

**Voter Information Campaign:  
Pre-Event Testing of  
Communications Products**

Contract number: 05005-180079/001/CY

POR Registration Number: POR 007-18

Contract date: 2018-05-09

Report date: 2019-03-19

Phase III fieldwork date: March 4, 2019

Prepared for:

Elections Canada

Prepared by:

Environics Research Group

PA 9955

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For more information on this report:

[rop-por@elections.ca](mailto:rop-por@elections.ca)

## Executive summary

### Background and objectives

Elections Canada (EC) is an independent, non-partisan agency exercising general direction and supervision over federal-level elections and referenda. One key undertaking toward delivering on its mandate is the Voter Information Campaign, a multi-media communications and information strategy, implemented during a federal general election. EC develops advertising and communications campaigns to inform electors about where, when and how to register and to vote, including information regarding eligibility criteria and required identification.

Elections Canada required reliable data on electors' perceptions and comprehension of the communications products being prepared for the 43rd general election to guide campaign development. EC identified a need for qualitative and quantitative research to assess:

- comprehension of the messages;
- perceived strengths and weaknesses of visual components;
- perceived strength and weakness of the tagline;
- usefulness of the information;
- perceived targets of specific components; and
- impact on the elector's decision to register and/or vote (information campaign)
- impact on the elector's decision to participate in the democratic process in ways other than voting, for example, as poll worker (democratic engagement campaign).

This research involved three phases:

- **Phase 1** involved qualitative research (in-person or telephone/online focus groups in five locations, plus in-depth interviews) in spring 2018 to test two possible creative concepts.
- **Phase 2** involved a second wave of qualitative research (similar in design to Phase 1) as well as a quantitative (online) survey, in summer 2018, to test communications products for the final chosen concept.
- **Phase 3** involved qualitative research (online focus group with young Canadians), in spring 2019, as a check of two pre-writ videos not tested in the previous research phases, and to get input into a proposed influencer campaign to engage youth 18-24 and build their awareness of the 2019 federal election and about registering and voting.

### Methodology

For **Phase 1**, Environics conducted qualitative research to address the research objectives:

- A series of focus groups between June 4 and June 14, 2018, with members of the general public, as well as members of specific groups of people:
  - Youth (those aged 18-24);
  - Indigenous citizens (First Nations, Inuit, Metis);

- New Canadians (persons who have come to Canada within the past 10 years and who are now Canadian citizens);
- Persons with a physical disability
- Nine in-person sessions in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Vancouver and Whitehorse; one telephone/online session with individuals who have a physical disability. Eight sessions were conducted in English and two in French.
- Four (4) in-depth interviews on June 18 and 19 with individuals with a cognitive disability. These interviews took place in Ottawa and recruited through local service providers working with the target audience. Two of these interviews were conducted in English and two in French.

A more detailed description of the methodology is presented at the back of the report (Appendix A), along with copies of both the qualitative (Appendices B and C) and quantitative (Appendix D) research instruments.

For **Phase 2**, both qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to address the research objectives.

Environics conducted the following qualitative research activities:

- A series of focus groups between September 6 and September 17, 2018, with members of the general public, as well as members of specific groups of people:
  - Youth (those aged 18-24);
  - Indigenous citizens (First Nations, Inuit, Metis);
  - New Canadians (persons who have come to Canada within the past 10 years and who are now Canadian citizens);
  - Persons with a physical disability
- Nine in-person sessions in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Vancouver and Whitehorse, and one session via telephone/online with individuals with a physical disability. Eight sessions were conducted in English and two in French.
- Four (4) in-depth interviews on September 18 and 19, 2018 with individuals with a cognitive disability. These interviews took place in Ottawa and recruited through local service providers working with the target audience. Two of these interviews were conducted in English and two in French.

The Phase 2 quantitative research involved an online survey with members of an online panel age 25 and over, including a general population group and individuals from target groups of interest. As an online survey is a non-probability sample, no margin of sampling error can be reported. The survey took place from September 13 to 24, 2018. The following sample disposition was achieved:

Target group	Target (quota)	Actual Unweighted	Actual Weighted*
Total	1,300	1,361	1,361
General population (25+)	500	508	520
Young electors (18-24)	200	207	211
Indigenous electors	200	209	196
Disabled electors	200	230	220
Allophone/newcomer	200	207	214

For **Phase 3**, one online focus group was held on March 4, 2019 with Canadians aged 18-24 from Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

## Statement of limitations

Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable.

## Cost of research

The cost of this research was \$219,818.90 (HST included).

## Key findings

### Phase 1 qualitative findings

The first phase of this research evaluated two possible concepts for a voter information campaign being developed by Elections Canada for the 2019 federal election: **It's Our Vote** and **I Vote**.

- Throughout the country, focus group participants were more likely to react positively to the **It's Our Vote** concept, with most praising this concept for showing diverse groups of people and conveying a collective, unifying message. Of the two concepts presented, members of the general population and specific groups (Indigenous voters, persons with disabilities, new Canadians) generally preferred this concept.
- The **I Vote** concept, on the other hand, was regarded as being generally informative, but less compelling. The key reasons why voters were less inclined to prefer this concept were the presence of the large, multi-coloured and multi-patterned X in the different treatments, which many described as being distracting. The other key comment regarding this concept was that the images were not sufficiently diverse; most participants did not realize the different X patterns were meant to be unique to each of the individuals shown in the creative.
- Younger adults (particularly Francophones) were the only group to find the content of **I Vote** to be more appealing than **It's Our Vote**. Those who liked this concept felt it conveys a more personalized message and does so in a manner that is more likely to appeal to younger voters.
- Participants with a disability (cognitive or physical), as well as some without a disability, found the images of persons in a wheelchair to be inclusive and appealing. Many commented that they felt this conveys inclusion, particularly as persons with a disability are often not shown in advertisements.
- Participants generally liked the images used in both concepts and felt that they fit well with the content. The main exception to this was the image of the people with a birthday cake in the black-and-white print ad for **It's Our Vote**; several participants did not make the connection between the party (signifying turning 18) and being able to vote. There was also some confusion around the travel-related images in the early voting treatments of **It's Our Vote**.
- The discussion of the taglines revealed that focus group participants were more partial to a collective message (e.g. **It's Our Vote**) as opposed to a more individualistic message (e.g. **I Vote**, **It's Your Vote**). The reason that many participants gave for this view was that a more collective image ties Canadians together in the collective act of voting, whereas alternatives that are more directed to an individual are less compelling.

## Phase 2 qualitative findings

Based on the findings of the phase I research, Elections Canada selected the **It's Our Vote** concept for its voter information campaign. A range of communications products were then developed for the different phases of the 2019 federal election campaign period (pre-writ, registration, Voter Information Card, early voting and Election Day), as well as a Guide to the Federal Election brochure, calendar of key dates and two potential layouts for Elections Canada's website. In addition to evaluating these materials, the phase II focus group participants assessed two different versions of the "visual signature" developed for the voter information campaign.

- **Pre-writ:** Participants generally understood the pre-writ materials and like the inclusive tone ("be part of something that shapes our nation"). A main takeaway is that the inclusion of non-voting activities, such as working for Elections Canada and running for office, in these ads is confusing for many participants.
- **Registration:** Most participants understood that the registration ads are meant to encourage people to find out if they are registered to vote. Furthermore, most of the content in the web banner ads and infographic, and particularly the detail in the print ad, were regarded as helpful and informative. Suggestions for improvement were mainly related to the choice of some images and colours in the infographic.
- **Voter Information Card (VIC):** Materials regarding the VIC were perhaps the most well-received by participants, who found them to be clear, straightforward and informative. Participants thought it was especially helpful to show an example VIC in these ads so those who have never received one in the past know what it looks like.
- **Early voting:** Participants generally liked the information in the early voting infographic and ads, and particularly how these ads promote the idea of early voting as something that is easy to do. Many did not know that voting by mail is an option and found the information confusing and requiring clarification.
- **Election Day:** Participants were unclear about the purpose of the Election Day infographic and how it is meant to be used, in part due to confusion about the order of the different steps in the voter's checklist and the description of the four different ways to vote. Participants wanted the infographic to contain words describing these four voting options rather than relying solely on icons.
- **Guide to the Federal Election Brochure:** The brochure was regarded as the most comprehensive and informative item tested in these focus groups, because it is seen to provide detailed information in a single place about all of the different aspects of voting.
- **Calendar:** Participants felt the information in the calendar was useful, but that it could provide more details on the steps associated with each date. Most would prefer to receive this calendar in a physical format, such as a brochure or piece of direct mail, and did not anticipate looking for or finding it on Elections Canada's website.
- **Web page:** When assessing two different potential layouts for Elections Canada's landing page, participants preferred the version with the icons over the version with the stock images of people, because they felt the icons did a better job explaining what each part of the website is about.
- **Visual signature:** General preference was for the X version of the visual signature, because it does the best job of raising attention. Participants who preferred the alternate box signature (most evident in the

francophone groups) did so because of negative feelings about the X, rather than any strong enthusiasm for the box itself.

- Overall, participants were most likely to say that in-depth, tangible materials, like the brochure and calendar, stood out as being the most memorable and useful pieces of information they evaluated. After being exposed to the different materials associated with the campaign, most participants agreed that they have all the information they need to cast a ballot.

### Phase 2 quantitative findings

This part of the research took a quantitative approach to evaluating the same communications products tested in the phase II qualitative.

- The findings confirm the election ad materials are working as designed in terms of message comprehension and call to action. Eight in ten or more electors (ranging between 81% and 94%) could identify at least one correct message they received from seeing hearing each ad. Moreover, the message recall correlates with the phase of the campaign (e.g., electors are most likely to recall a message about needing to register to vote upon seeing the registration ads, or most likely to recall a message about other ways to vote upon seeing the early voting ads). The one exception was the pre-writ banner ad, with only half (51%) who identified a correct message; consistent with the qualitative findings, electors had more difficulty identifying what this ad was about.
- Further evidence for the solid comprehension of the ads is that majorities (two-thirds or more for most ads) agree the message in the ads was easy to understand, the information was helpful and the important information was clear.
- Overall, electors believe they have the information they need after seeing/hearing the body of communication materials (i.e., items from four of the five possible campaign phases). Strong majorities say they learned how to contact EC, how to verify they are registered to vote, what to do if they do not receive a VIC or if it is incorrect, that there are early voting options for those who cannot vote in person on election day, and that they need to bring the correct ID to vote.
- Target audiences perceive the materials in a similar way to the general population 25+, with youth and Indigenous electors being as likely as (or only marginally less likely than) the general public to respond positively about key messaging and call to action.
- In the quantitative survey, there was no preference for the visual signature between the X and the box.

### Phase 3 qualitative findings

The third phase of this research evaluated two pre-writ videos to be placed on social and digital media to support Election Canada's voter information campaign for the 2019 federal election. Since this phase of research is based on a single focus group and cannot be considered representative of the views of youth across Canada, the results should be interpreted with caution.

- Participants understood the intent of the **30-second pre-writ video (with real people)** but were not convinced they would engage with it. Focus group participants liked that the ad was short, easy to understand, included a variety of people, and the tagline "ready to have you say?". Several concerns were also raised: the scenes were felt to cut too fast, there wasn't enough to grab their attention, and the connection to Elections Canada doesn't occur until the end of the ad – by which time they likely

have already moved on. The call-to-action of this ad was felt to be weaker, and there was little desire to share the ad on social media.

- The **animated (15-second) pre-writ video** was very well-received. Focus group participants were enthusiastic about the style of the ad, particularly how it drew them in and made them want to watch all the way through. Using each new screen/flash to provide new information was considered particularly effective at delivering a clear message. There was consensus that the ad made them want to get informed about the election, register and vote. All participants said they would share the ad on social media.
- Participants were open to the idea of an Elections Canada influencer campaign targeted to young Canadians. Participants are familiar with these types of campaigns, acknowledge that they can be effective, and consider the approach to be a good fit with the topic, since most of the examples that came to mind were for social issues (rather than consumer products/services). Participants favour an approach that includes genuine diversity and inclusiveness, and a light and upbeat (but still professional) tone. Reactions to previous influencer campaigns in support of elections suggest a preference for higher production values/a more polished product.

### **Political neutrality statement and contact information**

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Environics Research that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.



Sarah Robertson  
Vice President, Corporate and Public Affairs  
[sarah.roberson@environics.ca](mailto:sarah.roberson@environics.ca)  
613-699-6884

**Supplier name:** Environics Research Group  
PWGSC contract number: 05005-180079/001/CY  
Original contract date: 2018-05-09