

Decarbonizing Tribal Community Housing Utilizing Local Workforce
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ABSTRACT

A Tribal community in Minnesota has raised funds to realize their vision of decarbonizing all 100 homes on the reservation, the majority of which are manufactured homes. With funding from several sources including multiple federal agencies and multiple utilities, the Tribal community worked with a local energy nonprofit to conduct energy audits, develop scopes of work, procure contractors for retrofits, and perform quality assurance. The work focused on health and safety, electrification, and building envelope improvements. Decarbonizing manufactured homes in cold climates poses technical challenges such as available equipment, space constraints, and fuel cost considerations. The team tapped into internal expertise and worked with skilled contractors to tackle these challenges.

The project team spent time early on engaging with Tribal community members to gather feedback and communicate program details. This generated strategic buy-in from residents and developed trust between the project team and the community. Additionally, feedback and engagement led to developing a side-by-side workforce development program that trains Tribal members and relatives interested in residential home energy careers as an energy auditor, HVAC installer or technician, or insulation installer. The program offers paid classroom training, career navigation support, and on-the-job training with the goal of employment in the field. Co-creating a home retrofit and workforce development program enabled retrofit projects to be done by experienced contractors hiring Tribal members to work in their local community. This type of innovative place-based community driven decarbonization paired with workforce development is a model for scaling to other communities across the country.

Background

The Prairie Island Indian Community (PIIC) is a federally recognized Tribal Nation of the Dakota Oyate (people). The community is located about 45 miles southeast of Minneapolis, Minnesota and is just to the west of the Mississippi River. PIIC has several initiatives grounded in their values of stewardship, including a goal to be one of the first net zero emissions Tribal communities in the country. They are working toward this goal through multiple projects and programs, all of which are housed within their Net Zero Program (Prairie Island 2026).

PIIC is located next to an operational nuclear power plant and hazardous waste site. The power plant was built fifty years ago without proper tribal consultation, and there are no current plans for Xcel Energy to close the site or move the waste elsewhere. In 1999, the state established a Renewable Development Account, as a condition of allowing the temporary storage of nuclear waste at Prairie Island. PIIC was finally able to apply to receive some of these funds in 2020, when the Minnesota Legislature approved a \$46.2 million appropriation to support the

Tribe's net zero goals, which prioritize efficiency, renewable energy generation, and energy resiliency and sovereignty. Within the first two years of the program, PIIC began building a large 5.4 MW community solar installation and a geothermal system large enough to heat and cool the tribe's one-million square foot commercial casino and resort facility (Prairie Island 2026).

In 2023, PIIC launched EnergyWise, a residential efficiency and electrification retrofit program, with Center for Energy and Environment (CEE), a Minnesota nonprofit, as their program implementor. Prior to the program, many of the existing PIIC tribal member homes lacked high-efficiency, low-carbon systems and equipment. This presented challenges for members, especially elders, including high bills in peak seasons, safety hazards, and occupant discomfort. The goal for EnergyWise program participants is to reduce carbon emissions and utility costs while improving durability, comfort, and reliance on fossil fuels.

Housing Stock and Available Programs

There are 100 existing homes on PIIC's Tribal land, including approximately 75 manufactured homes and 25 site-built homes. About 75% of the homes are heated with natural gas provided by Xcel Energy, while the remaining 25% use propane. All homes are served by Dakota Electric, a cooperative member-owned electric utility.

Prior to EnergyWise, community members could access tribal grant funds for limited home repairs, but there were no existing PIIC programs focused on residential energy efficiency and electrification. These homes could take advantage of prescriptive rebates from Xcel Energy and Dakota Electric, but adoption of these rebates by tribal members was low and there were no available whole-home retrofit programs that could holistically address the decarbonization goals in manufactured homes.

Contractor and Workforce Landscape

While the construction industry is projected to grow 8.2 percent in Southeast Minnesota from 2022–2032 (Blaschko 2025), there are shortages of HVAC contractors who install air source heat pumps and insulation contractors based in and around Prairie Island. According to the Xcel Energy Trade Partners rebate list (Xcel 2025), there are six HVAC contractors on the Central Air Conditioning rebate list based in Red Wing, about 12 miles from Prairie Island; however, only four of these contractors are eligible for air source heat pump rebates. None of these contractors are based in Prairie Island or the surrounding zip code. Even fewer contractors in this area do work in manufactured housing or are known to have any connection to Tribal community members.

Prairie Island continually seeks to help its community members and their relatives grow their knowledge, skills, and career opportunities, and has offered a variety of short and long-term trainings, internships, and jobs over the years, including those in building and energy trades. Examples include workforce development in general construction as well as clean energy systems and solar PV. The EnergyWise program offered a new opportunity for workforce development and career building for PIIC members, alongside anticipated contractor recruitment for project completions.

Since 2022, CEE has been delivering a paid workforce training program that prioritizes historically underrepresented groups in Minnesota — specifically Black, Indigenous, people of color, and women — in energy efficiency careers. CEE has received funding for workforce development from multiple sources, including foundations, cities, and counties, but the largest funding source has been from Xcel Energy through their Workforce Development and Education (WDE) program. The WDE Xcel Energy program is part of Minnesota’s Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) low-income portfolio. The primary goal of the WDE is to create several energy efficiency career pathways for unemployed and underemployed people from historically underserved communities (CEE 2026).

The initial geographic priority for the program was the Twin Cities metro, but in 2024 this expanded to include parts of Greater Minnesota, prioritizing Tribal communities in Xcel Energy territory. At the same time, PIIC was planning a workforce development initiative through EnergyWise and worked with CEE and Xcel to develop a joint initiative that brought together all parties’ budgets, goals, and efforts.

Home Retrofit Program Design and Delivery

EnergyWise was initially funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and another federal agency that withdrew some of the allocated funding in spring 2025. This would have been a significant program setback were it not for funding that PIIC received from Xcel Energy via Minnesota’s Natural Gas Innovation Act (NGIA) a few months later. The NGIA funds were nearly double what was withdrawn. With the combined budget from HUD and the NGIA, the program projects that approximately 60 homes will be able to participate in the program. The program also leverages more standard utility rebates from Dakota Electric Association and Xcel Energy as applicable.

To date, EnergyWise has conducted energy audits for 35 participants, and 24 participants have moved to the construction phase. The program has multiple steps that a participant completes with help and guidance from CEE and PIIC staff (Figure 1).



Figure 1. EnergyWise program steps

CEE staff guide participants through the program to ensure holistic work scope development that balances the goals of electrification and decarbonization while lowering utility bills. For the EnergyWise program to have the highest impact on a limited per-household budget,

CEE develops project recommendations by first identifying and addressing any environmental hazards found during the HUD-required environmental review and health and safety concerns, then planning for core efficiency measures paired with advanced and electrified systems, heat pump appliances and windows. Most of the participants receive a scope of work that includes both core and advanced measures (Figure 2).

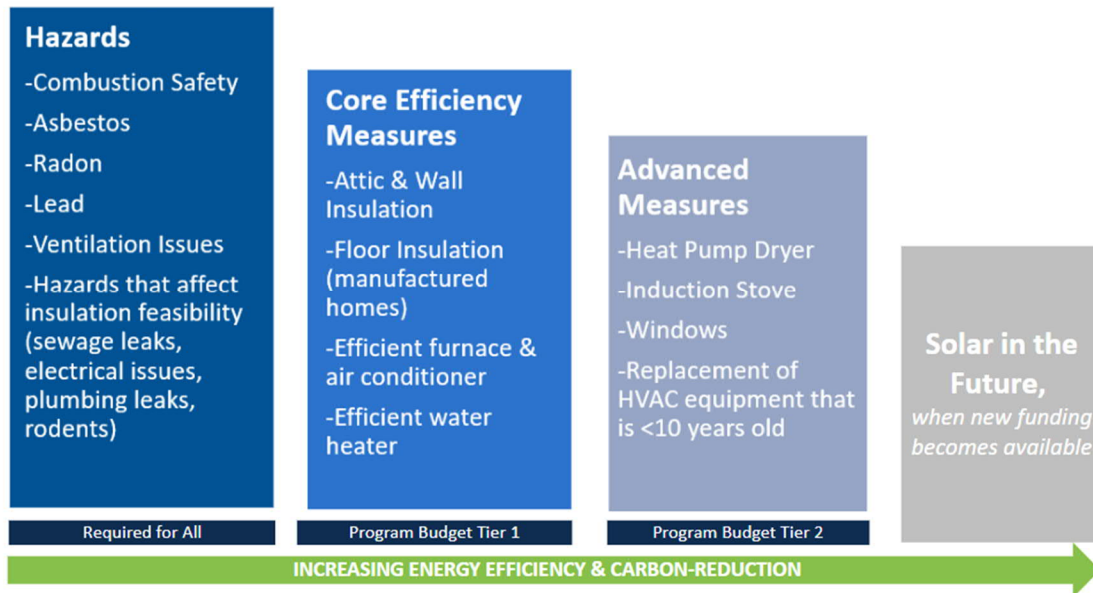


Figure 2. EnergyWise measure list and prioritization bundles

Contractor Procurement

Due to contractor shortages and funding procurement requirements, the project team initiated a competitive request for proposals (RFP) to recruit partnering contractors. Despite being only 45 minutes away from a densely populated metro region, PIIC and its surrounding community have limited contractors who work on manufactured housing and who have expertise in air source heat pumps or weatherization.

This RFP sought contractors who were credentialed within their trade, had experience working with Tribal communities, had experience working in manufactured homes, and were a part of (or willing to join) the utility rebate program. Previous work with Tribal communities was especially important in the selection process as we had heard from community members that there was distrust of contractors working in homes.

The RFP was posted on CEE's website and shared with various contractor networks. The project team also sought contractors in the area who had experience with federally funded projects and met Prairie Island's preference for tribal-owned businesses under its Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance (TERO) (Prairie Island 2022) or had Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) status. Meeting tribal preference would mean the business is owned by an

enrolled member of PIIC or another tribe, is a relative of an enrolled PIIC Tribal member, or has experience working with PIIC or other Tribal Nations.

Through this process, the project team selected a mechanical contractor, an insulation contractor, and a radon mitigation contractor for EnergyWise project work. The owner of the selected mechanical contractor is enrolled in a different Tribal Nation. The insulation contractor had some previous experience working with Tribal communities, and the radon contractor has at least one other contract directly with PIIC. The partnering insulation contractor suggested the use of AeroSeal, an innovative duct-sealing product, to achieve better duct tightness and reduce labor. This proved to be much more effective for duct sealing than traditional methods, so it was included in most of the manufactured homes' work scopes. This was an easy shift because the cost was only marginally higher (generally \$300 to \$500 more for installation).

Community Engagement and Outreach

EnergyWise accepts new participants in rounds. Each round begins with an engagement and outreach phase focused on recruiting new participants to schedule an energy audit. For the first round in fall 2024, CEE not only had to introduce and explain a complex program but also begin to build trust. During the sign-up period, CEE attended community meetings and tabled at community events. Trusted PIIC staff often introduced CEE and co-presented program information to the community. For many of the first events, CEE staff included the primary program auditor, quality assurance manager, outreach staff, as well as the PIIC program manager. It was important for the community to meet the team and understand their roles before asking participants to let practitioners into their homes.

CEE sent mailers, emails, and texts to Tribal members encouraging them to learn about this new offering and consider signing up for an audit. PIIC was provided with social media toolkits, which were used on their internal community website, a trusted and well-trafficked source for information. CEE also created a [webpage](#) where members could learn more about the program and sign up through a simple form. The website was designed to be consistent with what was shared in meetings, and in email and mailed materials. In all cases, EnergyWise uses PIIC branding because it is familiar and trusted.

To date, CEE has offered three sign-up periods for EnergyWise. The first was in fall 2024, the second was in early summer 2025, and a third in spring 2026. During these periods, members are invited to voluntarily schedule an energy audit for their home. Given that Tribal members opt into the program, CEE has focused on trust and relationship building. Through all outreach channels, members are asked to fill out the sign-up form on the PIIC website to schedule an energy audit. This step triggers the CEE program coordinator to communicate directly with participants ahead of the audit to establish trust, answer any questions, and prepare members for their home visit.

The team has shifted messaging slightly in each round to adapt to changes in uptake and increasing trust with the program. For example, outreach for the third round focuses on reengaging roughly 20 members who have filled out the webform during previous rounds but have not completed their energy audit.

Energy Audits, Modeling, and Scope Development

The initial on-site work begins with a comprehensive energy audit that includes the following:

- A comprehensive visual inspection of the home's attic and exterior walls and the underside (belly) of any manufactured home
- A blower door test with infrared images
- Combustion safety tests on gas-powered furnace and water heaters
- Collecting the age and type of existing heating and cooling systems, water heater, range, and dryer
- A visual inspection to identify significant signs of mold or water damage or the presence of vermiculite, asbestos, or pests that ought to be addressed before weatherization
- Data collection needed for modeling the recommended upgrades in EkoTrove
- Homeowner survey to inform HUD-required environmental reviews

Once the visit is completed, CEE uses EkoTrove modeling software to understand the expected energy savings, emissions reductions, and bill impacts of the recommended projects. The modeling also helps CEE identify an economical switchover temperature for homes receiving a dual fuel air source heat pump paired with a furnace. The modeled bill savings and emissions reductions for the first 24 projects are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Modeled savings of individual PIIC homes

Site	House Type	Bill Savings (per year)	% Bill Savings (per year)	CO2 Savings (tons per year)	Current Home Heating Fuel
1	Manufactured	\$558	17%	1.9	Natural gas
2	Manufactured	\$313	17%	3.4	Natural gas
3	Manufactured	\$375	12%	1.7	Natural gas
4	Manufactured	\$271	15%	1.5	Natural gas
5	Manufactured	\$165	5%	1	Natural gas
6	Manufactured	\$556	17%	5.2	Natural gas
7	Manufactured	\$1,484	26%	4.7	Propane
8	Manufactured	\$283	15%	3.4	Natural gas
9	Single Family	\$286	11%	2.4	Natural gas
10	Single Family	TBD	TBD	TBD	Natural gas
11	Manufactured	\$424	17%	0.6	Natural gas
12	Single Family	\$240	12%	1.6	Natural gas
13	Manufactured	\$338	11%	0.3	Propane
14	Manufactured	\$476	15%	3.4	Natural gas
15	Single Family	\$609	21%	3	Propane
16	Single Family	\$370	12%	-1	Natural gas

17	Manufactured	\$330	10%	3.5	Natural gas
18	Manufactured	\$1,158	16%	7.1	Propane
19	Manufactured	\$242	8%	3.3	Natural gas
20	Manufactured	\$125	2%	1.7	Natural gas
21	Manufactured	\$1,757	36%	6.1	Propane
22	Single Family	\$189	6%	5.6	Natural gas
23	Manufactured	\$1,179	35%	7.5	Natural gas
24	Single Family	\$425	18%	-2	Natural gas
TOTAL		\$12,153.00		65.90	
Average		\$506.38	15%	2.75	

Once the modeling is done, a simple summary report is shared with participants along with a draft work scope. CEE's project coordinator presents this information and answers any questions or concerns they have. Participants are allowed to decline any part of the work scope, as long as health and safety issues are addressed and a newly installed heat pump can still perform optimally. While a few participants have decided that they were no longer interested in the program for logistical reasons, most participants approved the full scope. The fact that these projects are done at no cost to the participant certainly motivates acceptance of the full scope. However, CEE takes time during this call and during the audit to demonstrate how the house is a system and how individual projects benefit others. For example, an auditor would explain how insulation and a new, ideally paired furnace improve the performance and efficiency of a cold climate heat pump.

Project Completions and Quality Assurance

Once scopes of work are approved, qualified contractors complete the prescribed work. To date, all 20 participants with approved mechanical projects have had new systems installed. Five of the seventeen approved insulation projects have been completed. Two single-family insulation projects will be done before the end of winter 2026. The remaining approved insulation projects are scheduled for April and May 2026.

Most of the participating homes are manufactured, and most of those received both mechanical and insulation recommendations. To limit penetrations to the manufactured home's newly insulated belly, CEE recommended mechanical systems be installed before insulation work is done. Unfortunately, in the fall while the mechanical contractor waited for delayed equipment to arrive, the colder winter temperatures came first. By the time the equipment was installed, the conditions were too cold and snowy for the insulation crews to work safely under manufactured homes and to properly cure the insulation and duct-sealing products used by the insulation contractor.

This protracted installation period means that the quality assurance (QA) team will perform two separate inspections for these projects in most houses for the mechanical and

insulation work. To date, all inspections have passed. QA inspections are thorough and include the following:

- Paperwork coordination
 - Ensuring that warranty information has been shared
 - Collecting contractor photos
 - Collecting AeroSeal certificates if applicable
- Insulation work
 - Visual inspection and diagnostics (infrared, blower door test, pressure pan testing if applicable)
- Continuous fan
 - Visual inspection, test CFM (low and high), adjust as needed, homeowner education
- Water heaters
 - Visual inspection, compare to work scope
- Mechanical systems
 - Visual inspection, check switchover temperature
 - Diagnostics: airflow and static pressure testing

Once the work passes inspection, CEE receives the final invoices from the contractors, gets confirmation that the rebates have been submitted, and collects the final approval of work completed by participant.

Workforce Development Program Design and Delivery

Initial program design conversations for workforce development began in summer 2024. Originally, PIIC and CEE discussed offering a short introductory paid training, a few days to one-week in length, for five to ten Tribal members and relatives, with the goal of pairing training with shadowing EnergyWise audits. Through continued conversations, it became clear that a short training format would not be the best fit to achieve the desired outcomes of long-term career development and support. It was concluded that a successful workforce program should train participants in relevant credentials that could be used right away on homes at Prairie Island and provide paid classroom training with opportunities for on-the-job training that could lead to long-term career paths in residential energy efficiency.

The three-week classroom training introduces PIIC and surrounding area community members to building science and careers in home energy. It also includes work-readiness topics like communication, resume writing, and interview skills. The building science topics follow the Building Performance Institute (BPI) Building Science Principles including house as a system, insulation, air sealing, and moisture transport. Hands-on activities like blower door, air sealing, and thermal imaging allowed students to connect the building science topics to insulation and auditing careers.

To fund this effort, CEE and PIIC Net Zero Energy staff explored what it could look like to have a co-funded workforce training program. PIIC had funding earmarked for workforce development training from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). They recognized these funds

could go farther if they were braided with CEE’s Xcel Energy funding. Since both funding sources had similar goals, the team sought Xcel’s support for co-funding this Home Energy Career training program.

Co-funding Model

Xcel Energy committed to funding 10 out of the 20 participants’ stipends, Building Science Principles (BSP) test exam fees, and the cost for some CEE trainer staff time for recruitment and instruction. The 10 Xcel-funded participants would be from Red Wing and surrounding communities, while PIIC would use BIA funding for Tribal members and relatives. Given the unemployment rate in the area and lack of short-term training opportunities in energy efficiency, Xcel and CEE recognized there was still an opportunity for non-PIIC members in Southeast Minnesota to further their careers in this field.

Based on feedback from PIIC, it was proposed that the wages during the internship should be raised to \$20 per hour instead of the \$18.50 per hour Xcel Energy was paying to fund intern wages through the Minneapolis-based trainings. Concerns were raised that \$18.50 per hour would not be a high enough wage to attract PIIC members and relatives to these positions and may cause some to think these career options were not viable. CEE did some wage research and found that the average wages offered for Goodhue County, where Prairie Island is located, were at \$21–23/hour for someone working in 'installation, maintenance, and repair' or 'construction & extraction' careers in 2024 (MN DEED 2024). Based on this information, Xcel approved an increase to \$20 per hour for this co-funded cohort.

Participant Outreach

PIIC staff emphasized the need to align with TERO guidance to “promote business development, expand employment and training opportunities, and protect the rights of tribal members.” PIIC’s TERO Manager advised the program team to develop clear outreach language to communicate eligibility, available space in each phase, and the wages/stipends to expect. Prairie Island wanted to ensure their members felt supported and encouraged to apply, so they offered an additional bonus stipend to incentivize participation. Outreach and marketing materials were developed for this program to reflect PIIC staff guidance (Figure 3).




Are you looking for work in a fast-growing industry?

Prairie Island Paid Home Energy Career Training

Earn a **\$550 stipend per week** and an industry-recognized credential in Building Science Principles (BSP). Additional bonus stipends will be given to participants after completing milestones in the program and on-the-job experience. **Ten spots will be held for Prairie Island Tribal Members and their spouses, domestic partners, or dependents.**

Paid three-week training

Paid On-the-Job Experience

After completing the initial training, **three** Prairie Island community members may continue to a 14-week paid on-the-job experience with CEE. You'll receive additional training with local weatherization and residential insulation contractors. Additional bonus stipends will be available to Prairie Island trainees.

Register Today!

Visit mncee.org/Career-Training
For questions, call **651.380.0548**



Sponsored by  Administered by 

This program is co-funded by Prairie Island Indian Community and Xcel Energy.

Cohort Begins:
July 21
Register Now!
Deadline is
July 14

On-the-Job Trainee Wage:
\$20
per hour

Starting Industry Wages:
Insulation Installer
\$20-\$25
per hour
Energy Auditor
\$21-\$27
per hour

Training Includes:

- Basics of building performance, home energy audits, and insulation and air sealing
- Opportunity to earn industry-recognized, stackable credentials
- Hands-on skills needed for residential insulation, energy auditing, and HVAC careers
- Exposure to cutting-edge technologies from industry experts
- Transportation support services (e.g., bus cards, gas cards)

Qualifications

- 18 years or older at the time of enrollment
- PIIC Tribal Members and their spouses, domestic partners, or dependents
- Legally authorized to work in the U.S.
- Must have a valid driver's license
- High school diploma or GED equivalent required

Figure 3. PIIC Home Energy Career Training flyer

Throughout the planning process, CEE and Prairie Island worked closely together to determine the training location and timing that would make the most sense for PIIC members and relatives. The annual powwow, or Wacipi, takes place in early July at Prairie Island and brings together Tribal members and families from across the state. It was determined that the Home Energy Career training would need to take place a week after the Wacipi to allow ample time for travel and ensure there were no conflicting activities.

To recruit and promote this opportunity to PIIC Tribal members and relatives, CEE staff attended community events, including a public safety day and an annual health fair. CEE workforce development staff also presented at a community meeting held a month prior to the training start date. In 2026, PIIC also included the Home Energy Career Training program flyer in their monthly newsletter that is sent out to all PIIC members. This allowed members and relatives to hear about the Home Energy Career training in multiple locations from trusted sources.

Wraparound Services Support

Each week, students received a \$40 gas card to support their ability to get to class. Participants were also provided breakfast every morning. The program partnered with a community-based organization, Workforce Development Inc. (WDI), a nonprofit agency that serves job seekers and employers throughout Southeast Minnesota. Representatives from WDI spoke to the class about the support services and programs available. WDI worked with the program to distribute support service funds to workforce trainees at the end of the on-the-job training.

Paid On-the-Job Training and Placements

In the second week of the class, six interested students applied and were interviewed for a Workforce Trainee position with CEE. The CEE trainers then selected four students to advance to on-the-job training. Participants were selected based on attendance, building science understanding, and interest in the available career paths. Those selected for the on-the-job training attended an additional three-day training after graduation. This training included two practice energy audits in nearby homes and a visit to a training lab with heating and cooling equipment.

After the three-day training, participants were placed with approved EnergyWise contractors and other local employers to further develop their skills over a 14-week period. The trainees became temporary employees of CEE, earning \$20/hour and 40 hours of PTO. Three out of the four trainees selected for the paid on-the-job experience were PIIC Tribal members. Being placed with approved EnergyWise contractors allowed PIIC member participants to lead energy efficiency installations and upgrades in their family and community members' homes.

EnergyWise Project Outcomes

In the early planning phases of the program, there was some concern that members wouldn't be interested in signing up for the EnergyWise program. Through thoughtful execution of outreach utilizing trusted messengers, trust building events, and listening sessions, the program was able to recruit over one-third of the Tribal members in the first year and a half. Round three already has a waiting list as positive word of mouth has spread across the community.

As the project team inspects work from rounds one and two, there have been better-than-expected results. The initial group of manufactured homes that received the AeroSeal duct treatment saw large duct leakage reductions, ranging between 87% and 96%. The insulation contractor shared that comparable reductions have not been possible using traditional duct sealing methods in manufactured homes. The same group of houses saw moderate to great air leakage reductions, between 11% and 52% with the combined duct sealing and spot air sealing treatments that they received. The average cost for the AeroSeal treatment was \$3,650, slightly more than the traditional treatment costs. With improved ductwork, the air source heat pump will perform even better than expected in these homes.

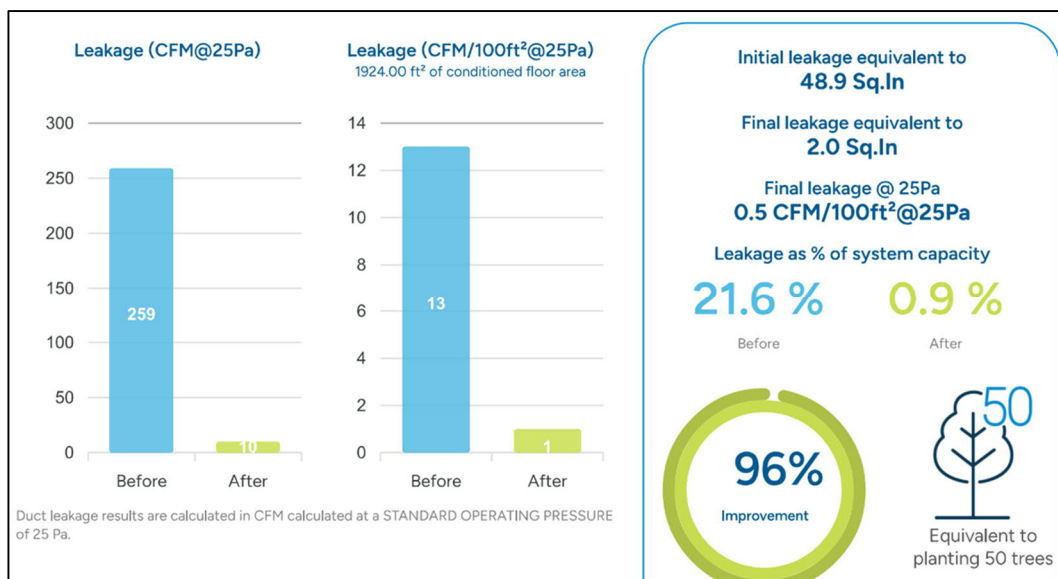


Figure 4. Example of duct leakage and air leakage results after AeroSeal duct sealing

EkoTrobe modeling consistently demonstrated that a dual fuel approach was the best way to balance PIIC's desire to decarbonize without raising utility bills. In all dual fuel systems, the cold climate air source heat pump is set as the primary unit, and the natural gas or propane furnace is the secondary system.

The planned per-household budget using HUD and NGIA funds is \$30,000 for homes needing significant, core energy improvements. Using other leveraged funds available like

applicable utility rebates, many home projects have come in under budget with a work scope costing an average of \$24,485. This allows for further investment in additional advanced measures in the future phases. Other factors that contribute to being under budget include fewer health and safety projects than originally expected. As of summer 2026, the program has not needed to repair or replace any windows. Furthermore, the fact that a great number of participating homes have needed significant improvements also demonstrates the tremendous value the program provides to tribal members and the uncertainty of whether these improvements would have been made—and associated cost- and energy-saving benefits realized—without programmatic support.

Next Steps

The program team will be launching round three in 2026 to recruit approximately 30-35 more participants. As the community becomes more familiar with the program work, we have seen increased interest in participation, and we anticipate more interest within a shorter sign-up window.

In 2026 we will also be adding an appliance vender to the contractor list to start adding highly efficient electric appliances to homes as part of the advanced measures list. Based on available funding after the core measures are installed for all interested participants, the project team will evaluate the of additional advanced measures like windows and replacements of younger HVAC equipment.

Workforce Program Outcomes

As a result of the pilot Home Energy Career Training in partnership with Prairie Island, 13 participants completed the training, achieving a 100% BSP certification rate (Table 2). Nearly 70% of graduates were Tribal members, and one member who graduated from the program said, “This (training) was empowering and gave me confidence in my own journey, becoming greener and also for my career path.” Another graduate shared, “I now have a much better understanding of energy use and costs and what makes a house energy efficient. I understand the heating and cooling systems, and the benefits and limitations of each.”

Table 2. Workforce program participation results

Community Membership	Started Class	Completed Class	Earned BSP Certificate	Started On-the-Job Training	Completed On-the-Job Training
Prairie Island Participants	10	9	9	3	2
SE MN Participants	4	4	4	1	1

When asked about their experience in working with WDE and CEE staff, PIIC staff shared: “The collaboration with CEE was a great experience and provided meaningful opportunities for PIIC members to gain hands-on experience in clean energy careers. Working

with industry and nonprofit partners went very well, which led to employment opportunities for some members, and overall was a positive experience that I hope to see more of in the future.”



Figure 5: Graduates and participants of PIIC pilot Home Energy Career Training

On the final day of class, the PIIC members and relatives completed a survey about their interest in further clean energy career training. Among the results, heat pump installation and maintenance and green construction and sustainable building design were among the “most interested” training areas.

After the classroom training, four participants went on to the paid on-the-job experience in residential insulation, HVAC, or energy auditing. One participant had to resign due to family commitments, but all other trainees successfully completed the training. One trainee shared feedback at end of the training. When asked what benefited them most, they said: “Learning how weatherization programs work and how it benefits the community they serve and how it helps the individuals. This was also my first time working outside of retail and hospitality and it gave me a different perspective on the working world.” Another trainee shared that “the knowledge, hands-on experience, innumerable qualities, memories, and experiences” were the most valuable portions of the training for them.

Next Steps

In 2026, PIIC and CEE plan to continue a co-funded workforce training model with another cohort. Based on feedback from participants and employers, CEE plans to extend the initial training by one additional week to incorporate training on OSHA 10 certification in addition to the BSP. The OSHA 10 certification will add another credential to participants’ portfolio, one that is more widely recognized by contractors in the construction industry. Feedback from employers indicated that they would like to see more training upfront on safety and increased comfort and awareness of how to use a variety of hand tools. CEE plans to incorporate more training with hand tools earlier on in the training program.

With feedback from participants in 2025, CEE and Prairie Island are placing more emphasis on providing training that could lead to greater long-term employment opportunities. In addition to offering the OSHA 10 certification, CEE plans to spend a greater portion of their Home Energy Career training curriculum on cold climate air source heat pumps, including sizing

and load calculations. This will give participants who go on to train as HVAC technicians more fundamental training to rely on. CEE is also considering offering BPI's new Cold Climate Air Source Heat Pump Assessor certification for participants interested in HVAC. This certification shows someone "has the knowledge to evaluate residential buildings for cold climate air source heat pump readiness and retrofit potential" (BPI 2025).

In planning for the next co-funded Home Energy Career Training, CEE and PIIC are focusing on strengthening ties with social service nonprofits, like WDI, and increasing exposure to Indigenous high school seniors at the surrounding area community school in Red Wing. Prairie Island Net Zero staff plan to present one to two times with Red Wing's Indigenous student association and gauge interest to determine if an introductory training could be a useful recruitment strategy for the next cohort in July 2026.

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