

- RETScreen is a software program that businesses can use to assess the cost-effectiveness of using renewable energy technologies.

Community Action

Sustainable development happens when communities and individual citizens take action. The Smart Communities Program encourages Canadian communities to use information and communication technologies in new and innovative ways to achieve better health care delivery, education, and business opportunities. Under the Sustainable Communities Initiative, Aboriginal, northern, and rural communities receive assistance in building their capacity to plan and make decisions. The initiative helps communities complete projects that address a community need through better access to geographical information sources and information-processing methods, improved communication and consultation tools, and more effective partnerships with governments, other communities, and the private sector.

Public Participation in Decision Making

Increasingly, Canadians want to participate in the decision-making and economic activities related to sustainable use or development of land and natural resources. A key vehicle for this participation is public consultation used to gather information and to help shape government policy and practice, as shown in the following examples.

- Public consultation is a key element of the sustainable development strategies required of all federal departments.
- The federal minister of finance receives advice in the form of pre-budget submissions from environmental groups, business, and other interested parties on various ways to integrate environmental considerations into the budget process.
- The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy takes an impartial, inclusive approach, with open and free debate, to issues related to the environment and the economy. It invites input from key stakeholders, assimilates research and consultation to clarify the debate, and distributes its conclusions and recommendations to the public.

EcoAction Community Funding Program

The EcoAction Community Funding Program is an Environment Canada program that provides financial support to community groups for projects that have measurable, positive impacts on the environment. Nonprofit groups and organizations are eligible to apply to the funding program. EcoAction encourages projects that protect, rehabilitate, or enhance the natural environment and build the capacity of communities to sustain these activities into the future. Projects require matching funds or in-kind support from other sponsors.

Smart Communities

Under its Smart Communities Program, the Government of Canada has committed \$60 million over three years to support the development of twelve Smart Community demonstration projects, one in each province, one in the North, and one in an Aboriginal community. A key component of the program is the sharing of information and expertise through the Smart Communities Resource Exchange, which integrates information of smart communities' best practices, applications, and technologies. The exchange also networks individuals, governments, companies, universities and colleges, and communities and allows them to share experience and set up alliances.