



**BUSINESS
+ HIGHER
EDUCATION**
ROUNDTABLE

BUILDING AHEAD OF DEMAND: WHY CANADA'S ENERGY ADVANTAGE DEPENDS ON BUILDING CAPACITY BEFORE IT'S NEEDED

JUNE 2026

Canada is entering one of the largest energy buildouts in generations.

Across the country, billions of dollars are being invested in nuclear energy, hydroelectric infrastructure, critical minerals, LNG, mining, and clean energy projects.

Canada has the resources and investment opportunities to become an energy leader. The question is whether we can build the capacity required to deliver on that potential.

The most successful energy projects are already showing what that looks like. They are planning workforce needs before labour shortages emerge. They are building supply chains that can support multiple projects over time. And they are establishing partnerships with Indigenous and local communities early enough to shape project success.



In other words, they are operating ahead of demand rather than reacting to it. In a period of rapid energy expansion, the capacity to anticipate and prepare may become one of Canada's most important competitive advantages.

What does that capacity look like in practice?

1. BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPACITY BEFORE IT IS NEEDED.

The most successful energy projects do not wait for labour shortages to emerge before investing in talent. They treat workforce development as a core part of project delivery, building capacity years before demand peaks.

Hydro-Québec, in partnership with the provincial government, has [committed hundreds of millions of dollars](#) to expand training capacity and prepare more than 5,000 workers for the energy transition and future electricity infrastructure needs.

Nuclear company Bruce Power has [invested heavily in continuous upskilling](#) as a core part of its operating model. Their goal is to retain experienced staff and keep them agile for changing business needs through robust systems that track, develop, and support employee training over time, in partnership with post-secondary institutions.





OPG's Darlington refurbishment also demonstrates the value of securing a deep domestic supply chain. By creating a network of qualified suppliers with the experience and capability to support future builds, OPG can use many of the same key partners from Darlington for their [upcoming Pickering refurbishment](#).

Beyond upgrading existing technology, Canada is also investing in the development of small modular reactors (SMRs). [Partnerships](#) between GE Vernova, OPG, SaskPower, and Canadian manufacturer BWXT are [helping establish standardized supply chains](#) for a common reactor design. By standardizing the system, qualified suppliers can be reused across future projects, saving time and money while increasing confidence in project delivery.

The broader lesson is that supply chains are part of the delivery infrastructure. When suppliers, tools, standards, and processes are built for repeatability, each project creates capacity for the next.

3. ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS BEFORE PROJECTS DEPEND ON THEM.

Successful energy projects recognize that community and Indigenous partnerships cannot be added after a project is underway. They must be built early, integrated into project design, and structured to create long-term value for all participants.



Mining and minerals company Teck is [working directly with local institutions](#) like Selkirk College to align specific programs with operational needs through place-based education. Meanwhile, Cameco has [partnered with Saskatchewan Polytechnic](#) and the [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies](#) to build mining and nuclear workforce capacity in northern communities through co-designed programs and targeted initiatives to expand Indigenous participation and women in trades.

While these approaches differ, they share a common principle: workforce development is not treated as a response to labour demand. It is built into project planning from the outset, creating the capacity required to support growth before workforce constraints become barriers to delivery.

2. DESIGNING SUPPLY CHAINS BEFORE SCALE IS REQUIRED.

Major projects cannot be delivered as a series of one-off builds. To move quickly and reliably, Canada needs supply chains that can be reused, strengthened, and scaled across multiple projects over time.

The partnership between Ontario Power Generation (OPG) and Bruce Power shows how this can work in practice. With nuclear reactor refurbishment and major component replacement projects happening at the same time, OPG and Bruce Power are [sharing resources, tooling, and equipment](#) to reduce costs, manage risks, and improve on-time delivery. Unlike traditional models where each project builds its own supply chain, this approach allows one project to strengthen the next.



In Western Canada, Enbridge has developed one of the most comprehensive approaches to Indigenous economic participation, including [large-scale equity partnerships](#) and a growing [procurement base of Indigenous suppliers and businesses](#). These models connect communities directly to project outcomes, creating shared incentives and long-term alignment.

In Ontario, the [Saugeen Ojibway Nation-Bruce Power Gamzook'aamin aakoziwin isotopes partnership](#) creates generational economic opportunities for Indigenous partners to participate financially in the production of nuclear isotopes for use in clean energy and medical innovation.

And in northern Saskatchewan, Cameco has [intentionally structured its operations](#) to create a workforce that draws largely from the [surrounding northern and Indigenous communities](#). The company prioritizes local hiring and invests in long-term training and development through partnerships with community organizations and regional institutions.

While these approaches take different forms, they share a common principle: participation is built into the project from the beginning. When local and Indigenous communities are integrated into planning, procurement, workforce development, and ownership structures, projects gain the relationships, trust, and alignment needed to support long-term success.

SCALING WHAT WORKS.

Taken together, these examples point to a broader pattern: the strongest energy projects build capacity before they need it.

They plan workforce, supply chain, and partnership needs into the project from the beginning. They create systems that can be reused across multiple projects. And they act before constraints become barriers to delivery.

Canada does not need to invent this model. Across the country, organizations are already showing what works. The challenge is scaling it. Energy leadership will be determined by more than resources or investment. It will be determined by the ability to build.

AUTHORS:

Sunny Chan
Senior Content Specialist

Matthew McKean
Chief R&D Officer

Val Walker
Chief Executive Officer

BHER IS ADVANCING THIS WORK THROUGH ITS [BHER: ENERGY LEADERSHIP TABLE](#).

If you're a company or post-secondary institution that wants to help us address talent, training, and coordination challenges in Canada's energy sector, please reach out about BHER membership. These tables will be made up of current and new BHER members.

See more of our [Action Plan Series](#) and [Thought Leadership](#).