



ALBERTA  
REAL ESTATE  
FOUNDATION

# Enabling Housing Choice Project

## Guidebook Module 1

### Introduction to the Enabling Housing Choice Project

September 2024



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to acknowledge our connection with the ancestral peoples who have been on this land for millennia.

RDN's physical office is located on lands traditionally known as amiskwachiwaskahikan (A Miss Gwa Che Wuss Sky Gun) - aka Beaver Hills House, or Edmonton, the historical land of Treaty 6 Territory, which is also within the Metis Nation District 9.

We acknowledge and confirm our commitment and responsibility to foster better relationships with Indigenous peoples, and to improve our own understanding of the unique and diverse cultures of local First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we gather on.

RDN is committed to connecting our programming to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as benchmarks for our reconciliation journey.

It is our sincere hope that the information provided in this guide will help communities address their own unique and diverse housing needs, and provide greater housing security and inclusion for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both in the community and the surrounding area.





## PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to thank the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF) for their funding and support in this research project.

We also want to acknowledge the 6 Alberta communities that participated in this research: (alphabetically) City of Airdrie, Town of Bow Island, Town of Claresholm, Town of Mayerthorpe, Town of Pincher Creek and Town of Trochu. These communities embraced the EHC team's mandate and research process, enabling them to collect practical and compelling information about current housing issues, barriers and opportunities in their community.

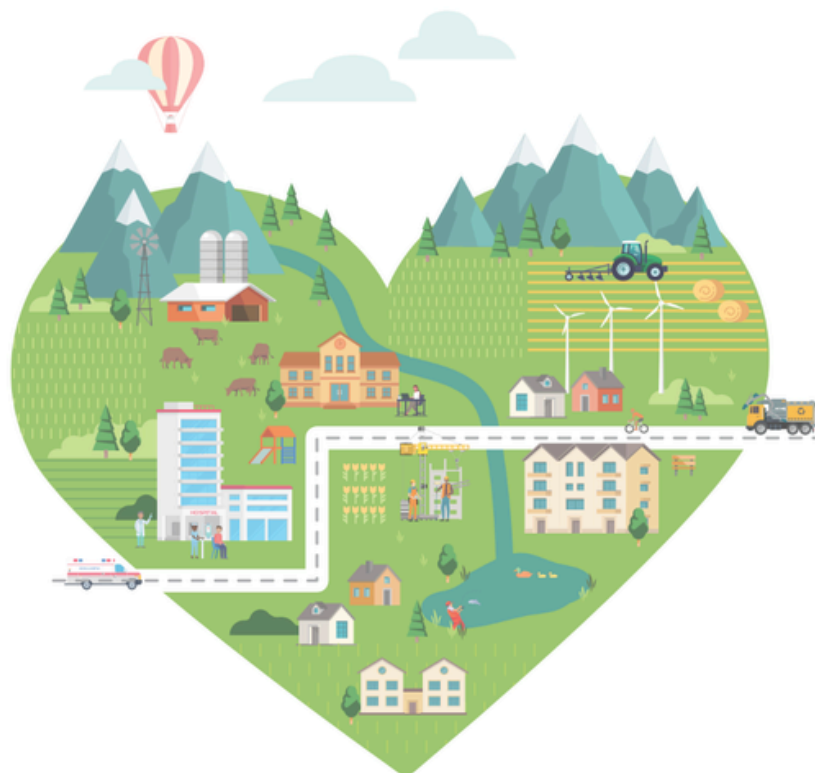
Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the housing stakeholders who participated in the various community engagement exercises that were conducted for this project. We appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to sharing your insights, identifying challenges, highlighting opportunities, and suggesting ways to improve housing diversity in your community. Your contributions have played a vital role in shaping the understanding of the current housing landscape and guiding the research towards meaningful solutions. Your generosity and willingness to collaborate have been instrumental in our goal to facilitate a more inclusive and diverse housing environment, both in your community and across Alberta.

# WHAT THIS MODULE EXPLORES

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# MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE ENABLING HOUSING CHOICE PROJECT

MODULE 1 OF 8

## INTRODUCTION

Housing diversity is critical for fostering vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable communities. By offering a range of housing options that cater to diverse needs, preferences, and income levels, municipalities can enhance social equity, economic resilience, and quality of life for residents. From affordable apartments to single-family homes, to mixed-use developments to senior living accommodations, housing diversity promotes neighbourhood stability, supports workforce retention, and ultimately helps create strong and vibrant communities.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to provide municipalities and organizations with an overview of the **Enabling Housing Choice Project**, including the project's overall objectives, timeline, and research methodology. Additionally, it explores how the overall research and findings of the EHC project helped provide the foundations for the **Guide for Diversifying Housing in Rural Communities**.



## 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

Funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, the **Enabling Housing Choice Project** aimed at providing insight into how Alberta municipalities can support growth in their communities and provide more housing options and choices to their residents. This was accomplished by addressing local policy, bylaw and process that realtors, housing developers, municipalities and residents often face when trying to build, buy or rent housing in the community.

The EHC project also aspires to help address the lack of capacity that is present in many rural communities, as they work to address local housing issues. As part of this, communities were encourage to bring together housing stakeholders to work together to achieve common goals. Shared challenges require collaborative solutions that harness the collective knowledge of housing industry professionals, municipal staff, and community residents.

Equipped with appropriate understanding about local housing needs, communities can better respond to their respective housing challenges through shared resources, research and information. This is where the **Enabling Housing Choice Project** strives to make an impact - by conducting extensive research into the numerous barriers, challenges and opportunities that are present within Alberta's housing landscape, and identifying pathways that will enable housing choice and diversity in Alberta communities.

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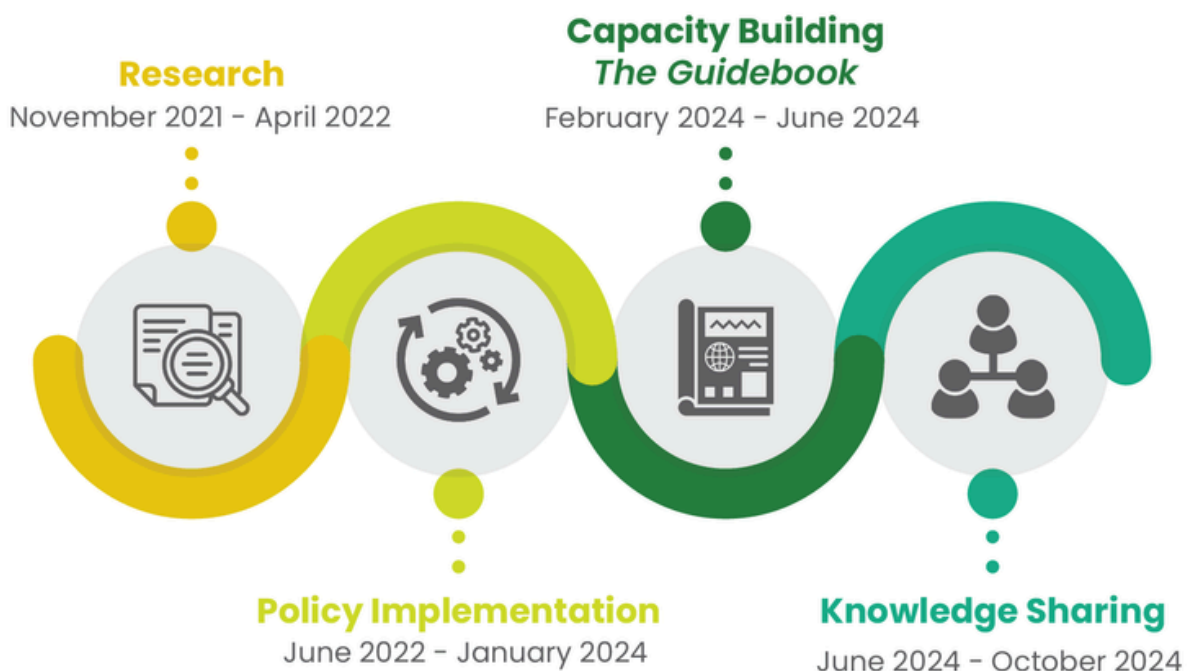
## 1.2 PROJECT TIMELINE

Initiated in November 2021 and slated for completion in October 2024, the **Enabling Housing Choice Project** has been a comprehensive three-year research initiative, structured across four distinct phases.

In Phase 1, general housing data was gathered, analyzed, and synthesized through a province-wide survey to better understand Alberta's current housing landscape and the need for diverse housing types. Building on the insights gained from these results, Phase 2 set up collaborative partnerships with six Alberta municipalities to examine, understand, and then foster housing choice and diversity in their communities.

Following this, the project transitioned into Progress Monitoring & Guidebook Development (Phase 3), where practical resources and guidelines were designed to empower housing stakeholders and communities in navigating their diverse housing challenges and opportunities. These resources were written into the **Guide for Diversifying Housing in Rural Communities**.

Finally, Knowledge Sharing (Phase 4) disseminated the project findings, best practices, and lessons learned, through various media and presentation approaches.



## 1.3 PHASE 1: RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

This section provides an overview of the first phase of the **Enabling Housing Choice Project**. In order to establish a starting point for the project's research, the EHC team developed the following guiding research questions:

1. What are the different barriers to growth and redevelopment?
2. How can more sustainable, equitable and efficient housing and land use practices be designed and implemented in communities?
3. What municipalities have successfully implemented changes to support real estate revitalization? What did they do? What did they not do?

### 1.3.1 PHASE 1 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Phase 1 focused on background research, which included a literature review and interviews with subject matter experts in economic development, academics, Indigenous housing, community planning (private and public), housing development, accessibility and diversity, and governance.

Also during this phase of the project, municipalities across the province were requested to participate in an online survey, to gather local insights about everyday housing challenges and opportunities for the community.

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### 1.3.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to develop a policy change framework that was used in Phase 2 of this project. This literature review focused on articles and discussions about the various elements and issues that impact housing choice. It also reviewed relevant academic research literature, as well as best practices for housing development in municipalities.

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### 1.3.3 CASE STUDIES

Six case studies were selected to highlight policy changes and the processes that were taken to implement those changes. These case studies were selected from interviews and then verified to confirm findings. Each of the selected case studies demonstrated how policy changes can be developed and executed in a real-life context.

If you're interested in examining the literature review and six case studies, please refer to the ***Enabling Housing Choice Project's*** Phase I Reports at:

[ruraldevelopment.ca/resources](http://ruraldevelopment.ca/resources)

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### 1.3.4 INTERVIEWS

The interviews were based on subject matter expertise; interviewee groups are provided in the box below.

For example, Planners that had recently updated municipal bylaws or policy in order to support housing choice and diversity were asked about the changes and the process to implement them. Developers provided perspectives from the other side of the development regulatory process; they spoke to the challenges and barriers inherent in housing development. Academics that specialized in planning policy and economic development added context about housing policy and development changes that have occurred in the province over time. Indigenous representatives added their experiences around the complexities of Indigenous housing, both on and off of the reserve. Finally, diversity and accessibility specialists helped understand the challenges that the various equity-seeking groups have faced regarding housing choice and policy barriers.

In total, the research team conducted interviews with the following subject matter experts:

- Economic Development Experts
- Academics
- Indigenous leaders and former Band council members
- Former Politicians
- Developers & Homebuilders
- Planning Consultants
- Planners from Municipalities & Planning Commissions
- Accessibility & Diversity Groups

### 1.3.5 PHASE 1 INITIAL FINDINGS

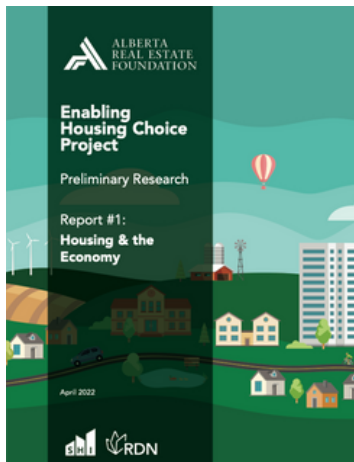
From the interviews, case studies, and literature review, the findings were categorized into major themes which were presented in **five reports** (linked below). These reports summarized the research findings, and then presented initial calls to action for municipalities.

The **five themes** that were extracted from the preliminary research and summarized in the initial reports are as follows:

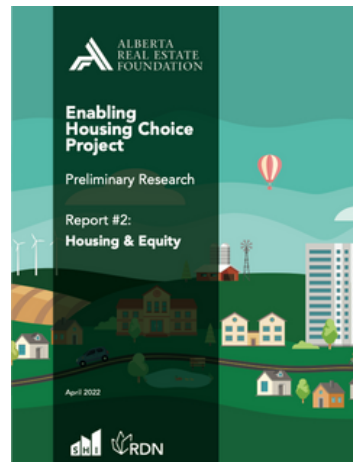
1. Equity Seeking Groups and Housing
2. Economic Impacts of Development
3. Sustainability (Economic, Environmental, Social)
4. Implementation and Capacity
5. Engagement and Community Buy-In

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#### Housing & Economy



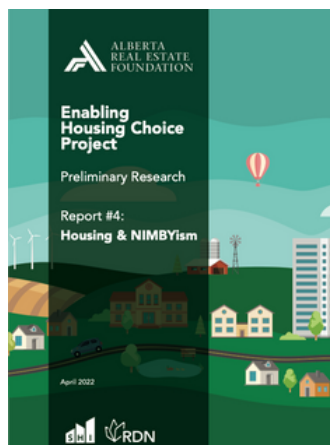
#### Housing & Equity



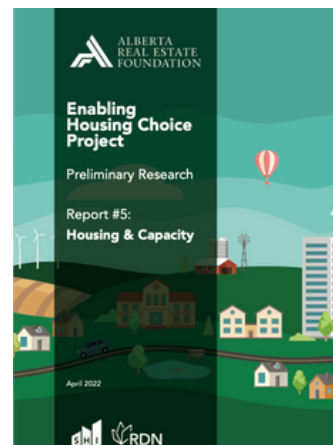
#### Housing & Environment



#### Housing & NIMBYism



#### Housing & Capacity



## 1.4 PHASE 2: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

This section provides an overview of the second phase of the **Enabling Housing Choice Project**. As the project evolved, the initial guiding research questions from Phase 1 were expanded to include the following questions:

1. What are the different barriers and challenges for enabling diverse housing in our partner communities?
2. How can meaningful community engagement help support and inform municipalities that are trying to develop diverse housing?
3. What policy and regulatory changes can help enable and incentivize the development of diverse housing in Alberta communities?

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### 1.4.1 PHASE 2 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

During the second phase of the project, a call went out across Alberta to rural communities for them to submit an expression of interest in partnering with the **Enabling Housing Choice Project** research. At the end of this process, six rural communities were selected to be partners in the EHC research. The research involved working closely with local municipal administration and housing stakeholders, with the goal being to gain insight and understanding about the unique dynamics that shaped each community's housing landscape.

The key deliverable from this phase of the project involved the preparation of Recommendations Reports that were tailored to the unique housing needs of each partner community. The reports were the result of collaborative efforts between the EHC team and local administration, so that locally applicable, evidence-based strategies and solutions were prepared for implementation. These recommendations focused on addressing the unique and diverse housing challenges, needs and opportunities for each specific community.

A secondary deliverable was the **What We Heard Reports**. While they were not applicable to all of the partner communities, for those that were applicable, they were written to capture the insights that were collected from the local community engagement processes. The information and perspectives that were collected during the community engagement sessions were central to informing each community's **Recommendations Report**.

## 1.4.2 PARTNERING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

The **Enabling Housing Choice Project** Team is proud to have partnered with the following Alberta municipalities during the second phase of the project:

- City of Airdrie
  - Town of Bow Island
  - Town of Claresholm
  - Town of Mayerthorpe
  - Town of Pincher Creek
  - Town of Trochu
- 

## 1.4.3 DEVELOPING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

After preliminary discussions with the partner communities, and acquiring a preliminary understanding of their housing needs and challenges, a community engagement plan was prepared for each.

While the engagement strategies differed among the six partner communities, they generally included the following:

- Project Announcement & Promotion
- Identifying Community Engagement Approaches:
  - Surveys (Online or Paper Copy)
  - Key Actor Interviews
  - Focus Group Discussions
  - Open House/Town Hall Meeting(s)
- Development of *What We Heard Reports*



## Example Of Community Engagement Strategy

Phase		
Item	Materials	Date(s)
Press Release	Drafted & Reviewed by RDN Comms, reviewed by Trochu	Draft sent February 9, 2023 Release sent out by February 13, 2023
	Square post with EHC & Trochu graphics	February 16, 2023
Public Survey	Survey on Google Forms; Create media graphic; RDN to post on Trochu's facebook group; Trochu to post on their website and circulate it within their channels	Review by Trochu March 3, 2023 Final review by RDN/Trochu/Palliser March 9, 2023 Live from March 20- April 3, 2023
Developer Engagement	Interview questions	Interviews to be conducted April 13 to April 27, 2023
In Person Engagement	TBD	Date: Location: TBD
What We Heard Report	Initial report to Council & CAO Included in the Appendix of the Final Report	May 11, 2023 (draft - original date) July 25, 2023 (draft - actual date) May 18, 2023 (final - original date) August ,2023 (final - actual date)
	Square post with EHC & Trochu graphics to advertise What We Heard Report	May 18, 2023

### 1.4.4 IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Through discussions with local administration, potential housing stakeholders were identified to participate in the interviews and discussion groups as part of the community engagement process. The intention of these conversations was to gather a variety of perspectives about the unique housing needs, challenges, and opportunities in the community. By engaging with housing stakeholders from different areas of expertise, a more comprehensive understanding of the housing situation in each community could be prepared.

Interview and discussion group participants included the following:

- Elected Officials (Councils & Mayors)
- Realtors, Landlords & Property Managers
- Non-Profit Housing Organizations
- Economic Development Officers
- Chief Administrative Officers
- Developers & Homebuilders
- Planning Consultants
- Planners from Municipalities & Planning Commissions,
- Local Businesses
- Community Residents

### 1.4.5 CONDUCTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Following the preparation of an engagement strategy and identifying key stakeholders, the EHC team conducted community engagement with each partner community. While each community had distinctive engagement needs outlined in their strategies, the engagement approach for the partner communities generally consisted of:

- Community Surveys (online or paper copies)
  - Key Actor Interviews
  - Focus Group Sessions
  - Open House/Town Hall Meetings
- 

### 1.4.6 WHAT WE HEARD REPORTS

Findings from the community engagement were compiled into comprehensive **"What We Heard" Reports**. These reports provided detailed summaries of the insights, concerns, and feedback gathered from residents, housing stakeholders, and other community members regarding housing diversity challenges and opportunities.

These reports were shared with the municipality, stakeholders, and the broader community, to allow the opportunity to review and reflect on the various perspectives and issues that were raised. These reports ensured transparency through the process, and provided a community-informed foundation for addressing housing diversity and developing effective solutions.

**Note:** Based on the scope of each partner municipality's Community Engagement Strategy, **"What We Heard" Reports** were only written for the following communities:

- The Town of Bow Island
- The Town of Claresholm
- The Town of Pincher Creek
- The Town of Trochu

**NOTE:** To access the EHC **"What We Heard Reports"**, please visit: [ruraldevelopment.ca/resources](https://ruraldevelopment.ca/resources)

## 1.4.7 RECOMMENDATIONS REPORTS

The **"What We Heard" Reports** were instrumental in informing the preparation of the **Recommendations Reports** for each partner community. These reports, collaboratively prepared between the EHC Team and the partner communities, outlined the unique housing needs, challenges and opportunities specific to each community.

The **Recommendations Reports** emphasized:

**The Importance of Housing Diversity:** Emphasizing the significance of diverse housing options to meet the community's needs.

**Overview of Housing Challenges & Needs:** Providing a comprehensive overview of the housing-related challenges and barriers each community faced.

**Policy Incentive Solutions:** Exploring potential policy incentives to promote diverse housing development.

**Land Use Bylaw Updates:** Suggesting updates to enable more flexible zoning that will encourage diverse housing types.

**Areas of Opportunity:** Identifying ongoing and future opportunities for municipalities to achieve more diverse housing.

**NOTE:** To access the EHC **"Recommendations Reports"**, please visit: [ruraldevelopment.ca/resources](https://ruraldevelopment.ca/resources)

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## PHASE 3: PROGRESS MONITORING & GUIDEBOOK DEVELOPMENT

This section provides an overview of the third phase of the **Enabling Housing Choice Project**. Following the completion of the recommendations report for each of the six partner communities, follow-up meetings were conducted so that their progress with the suggested actions could be monitored. While discussions also included general thoughts about the project, the questions below formed the basis of the follow-up meetings :

## **PROGRESS MONITORING QUESTIONS:**

- 1. Which recommendation(s) have you decided to work on first?**
- 2. What issues/challenges are you discovering?**
- 3. What's going well or what's working well?**
- 4. What have you changed or not changed?**
- 5. What additional information have you discovered about a certain subject?**
- 6. How can we support you in moving forward with these recommendations(s)?**
- 7. What's the next task you're planning to take on?**

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### **1.5.1 PARTNER PROGRESS MONITORING**

Given that each project partnership had various start and end dates, it was expected that each partner community would vary in the progress made on the recommendations outlined in the reports.

Additionally, each partner differed in terms of overall **resources, capacity, and political willingness** to take housing action in their community. This emphasizes the reality that the road to enabling housing diversity is often a slow and incremental one, with success taking shape in many different forms and over a variety of time frames.

While the progress of each partner community will continued to be monitored, this guidebook also outlines some of the key achievements and milestones that have been made by the partner communities.

**NOTE:** If you're interested in staying up to date with the ongoing progress of the EHC partner communities, please email [\*\*info@ruraldevelopment.ca\*\*](mailto:info@ruraldevelopment.ca)



## 1.5.2 GUIDEBOOK DEVELOPMENT

One of the primary deliverables of the EHC project is this Guidebook, where the findings, discussions and outcomes of the ***Enabling Housing Choice Project*** are compiled and disseminated for public use.

Understanding that lengthy documents are burdensome to read, the EHC Team chose to divide the Guidebook into 8 separate modules. This modular approach is intended to allow readers to more easily access the specific discussions around housing diversity and the solutions that are being suggested to enabling diverse housing development in rural communities. The intent is to make the information both accessible and concise.

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The ***Guide for Diversifying Housing in Rural Communities*** consists of the following modules:

**Module 1:** An Introduction to the ***Enabling Housing Choice Project***

**Module 2:** The Importance of Housing Diversity

**Module 3:** Identifying Diverse Housing Needs

**Module 4:** Enabling Housing Diversity Through Land Use Bylaw Updates

**Module 5:** Enabling Diverse Housing Through Policy Incentives

**Module 6:** Enabling Housing Through Community Engagement, Collaboration & Capacity-Building

**Module 7:** Moving Forward With Solutions For Housing Diversity

**Module 8:** Additional Policy Resources For Housing Diversity



## **1.6 PHASE 4: KNOWLEDGE-SHARING**

At the heart of this project lies our desire to make the research findings accessible and attainable to communities facing similar challenges in fostering diverse housing development. We recognize that housing is a critical issue of national importance, necessitating shared and collaborative solutions.

It is our belief that we hold a responsibility to contribute to these solutions by disseminating this research as broadly as possible. By sharing our insights, we aspire to empower communities with the knowledge and tools essential for providing sustainable housing options that address the diverse needs of their residents.

This section briefly explores the various ways in which we will promote the Guidebook and the collective knowledge of the numerous housing industry professionals, municipal staff and community residents we had the privilege of working with.

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### **1.6.1 CONFERENCES AND TRADESHOWS**

The EHC team had the privilege of attending several conferences, and trade-shows to promote the research and findings, including:

- Alberta Municipalities Convention and Trade Show 2024
- Alberta Professional Planner's Institute Conference 2024
- Canadian Housing & Renewal Association Conference 2024
- Community Planning Association of Alberta Conference 2024
- Rural Municipalities of Alberta Conference 2024

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### **1.6.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE PROMOTION**

In addition to sharing our findings at various conferences and tradeshow, the EHC Team is developing an online promotional campaign that will be shared on the Rural Development Network's website and social media platforms.



**Email:** [info@ruraldevelopment.ca](mailto:info@ruraldevelopment.ca)  
**Website:** [ruraldevelopment.ca/resources](http://ruraldevelopment.ca/resources)