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Views of the Royal Canadian Navy 2022-23 Baseline Study

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Royal Canadian Navy

Supplier name: Earncliffe Strategy Group

Contract number: CW2245478

Contract value: \$128,413.65

Award date: October 10, 2022

Delivery date: February 24, 2023

Registration number: POR 066-22

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Canada

Views of the Royal Canadian Navy – 2022-23 Baseline Study

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February 2023

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey and focus groups conducted concurrently by Earnscliffe Strategy Group on behalf of the Royal Canadian Navy. The fieldwork for the quantitative research was conducted in November 2022 and in February 2023 for the qualitative research.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : *Points de vue sur la Marine royale canadienne - Étude de base 2022-23*

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Catalogue Number: D2-643/2023E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-0-660-47912-5

Related publications (registration number): D2-643/2023F-PDF

Points de vue sur la Marine royale canadienne - Étude de base 2022-23 (final report, French)
ISBN 978-0-660-47913-2

Executive summary

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) to undertake opinion research that will establish a baseline of public views of this environment within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN, or referred to as “the Navy” for the purposes of this research) is a part of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The Navy is Canada’s fighting force at sea, deterring conflict and defending the nation’s values. Wherever it operates, the Navy promotes Canada’s economic prosperity and, alongside our allies, protects the rules-based international order.

According to the “Views of the CAF Tracking Study”, public opinion research (POR) indicated that the awareness and familiarity with the RCN is relatively low. This POR project will assist the Government of Canada, specifically, the Department of National Defence to better understand public perceptions and attitudes towards the RCN and inform communication planning with an aim to better inform Canadians about the role of the RCN. The contract value for this project was \$128,413.65 including HST.

To that end, the primary objective of this research was to provide the Department of National Defence with insights into Canadians’ overall awareness, perceptions, and concerns about the RCN to develop policies, programs, services, and initiatives such as Canada’s Defence Policy and Canada’s military role internationally.

To meet the current objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a two-phased research program involving both quantitative and qualitative research.

The quantitative phase involved an online survey of 2,492 Canadians aged 18 and older, including 150 Indigenous Canadians and 769 Canadians who identify as an ethnic or cultural minority. The online survey was conducted using Leger’s opt-in panel between November 22 and 27, 2022. The online survey was completed in either English or French and took an average of 10 minutes to complete.

Respondents for the online survey were selected from among those who have volunteered to participate in online surveys. The data was weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the Canadian population aged 18 and older. Because the online sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated, and the results cannot be described as statistically projectable to the target population. The treatment here of the non-probability sample is aligned with the Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research - Online Surveys. Appendix A provides full details on the survey methodology and Appendix C provides the survey instrument used.

For the second phase, qualitative research was undertaken, which included a series of twelve focus groups between February 6 and 8, 2023. Two groups were held with residents of each of five cities (Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver) with one group among

residents aged 18 to 34 and the other group among those aged 35 to 65 years. Two additional groups were held exclusively among Indigenous participants, one with residents of Eastern Canada (all provinces east of Manitoba) and one with residents of Western Canada (all provinces west of Ontario). Three groups were conducted in French (both groups with residents of Montreal and one of the groups with residents of Moncton among those aged 35 to 65), while all other groups were conducted in English. Participants from official language minority communities were accommodated in their preferred language. Groups were recruited based on the official language with which they were most comfortable, as well as their geographic location to accommodate time zone differences. Any participant recruited for one language group who expresses preference for the other was invited to a different group that fits their language and time zone preferences.

The focus groups were standard groups, 90 minutes in length conducted using the Zoom meetings platform, with between four (4) and eight (8) participants in each. Participants were asked for written consent for all sessions to be recorded. To encourage full participation, participants were given an honorarium of \$100. Arrangements were made to permit observers to observe all sessions virtually.

It is important to note that qualitative research is a form of scientific, social, policy, and public opinion research. Focus group research is not designed to help a group reach a consensus or to make decisions, but rather to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions of a selected sample of participants on a defined topic. Because of the small numbers involved, the participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly representative in a statistical sense of the larger population from which they are drawn, and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond their number. As such, results are directional only.

The key findings from the research are presented below.

Awareness and impressions of the RCN

- Top-of-mind descriptors of the RCN among survey respondents are primarily descriptors that can be described as neutral (45%) or positive (43%). Fewer than one-fifth (17%) used at least one negative descriptor.
- Among focus group participants, two main themes emerged when asked what first came to mind when they thought of the RCN: neutral words that related to ships and protection, or favourable words that related to the people who serve in the RCN.
- More survey respondents are not familiar with the CAF and its environments than they are familiar. At 30%, familiarity with the RCN is the lowest among the environments.
- A majority of survey respondents have a positive impression of the CAF (58% positive), its environments (Army 58%; RCAF 56%; RCN 52%) and, especially of RCN members (63%). Few have a negative impression of any.
- When focus group participants were asked how familiar they are with the RCN, most indicated that they did not really know much and virtually no one went so far as to say they were very familiar.

- Despite not having much familiarity with the RCN, when asked their impression of the people who serve in it, focus groups participants' responses were decidedly favourable. Adjectives used tended to be admirable traits such as courageous, disciplined, brave, dedicated, strong, and people who have sacrificed.
- Approximately half of survey respondents (52%) believe that the RCN is a source of pride for Canadians. Three in ten (31%) hold a neutral position, and one in ten respondents believe the RCN is not a source of pride (9%) or did not provide a rating (9%).
- While most survey respondents (61%) do not see themselves joining the RCN, more respondents have positive than negative impressions of the RCN for its variety of jobs (60% versus 3%), its Canadian values (58% versus 6%) and its alignment with respondents' personal values (35% versus 12%).
- Slightly more than half of survey respondents agree that the RCN is as good a career choice for visible minorities (54%) and women (53%) as anyone else. At one-third (35%), fewer would say the same for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.
- Four in ten survey respondents (39%) say they are concerned about systemic racism within the RCN, and one-quarter (26%) believe that the RCN handles misconduct related to racist, sexist, or hateful conduct well.
- When focus group participants were asked if all segments of society are proportionately represented in the RCN, views were mixed, and some felt there were limitations to the level of comfort some might feel if they were to enter the RCN, including those in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as well as women (though less so). In terms of cultural diversity, there were fewer who felt the RCN posed discomfort.
- Some participants seemed to feel there are likely the right policies in place to welcome, protect and provide comfort to all members, but there may still be lingering cultural aspects that may not yet be fully living up to the spirit of those policies.

Roles of the RCN

- Over six in ten survey respondents (63%) believe the RCN is essential, while few believe that the RCN is no longer needed (6%). One-fifth (18%) of respondents hold a neutral position of the importance of the RCN.
- Asked for their understanding of the RCN's main role or mission, though lacking in confidence in their responses, focus group participants tended to describe it as the military force protecting Canadian waterways, shores, and people.
- After being shown RCN's mission, reactions from focus group participants were consistent from group to group. The fact that the RCN was "the fighting force at sea" and were tasked with protecting Canadians came as no surprise to almost all participants. What was a little more surprising, though participants explained that upon reflection it made sense, was the RCN's role in promoting economic prosperity and defending Canadian values.

- A majority of survey respondents believe the RCN is tasked with defending Canada (76%), securing the future against threats (56%) and making the world safer (53%). Fewer than half believe the RCN represents part of our national identity (44%), has a role in diplomacy (33%) or protects our economy (22%).
- On balance, survey respondents believe each role the RCN plays is at least somewhat important, and especially defending Canada (81%), securing the future against threats (78%) and making the world safer (74%). Only a handful of respondents believe any of the roles are not important.
- Views on how well the RCN is performing against its mission were typically qualified, with many focus group participants feeling unable to provide an assessment, citing their lack of knowledge. Many explained that they could only assume they are performing well, on the basis that they believe they would hear if the RCN was failing at their mission.

Attitudes towards recruitment and joining the RCN

- Among survey respondents, the appeal of a career in the RCN is slightly higher than of the Army (49% and 44% appealing, respectively), and is lower than that of the RCAF (54%).
- Over half of survey respondents (54%) say they would have a favourable reaction to a friend or family member joining the RCN. Three in ten (29%) would have a neutral reaction, while one in ten (11%) say they would have an unfavourable reaction.
- Among younger survey respondents (that is, those 18 to 34 years of age), approximately one-fifth are aware of the opportunities available (21%), are interested in joining (19%), and say they are likely to join the RCN (22%).
- Hardly any youth in the focus groups indicated they would be interested in a career in the RCN, but a few had considered it in the past. The numbers who had considered it were similar among the participants aged 35-65 years, but asked if they would recommend it, the older participants tended to say they would to someone who expressed an interest in serving.
- Most focus group participants admitted they do not have a good sense of what a career in the RCN would be like, and often inferred combat roles. When pressed to think about what it might be like in this context, some did say that the RCN must have a variety of options for people, though most do not consider these roles when reflecting on a job in the RCN.
- Focus group participants generally found it easy to name benefits and drawbacks of a career in the RCN. A few benefits came up regularly including a pension and health benefits, an assumption that the pay is good, that it was a long-term career, in which education and training were provided, and opportunities for advancement. The common drawbacks mentioned were risk of death or injury, being away from home and family for extended periods, seasickness and cramped living quarters (on ships).

- Presented with the concept of a new Naval Experience Programme (NEP), reactions were almost universally positive. Participants felt this was a good way to “test-drive” being in the RCN without “signing your life away.” Some offered the rationale that a person could have a gap year, or want to make a career change, and make some money while learning about the RCN.
- Three NEP communications concepts (posters) were shown to focus group participants and for the most part, they were not seen as hitting the mark. Of the three shown, the poster depicting Navy members in a ship’s navigation centre was the most appealing as it depicted a likely experience, while the impressions of the posters of members doing yoga on a ship or navigating an inflatable boat were mostly negative. They were seen as not taking the role seriously and somewhat misleading in projection of a career in the RCN.

Communication needs and preferences

- About half of survey respondents (48%) say they are interested in learning more about the RCN. Among those who have some level of interest, the largest proportions would prefer to hear about the RCN through traditional media (for example, news 35%, television 34%) or online (that is, the RCN website 27% or social media 22%).
- When asked, many focus group participants claimed they would be interested in learning more about the RCN, expressing that they would be most interested in learning what the Navy is actually doing and what life is like in the RCN.
- Ads appearing in their social media feeds or on television are typically mentioned as the best places to intercept focus group participants with outreach.
- One in ten survey respondents (11%) follow the RCN on at least one social media platform, with similar associations for each YouTube (5%), Facebook (5%), Instagram (4%) and Twitter (2%).
- Focus group participants were shown a 90-second video promoting the RCN and were asked to provide their reactions to it, which resulted in more favourable than unfavourable reactions, usually among those who described the video as powerful and cool.
- That said, some focus group participants did not appreciate the more aggressive, intense and/or military aspects. Furthermore, some felt it displayed tokenism at times, particularly the image of a lesbian couple and an Indigenous ceremony, and there were some who noted they saw few, if any, people of colour.
- For some focus group participants, this 90-second video was their deepest introduction to the RCN. They explained that it gave them a little information but left them wanting to know more. Specifically, they wanted to see those serving doing what they do in the RCN and firsthand testimonials.

Contract number: CW2244294
Contract value: \$171,545.30
Contract award date: October 12, 2022

I hereby certify as a representative of Earncliffe Strategy Group that the final 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.

Signed:

Date: February 24, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Anderson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Doug Anderson
Principal, Earncliffe