

Aki Energy – Providing Innovative Solutions to Address Climate Change and Create Jobs!

As one of Manitoba’s premier social enterprises and Indigenous-based businesses, Aki Energy sells solutions to problems. And not only do they sell solutions to pressing issues like affordable energy and reducing carbon emissions, their aim is to create employment opportunities and capacity in every First Nations community they work with.

Aki (an Oji-Cree word meaning Earth) puts a novel spin on the not-for-profit business model by selling outcomes that governments want, be it at local, provincial, or federal levels. Reduced utility bills, fewer people on social assistance, reduced carbon emissions, employment benefits are three outcomes that governments are interested in buying.



Source: <http://www.akienergy.com/about-aki-energy>

While Aki Energy has done some work in the four remaining off-grid First Nations in Manitoba, most of the nearly 700 renewable energy retrofits have been done in grid-connected communities and all with First Nation labour. The energy comes right from the community’s own backyard, rather than importing electricity.

Aki describes its business as ground-breaking, literally and figuratively.

Geothermal energy (also known as ground source heat pumps) systems move fluid through pipes installed below the frostline. The fluid warms up as it circulates. The fluid is pumped into buildings during the winter where the heat is extracted and dumped into the house before it returns cooler to circulate once more through the loop. The opposite happens in the summer. Heat is taken from the house and dumped into the loop. The system mimics your refrigerator which takes heat from the fridge chamber and dumps it into the kitchen through the loop at the back of the appliance.

In terms of benefits, on average, Aki’s geothermal energy systems deliver a 50% reduction in heating and cooling costs...a whopping \$1000 saved annually for every household. And that’s not all! Aki’s social enterprise business model includes training and certifying First Nations workers to install, maintain, and troubleshoot their geothermal units, building local capacity in key trades including plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and heavy equipment operation. For every 100 homes retrofitted, there is approximately \$1 million in labour. To date, Aki has helped communities install \$25 million worth of geothermal energy systems.

Case Study

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Aki's plan is to spread the model throughout Canada. They are partnering with Raven Indigenous Capital Partners that secures the procurement agreement with governments and also arranges the upfront financing that Aki needs to train people and do the installs. The secret is in understanding the power of turning governments from being a funder into selling them the impact that the model has on government systems. In essence turning governments from a funder into a customer. Darcy Wood, Aki Energy's CEO says it's easier for governments to recognize the cost-saving value of their work this way.

In a 2022 article by the National Observer, Darcy Wood, former Chief of the Garden Hill First Nation, highlights that their business model leverages financing from Manitoba Hydro and other sources, together with bulk purchases from suppliers, to help accomplish a defining issue in Canada which is "connecting the people who most need the work with the work that most needs to be done".

For more information visit <http://www.akienergy.com/about-aki-energy>.