

# The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Recruitment Focus Group Study – 2023-2024

## Executive Summary

### Prepared for the Department of National Defence (DND)

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# Executive Summary

## A. Background

To fulfill the Strategic Intake Plan of the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG), the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) must enroll Regular Force (full-time) and Reserve Force (part-time) members every year. A highly competitive job market has posed significant challenges for CAF recruitment initiatives as the CAF competes with other Canadian employers for top quality candidates. Public opinion research assists the Government of Canada and DND in staying attuned to the views, perceptions, and opinions of Canadians, and also provides additional context which can be used to aid in the CAF recruitment process.

The CAF recruitment advertising campaigns consist of a multi-pronged campaign that addresses the five main recruiting objectives for 2023-2024.

The five recruitment advertising campaigns include:

- CAF recruitment (Awareness) campaign
- Priority Occupations recruitment campaign
- Indigenous Peoples recruitment campaign
- Reserve Force recruitment campaign
- Paid Education recruitment campaign

Promoting the CAF as a first-class, professional employer is complex given that the decision to enroll in the military requires extended personal evaluation, both emotional and rational. The CAF awareness component is the main pillar of the recruitment campaign and to ensure its impact it must connect with Canadians.

The five primary DND and CAF military recruitment objectives include:

1. Raise awareness of the CAF and its many careers and programs.
2. Filling priority (in-demand) occupations.
3. Recruiting Reservists.
4. Increase in advertising visits to the Forces.ca website.
5. Increase the number of Canadians who click 'Apply Now' on Forces.ca.

These five primary recruitment objectives are supported by the Assistant Deputy Minister (Public Affairs) (ADM(PA)) through targeted marketing and advertising efforts, including content geared towards increasing the number of women and visible minorities serving in the CAF.

## Research Objectives

The main objective of this research was to assess the perspective of young Canadians (aged 18-34) concerning career goals/intentions and their perceptions of CAF recruitment advertisements. In order to meet the objective, the research explored issues such as familiarity with the CAF and its recruitment advertisements, likelihood of joining the CAF, perceived barriers to recruitment, potential barriers and motivations influencing potential recruits to join the CAF, knowledge of career opportunities in the CAF (for

self, women, visible minorities and 2SLGBTQI+), the effectiveness of attraction and recruitment strategies and preferred communication channels. It also identified career influencers and how they influence career decisions, examined career desires/decisions, and explored what matters most/least when making career decisions.

This research study:

- Tested several creatives and messaging.
- Provided a better understanding of young Canadians' perceptions of CAF recruitment and its elements.

The findings from this study will be used by the DND and CAF to:

- Gauge young Canadians' awareness and opinions of the CAF recruitment process.
- Inform recruitment decision-making.
- Inform recruitment campaign communication strategies and messaging.
- Improve communications to young Canadians.
- Understand the barriers to CAF recruitment.

The findings from this study will be used to provide advice to senior leaders and make evidence-based recommendations to improve existing recruitment processes and develop new strategies and campaign elements to assist CAF recruitment.

As a note of caution when interpreting the results from this study, findings of qualitative research are directional in nature only and cannot be attributed quantitatively to the overall population under study with any degree of confidence.

## B. Methodology

Participants in 12 focus groups conducted between October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, and October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, took part in conversations about their career plans and decision-making processes, as well as their views related to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as an employer of choice. In all, 12 groups were conducted across various target audiences.

The target audience consisted of job seekers and job changers:

- Job seekers: 18 to 24 years old with a high school and/or college degree
- Job changers: 25 to 34 years old enrolled in post-secondary institutions, college and university graduates, and career changers

Additional groups were conducted with various diversity groups. Two focus groups were conducted among Indigenous Peoples, one focus group was conducted among those identifying as part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and one focus group was conducted among those identifying as a visible minority.

Region/Language	Target Audience			
	Job Seekers	Job Changers	Additional Audiences	Total Number of Groups
Eastern Canada (Atlantic Canada)  English	√	√	N/A	2
Central Canada (Ontario)  English	√	√	Indigenous Peoples 2SLGBTQI+	4
Western Canada* (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia)  English	√	√	Indigenous Peoples Visible Minorities	4
National  French	√	√	N/A	2
<b>Total Number of Groups</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

\* A number of participants residing in Canada's North were included in the groups based in Western Canada.

In addition to the above-noted criteria, group composition ensured representation from across regions, including Eastern Canada (two groups), Ontario (four groups), Western Canada (four groups) and among Francophones nationally (two groups recruited from those residing in and outside of Quebec). Seven participants were recruited for each group with the expectation that a minimum of six would attend.

### C. Key Findings

**Participants identified financial considerations such as compensation, benefits, and employee pension programs as the top factors influencing their future career decisions.** The ability to maintain a work-life balance and careers in which one can grow, advance, and learn transferable skills were also viewed as highly important. Family members, friends, and trusted individuals (such as professors, academic advisors, counsellors, and community leaders) were seen as having the most impact on participants' education and career decisions. Many indicated that they would likely turn to these individuals, as well as those already working in fields of interest to them for guidance and information related to potential career paths they were considering.

**On balance, participants held a mostly neutral view of the CAF.** While many associated the armed forces with combat and active deployment, several called to mind other aspects such as learning skills related to leadership, teamwork, and discipline and the ability to have one's post-secondary education paid for by joining the CAF. Several had existing connections with the CAF, primarily through family members and friends who were active members or had served in the military in the past.

Only a few participants had previously considered the CAF as a potential career path, and fewer had actively pursued this opportunity. Several participants cited what they viewed as the long application process and delays in receiving a response as the primary reasons that they had not pursued this opportunity. **Most indicated that they would be unlikely to consider a position with the CAF either now or in the near future. For many, this was primarily due to a perceived lack of flexibility in their own lives, including having young children and the desire to maintain their current career.**

Many had previously seen advertisements produced by the CAF. Several recalled these advertisements as being heavily focused on action and excitement, while a smaller number reported having seen advertisements related to specific career paths that one could pursue within the armed forces.

Awareness of the Reserve Force was low among participants. **While viewing the part-time nature, opportunity to earn additional income, and ability to maintain their civilian lives and careers as enticing aspects of the Reserve Force, many were reluctant to consider this as a potential employment opportunity.** For most, this was primarily due to concerns that they may be deployed in the event of a large-scale conflict or national security emergency as well as the impression that even a part-time commitment would still be too much for them to handle.

**Participants were mostly positive in their reactions to the Reserve Force static advertisements.** It was felt that these had been well-designed and had effectively conveyed the balance between military and civilian life experienced by Reservists. Some recommended making the contrast between military and civilian aspects starker, believing this was too subtle in some of the concepts. Others felt that military scenes featuring desert and ocean settings evoked imagery of deployment and thought that this might dissuade those who might be interested in the Reserve Force but not in being deployed.

**While on balance participants felt the Reserve Force video advertisements were energetic and featured a high level of excitement, many thought that they moved too rapidly and would be more effective if they gave viewers more time to focus on each scene.** It was also felt that the music selection for these videos could be less intense, with a number of the opinion that the high-energy soundtrack could be alienating to some types of viewers, including women.

Groups presented with the Priority Occupation campaign reacted mostly positively to the concepts they were presented with. **Discussing the static advertisements, many expressed a preference for those concepts that focused on specific career paths rather than a more generalized approach.** A number found what they viewed as the calmness of these advertisements to be appealing.

Those shown the Priority Occupation video campaign felt that the videos were energetic and did a good job in conveying the message that there were many different career paths available through the CAF. **Discussing ways in which the videos could be improved, several recommended focusing on more than one position in each specific advertisement as well as providing information related to potential salaries and benefits with the CAF.** It was felt that by advertising a wide variety of different jobs, these

advertisements could potentially serve as inspiration to individuals interested in certain career paths that they did not know were an option through the CAF.

**While viewing the Paid Education program as a valuable opportunity, a number questioned what commitment would be required on their end in order to access this program.** Many were of the impression that one would have to make at least a part-time commitment to the CAF in order to receive this support. **Several expressed a preference for the advertisements featuring jobs that could conceivably be done close to home rather than those that might require them to work in the field or far away from friends and family.** While discussing ways that these concepts could be improved, it was suggested that the text could be made larger and more eye-catching in order to stand out more from the rest of the concept. A number also thought that the addition of information pertaining to potential salary and benefits would prompt a greater number of individuals to want to find out more about this program. Several spoke positively of the “Earn While You Learn” tagline, believing it to be catchy.

**Those in the groups comprised of Indigenous peoples overwhelmingly expressed a preference for the advertising approach featuring real people rather than artistic silhouettes.** It was widely felt that this approach was a more accurate depiction of the Indigenous Entry Program and better showcased values such as teamwork, comradery, and learning new skills while also having a positive experience. **It was felt that seeing real Indigenous people having fun and working together would likely inspire those who encountered this campaign to want to learn more about this program.** The three weeks, all expenses paid with no commitment required were widely seen as enticing aspects of this program that participants felt should be highlighted to a greater extent.

Sharing their overall thoughts on these advertisements, **several felt that the images and videos they had seen were too focused on the individual and that a greater emphasis should be placed on teamwork and learning valuable skills alongside others.** A few also thought that efforts could be taken to portray individuals gaining leadership experience more effectively through working with the CAF, believing that this value had not been sufficiently communicated by the images and videos they had seen.

While participants felt that these advertisements had generally been inclusive, this had been far more apparent in terms of the inclusion of women, Indigenous peoples, and visible minorities compared to persons living with disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+. As a general comment, **it was felt that the sense of diversity in these advertisements could be increased by presenting more imagery of individuals of different backgrounds working together and striving towards a common goal.**

Focusing on ways to make these advertisements more inclusive, **it was thought that more could be done to demonstrate the ways that individuals who were less physically able could still contribute to the CAF** and place less emphasis on physical activities such as lifting weights. Some also suggested that more should be done to feature older individuals (40 years and over), demonstrating that opportunities with the CAF were not just for young people.

Asked how they would typically like to receive information about jobs and careers more generally (not specific to the CAF), **participants expressed a preference for short-form video and text posts on social media, video advertisements (online or in theatres), career fairs, and exhibits on campuses.** Some in the groups comprised of Indigenous peoples also identified Indigenous-led organizations (such as Métis Nation), cultural spaces, and their respective bands as effective ways to communicate this type of information.

Participants identified Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as the social media platforms they spend the most time on, with a number also identifying Facebook, Snapchat, X (formerly known as Twitter), and LinkedIn. **Describing what factors would make them more inclined to click on a job advertisement posted on social media, participants identified aspects such as salary and benefits, the ability to maintain a work-life balance, the ability to grow and advance, and the location of the work.**

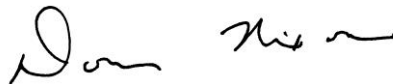
**Discussing potential interactions with a CAF recruiter, a slightly larger number indicated a preference for a face-to-face interaction with a recruiter, rather than online. Many, however, indicated a high level of comfort with either method.** For those who favoured face-to-face, this was primarily due to the impression that this would allow for a more natural conversation. Those who preferred an online setting believed that this would be less intimidating and that they would likely feel less pressure than if they were face-to-face with a recruiter.

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Signed:



Donna Nixon, Partner  
The Strategic Counsel