

Survey of Official Agents following the 43rd General Election

Executive Summary

Prepared for Elections Canada

Supplier Name: Environics Research Group
Contract Number: 005005-190772/001/CY
Contract Value: \$\$66,506.87 (including HST)
Award Date: 2020-02-28
Delivery Date: May 20, 2021

Registration Number: POR 110-19

For more information on this report, please contact Elections Canada at: rop-por@elections.ca.

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en Français

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This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by Environics Research Group from March 8 to 31, 2021.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre *Sondage auprès des agents officiels à la suite de la 43^e élection générale – Rapport final*.

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Catalogue Number: SE3-122/2021E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-0-660-40803-3

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

Elections Canada (EC) identified the need to conduct quantitative research to understand how its current programs and services were used by Official Agents of the 43rd General Election held October 21, 2019, and to identify areas for improvement.

EC required the services of a public opinion research supplier to conduct a baseline Survey of Official Agents (OAs) following the 43rd federal General Election. This survey aimed to assess official agents' views and experiences with the 43rd General Election (GE) with regards to the financial obligations of the candidate campaign. An official agent is the person responsible for administering the candidate's campaign financial transactions and for reporting those transactions to Elections Canada as required by the *Canada Elections Act*.

The survey was conducted as part of the evaluation and development of EC's programs and services.

Methodology

Environics conducted an online survey with Official Agents from March 8 to 31, 2021. From a list of 1,847 unduplicated contact emails provided by Elections Canada, a total of 608 Official Agents completed an online interview, 33% of the records provided. The online survey was open from March 8 to 31, 2021. The participating respondents had the following regional distribution:

Breakdown/Location	Total	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	MB/SK	Alberta	BC	Territories
Number of interviews	608	60	137	229	44	58	77	3
% of completed interviews	100%	10%	23%	38%	8%	10%	13%	1%
% of total OA contacts	100%	9%	24%	36%	8%	10%	13%	1%

NOTE: This was an attempted census of the Official Agent population, and as such, no margin of sampling error is cited.

Contract value

The contract value was \$66,506.87 (HST included).

Report

This report begins with an executive summary outlining key findings and conclusions, followed by a detailed analysis of the survey data. Provided under a separate cover is a detailed set of "banner tables" presenting the results for all questions for the total and identified subgroups of interest. These tables are referenced by the survey question in the detailed analysis.

In this report, quantitative results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Net results cited in the text may not exactly match individual results shown in the tables due to rounding.

Note on timing: Although official agents are required to file campaign returns four months after election day, many campaigns requested extensions to submit the return, and some official agents were still completing their activities at the start of the survey. Nonetheless, those official agents who filed the campaign return within the prescribed timeframes may have experienced a 12 month gap between when they filed and the start of the survey, which could contribute to recall issues. As well, a few activities included in the survey (opening a campaign account, training materials and use of other services available during the campaign) occurred over 15 months prior and thus recall may be an issue for some. A few survey participants (and some who refused to participate) indicated the time gap was too great; this should be kept in mind when designing future research with this audience. It should be noted that some of the activities of the OAs may have been affected because wrapping up the campaign took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Use of research: The information gained through this public opinion research will assist in the evaluation of EC's administration of the political financing regime. It will also assist in identifying areas where EC's various products and services may be improved.

Key findings

A. Information about Official Agents

- Two-thirds of OAs in the survey were first time agents, with the vast majority supporting a single candidate.
- One-third of candidates were in a nomination contest; one-third of OAs acted as the financial agent for one.

B. Getting the campaign underway

- Close to three-quarters say the obligation to open a campaign account was very clear; the most difficult aspects of opening a campaign account were dealing with the bank and sorting out the required documentation.

C. Completing and submitting the electoral campaign return

- Almost all were the official agent at the time the campaign return was submitted.
- Six in ten submitted the electoral campaign return via the Political Entity Service Centre (PESC).
- Just over four in ten attended training regarding the electoral return
- Agents are divided about the ease of completing the return, while just under six in ten agree to some extent it was easy to submit. The most difficult aspects of dealing with the campaign return are the lack of clarity of the completion and submission instructions, and the complexity of the form itself.

D. Electronic Financial Return (EFR)

- Nine in ten used the EFR software to prepare the campaign return; agents are most likely to agree to some extent that the instructions on how to find the EFR software were clear, and that it was easy to navigate.
- The very few who did not use the EFR software mention this was mostly because they preferred to prepare it manually, or that the software could not be installed
- Over seven in ten indicate the campaign was required to file an external auditor's report with the return; most say it was at least somewhat easy to figure out if this was required.

E. Elections Canada products and services

- Of nine products and services, OAs most likely to report using the Political Financing Handbook or the 1-800 #, or to have corresponded with EC.
- The Political Financing Handbook, 1-800# and in-classroom sessions are the resources deemed helpful by the highest proportions of users.
- The main difficulties mentioned with the Political Financing website relate to navigation and presentation; training on how to deal with the return also may need improvement.
- Two-thirds who used the Political Entities Support Network strongly agreed that the EC employee they dealt with was courteous, and majorities agree to some extent with other positive statements about their experience. Two-thirds waited ten minutes or less on the 1-800 line.
- Six in ten of the OAs who corresponded with EC by mail or email strongly agree that the response they received by mail or email was courteous, and majorities agree to some extent with other positive statements about their contact with EC.
- Four in ten OAs used sources other than EC to understand provisions of the Canada Elections Act. Most who used other sources turned to the candidate's affiliated party, while a minority got advice from an accountant, other official agents or consulted the Act itself.
- The top product and service needs identified more flexible training availability, software updates, and a simplified process (especially for small campaigns).

F. Post-filing Elections Canada contact

- Just under two-thirds of OAs were contacted by EC after filing the campaign return. Nine in ten of these received an email.
- Majorities agreed with positive statements about their interactions with EC after their campaign return was submitted. Agreement is highest the EC employee was courteous, and lowest that they followed up regularly.

G. Closing of the campaign and other comments

- The easiest aspects of closing the campaign are closing the bank account and disposing of any surpluses.
- Many OAs suggested improvements to the EFR software, a simplified process overall (especially for smaller campaigns), and more expedited auditing and reporting on EC's part to allow for prompt closure.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics 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 include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Brenda Sharpe
Senior Research Associate, Corporate and, Public Affairs
Environics Research Group
brenda.sharpe@environics.ca

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PWGSC contract number: 005005-190772/001/CY
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