a particular emphasis on supporting community organizations and non-profits. She described challenges with the community generation program, particularly those arising from changes in government and the resulting delays and stalling of the program. She highlighted how frequently shifting government policies have created ongoing uncertainty and have led to repeated losses of time and effort for the organization. Outside of changing government policies, the organization's current challenge is not a lack of suitable investors, but rather a shortage of suitable host sites for projects.

SESSION 2 (CONT.)

What We're Up Against: Challenges Facing REC Leaders

Rod Johnson of SES Solar Co-operative (Saskatchewan) shared the challenges and risks involved in launching the organization. He also discussed their successes over the past 10 years, including the development of eight solar arrays and approximately one megawatt of generation capacity. He outlined their current challenges in finding appropriate host sites, wariness from investors and government regulations that continue to hinder growth in the sector. He also shared his goal of promoting the renewable energy cooperative model and their organization's toolkit for starting a co-operative.

Watch the "What We're Up Against" panel here.

SESSION 3

Community Energy Around the World: Policies, Practices, and Pathways

In this talk, presenters Dr. Julie MacArthur, Dan Curwin, Khaoula Bengezi, and Niels Vilstrup shared their recent work exploring international case studies from the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and Denmark, showcasing innovative approaches to community energy and shared ownership models. The presentations also highlight the enabling policies and environments that led to the selected projects' success.

In Germany, the presenters highlighted the Bioenergy Village Jühnde which is the first energy self-sufficient village in Germany and approximately 70% of the village population is a member of the energy co-operative and owns the energy system. The project was initially funded by a research grant and the success of the project led to 16 other demonstration projects across Germany. The project also provided new income streams for local tradesmen.

In Denmark, the presenters highlighted the Samsø Energy Island which began in 1997. The energy island emerged from a national competition on integrated energy planning which supported the initial onshore wind development. Since then the project has grown to include onshore and offshore wind, rooftop solar, and a biomass and solar thermal district heating system. The energy island has diverse owners including individual citizens, cooperatives, the municipality, private companies and farmers associations. This case highlights how initial smaller projects can scale far beyond the initial investment.

In Australia, the presenters highlighted the Marlinja Community Microgrid, which is an Indigenous owned solar array with battery storage. The project began in 2024 and is Australia's first First Nations owned grid connected renewable microgrid. The project was initiated in response to frequent blackouts in the region and can operate independent of the grid. It is sized to power 18 homes benefitting 60 residents. The project is enabled by a unique virtual net metering model that allows daily solar credits on prepaid meters.

Community Energy Around the World: Policies, Practices, and Pathways

In New Zealand, the presenters highlighted the Rau Kumara Solar Farm which is New Zealand's first community-owned solar farm. The solar farm includes 2 arrays, 1 at the local water treatment plant and 1 on a local college. The project is owned by a local charitable trust and all profits are reinvested into the local community. The project was funded by a large grant provided by a community trust and the last was leased by the local council at $1 per year.

In the United Kingdom, the presenters highlighted the Bristol Energy Cooperative which began in 2011. It has over 2,000 members, 17 rooftop solar installations, and 2 ground mounted solar farms. They have also incorporated 2 microgrid schemes which include solar, ground source heat pumps, battery storage and EV charging. They also have 2 additional battery schemes. They provide approximately 35 mw of power, which is enough to power 3600 homes. The Bristol Energy Cooperative provides a strong example of how organizations can adapt when government support programs are discontinued, such as the feed-in tariff scheme that initially enabled Bristol's development. The success of this case emphasized the importance of business model innovation in the sector.

Community Energy Around the World: Policies, Practices, and Pathways

In the US the presenters highlighted 2 cases La Cooperativa Hidroeléctrica de la Montaña (Puerto Rico) and the Green Energy Justice Cooperative (Illinois). La Cooperativa Hidroeléctrica de la Montaña is the first community energy cooperative in Puerto Rico and emerged following Hurricane Maria. Many residents in the region were left without power for up to nine months. The cooperative has three key areas of operation: rehabilitating existing hydroelectric dams, developing new solar installations, and exploring microgrid development. The solar installations are located on selected community buildings so they can provide power during outages and improve local energy resilience.

The Green Energy Justice Cooperative is based in the northern Chicago suburbs and has 9 MW of solar installed. The organization is new and has plans to include 3 programs; a rooftop solar program, a community solar garden program and a community choice aggregator program. They have the largest non-utility owned solar project in the United States which will power approximately 1200 homes. The project was enabled with funding from the Illinois Climate Bank.

Watch the "Community Energy Around the World" presentation here.

This talk presented preliminary findings on international best practices for community energy. In January 2026, the international scan report based on the research presented at the forum was published. You can read the report here.

SESSION 4

On the Ground: Indigenous Experiences in Community Energy

In this session, the Leighton Gall and Garrett Russ discuss their experience with Indigenous community energy in Canada. They discuss the current challenges facing their communities. Garrett Russ from Haida Gwaii shared his communities' current initiatives to reduce their diesel reliance. Leighton Gall is a member of the Métis Nation, who specializes in geothermal and ultra deep digging.

They describe their approaches to collaborating across Indigenous and Western worldviews, and how to balance advancing projects while ensuring full social license has been secured. They also discuss the role of capacity building for Indigenous communities to ensure that projects are led by members of the community. Finally, they discuss the potential for geothermal energy in Canada, and particularly for British Columbia, and how to bring Indigenous communities into the discussion.

Watch the "On the Ground" talk here.

SESSION 5

Where We Stand: The Canadian Community Energy Landscape

In this session, presenters share their cutting-edge research on community energy and renewable energy cooperatives in Canada. This work helps to provide an overview of what is happening across Canada and how current research can build a strong REC sector.

Dr. Martin Boucher and Josie Ward presented their Community Energy Co-operative Policy Index, which evaluates and ranks Canadian provinces based on the extent to which their policy environments support renewable energy cooperatives. They outlined the methodology used to develop the index, including the selection of indicators and weighting approach, and discussed the resulting provincial rankings. The presentation concluded with a request for feedback to help refine and improve future iterations of the index.

Karl Janelle shared his work mapping energy co-operatives in Canada. He shared his team's work mapping all energy cooperatives and their projects across the country. The results of this map highlight the geographic distribution of renewable energy cooperatives in Canada. Karl also discussed the current state of community energy in Quebec, with particular emphasis on the cultural and ideological factors that can make it more challenging to advance democratically governed, locally owned energy systems. You can view the map here.

Dr. Derya Tarhan spoke about how to align the renewable energy cooperative sector with the broader energy justice movement, with a particular focus on how renewable energy cooperatives can ensure that they are contributing to energy democracy and energy justice. He also spoke about how corporations can infiltrate the sector and take advantage of programs set aside for communities. His work emphasizes the importance of participatory policy design to develop programs that support community energy projects that align with the energy justice movement.

Where We Stand: The Canadian Community Energy Landscape

Finally, Dr. Chad Walker spoke about his current research based on survey data across the UK and Canada which looked at perspectives on local energy transition using local smart grids. They specifically looked at what factors positively shaped support for these systems and for differences in support across countries. They found that concern around climate change, satisfaction with current energy system and comfort in sharing data all influenced individuals support for local smart grids in Canada. He also spoke about his future research looking at place based branding and its impact on public acceptance.

Watch the "Where We Stand" panel here.

SESSION 6

Accelerating Community Energy Transformation

Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) is a research project based at the University of Victoria and is focused on developing equitable and sustainable energy solutions to advance the energy transition. The final session highlighted some of the current research being completed under this project.

Dr. Megan Egler spoke about her research on affective polarization for climate policies in western Canada and how this can inform renewable energy project development. The results highlight that individual perspectives towards renewable energy and just transitions aren't just ideological, but also identity based. The research highlights a few key implications for renewable energy projects including using depoliticized framing and pursuing partnerships with trusted community organizations.

Pavel Soriano Hernandez shared his current research on community energy financing in Canada. He spoke about the importance of designing financing mechanisms that support energy justice, rather than reproducing existing inequalities. He also promoted his survey, surveying community energy projects to learn about how they were financed to gain an understanding of exisiting community energy finance models across Canada.

Finally, Dr. Zachary Gould presented a model for district energy and data cooperatives. Using the case of Cumberland House, Zachary highlights a circular economy for community energy and sustainable development, including district heating, subsidized housing and data centres. The model provides a visionary approach to designing energy communities that expand beyond traditional renewable energy projects.

Watch the "Accelerating Community Energy Transformation" panel here.

CONCLUSION

The CECC 3rd Annual AGM and 2nd Annual Community Energy Forum were a resounding success. The program opened with a broad, global perspective through our keynote speaker, Dr. Anna Berka, who shared insights from her work in Australia.

Day 2 shifted to the on-the-ground realities of renewable energy cooperatives in Canada, with sessions examining current barriers and challenges, as well as the opportunities and constraints shaped by the federal policy landscape. In the afternoon, the focus widened again to include comparative perspectives from outside the renewable energy cooperative sector. This included a scan of international best practices, followed by a session highlighting the experiences of Indigenous-led community energy initiatives in Canada.

Day 3 focused on the current state of research across Canada relevant to renewable energy co-operatives. The first session reviewed existing Canadian research on RECs, while the second broadened the scope to community energy research more generally, considering its implications for the development and scaling of renewable energy cooperatives.

The coversations captured in this report highlight both the progress made and the opportunities ahead for community energy in Canada. As we prepare for the 2026 CECC Community Energy Forum in Montreal, we invite new and returning participants to join us as we shape the future of community owned energy and continue building momentum across the sector.

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