



**Award date:** 2016-10-31

**Contract #** 35035-165058/001/CY

**POR** 061-16

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# Privy Council Office Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – Wave 11 of Focus Groups

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
November, 2017

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Mike Colledge  
President  
Ipsos Public Affairs

# 1. Executive Summary

## Background and Objectives

The Privy Council Office (PCO) is the hub of non-partisan, public service support to the Prime Minister and Cabinet and its decision-making structures. Led by the Clerk of the Privy Council, PCO helps the Government implement its vision and respond effectively and quickly to issues facing the government and the country.

As an advisor to the Prime Minister, PCO brings together quality, objective policy advice and information to support the Prime Minister and Cabinet, including information on the priorities of Canadians. To this end, the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO supports the Prime Minister’s Office in coordinating government communications and setting broad government communications themes and messages, in accordance with government priorities, as determined by the Prime Minister, Cabinet, Cabinet committees and the Clerk of the Privy Council. The Secretariat also works with PCO policy secretariats to advise and support Cabinet and its committees.

In fulfilling its mandate, PCO required an ongoing cycle of qualitative data collection to ensure that it has up-to-date representations of Canadians’ opinions on macro-level issues that are of interest to the government, such as their views on what should be the priorities of the government. Additionally, such research increases the Government of Canada’s understanding of emerging trends, and measures Canadians’ views on key national issues and policy initiatives.

Through the use of an ongoing cycle of focus groups, PCO is gaining a solid understanding of Canadians’ views as they relate to the most important issues facing the country; their perceptions of how the federal government can best address these issues; expectations of actions related to government priorities; and, perspectives on how the government can most effectively convey its efforts in dealing with emerging issues. This research helps inform the development of communications messages, products and dissemination tactics to respond to priority issues. Additionally, the research allows the Government of Canada to develop and refine communications activities to meet the specific needs of Canadians with timely, up-to-date, easily understood information based on the current perceptions of Canadians in the requisite areas.

This eleventh wave of ongoing qualitative research was meant to gather feedback from Canadians on select issues and policy areas that are important to the Government of Canada. The issues discussed during focus groups differed from one location to the next. Topics covered included:

- Government of Canada Actions
- Creative Canada
- Environment assessment
- Offshore protected areas
- Healthy eating strategy
- Gun control
- Immigration
- Electric Cars

## Overview of Methodology

This wave of qualitative research was comprised of a series of 14 focus groups with Canadians aged 20 years old and above, held between November 7<sup>th</sup> and November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. All group discussions lasted approximately two hours and were conducted in the evening, with the first session in each city starting at 5:30pm and the second starting at 7:30pm. These sessions were held in the following locations:

- November 7<sup>th</sup>- Halifax
- November 9<sup>th</sup>- Montreal
- November 14<sup>th</sup> North York
- November 22<sup>nd</sup>, Drummondville
- November 23<sup>rd</sup>- Peterborough
- November 27<sup>th</sup>- Victoria
- November 29<sup>th</sup>—Saskatoon

A total of 12 participants were recruited for each session to ensure that a minimum of eight to ten participants would attend. In total, 125 participants took part in the discussions. All participants received an honorarium of \$75 for attending the sessions at the focus group facilities. The screening questionnaire helped ensure that participants included a good cross-section of the general population, with good mixes of gender, ages, education and income levels, as well as household composition. Additional methodological details can be found in the appendix of this report.

This eleventh wave of research is part of a continuous qualitative research project that will include a total of 144 focus groups to be held in multiple waves over the 2017 calendar year, with the option of renewing the cycle of research for two additional years. The contracted amount for this research project for calendar year 2017 is \$916,865.05, including HST.

## *Key Findings*

### *Government of Canada News- Bombardier*

Participants in North York and Montreal were asked whether they had heard anything in the news about Bombardier. Participants in Montreal demonstrated higher levels of awareness than did their counterparts in North York. Participants in both cities tended to hesitantly acknowledge that overall the C-Series deal with Airbus was a good decision in light of actions by the US Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration. Participants' concerns tended to focus on preserving jobs, with some wondering whether this deal would eventually lead to Airbus moving operations elsewhere. Participants in Montreal expressed concerns that the regional production plant would shut down, and the impact it would have on jobs. For the most part those in North York stated the deal was struck to address pending trade tariffs put in place by the US.

### *Creative Canada*

Participants had not heard of 'Creative Canada' by name but were aware of the Netflix component of the initiative. Outside of the Quebec locations, many liked this agreement as it would result in more funding for Canadian content. They felt that it had the potential to create local jobs and encourage local productions. They felt the investment would boost the entertainment industry and the sectors that support it, creating local jobs and having an overall positive economic impact. Those less receptive to this new policy framework most often said they felt it was unfair and set a bad precedent for other similar types of companies who would demand similar treatment in the future. These participants also worried about the potential impact of this deal on local companies who do not benefit from similar treatment. Those opposed to the Netflix deal generally felt that Netflix would have invested heavily in Canada regardless of the deal to ensure their market share. Some francophone participants, particularly in Montreal, also questioned whether Netflix would in fact invest in French content given the relative size of the French language market.

### *Environmental Assessment*

Most were not aware of what took place during an environmental assessment but thought it might include activities such as consulting scientists, cost analyses, and an assessment of risks to the local environment. Some thought political motives might be taken into consideration, and those in Montreal felt that this, as well as cost, were the most influential factors. Participants felt environmental assessments likely involved seeking out input from various stakeholder audiences, local communities, indigenous groups, the courts, businesses, and all levels of government. Participants assumed that when it came to environmental assessments, final decisions were made by the federal government.

When asked about changes to be made to the current process, many felt more public consultation and increased transparency in the assessment process would be beneficial. During an exercise on key factors to be considered during an environmental assessment, participants often focussed on the long-term sustainability of projects and the potential health impact they would have on Canadians as key determinants to be considered.

Last, participants were provided a list and asked to select the most important factors during the environmental assessment process. Considering *indirect environmental and health impacts of projects, not just their direct impact, and making the process more transparent* were most often selected.

#### *Official Government Communications*

Groups in Victoria, Saskatoon and Drummondville were led in a discussion on official government communications. Nearly all participants recognized the Government of Canada logo, saying it evokes feelings of pride and patriotism. Other ways participants identified Government of Canada communications included the inclusion of ‘.gc.ca’ in a URL, the official symbol included on mail received from the Government of Canada – notably the brown envelopes, and the soundbite at the end of any audio communications. The logo was seen as branding by the Government of Canada which increased trust that information provided with the logo was credible.

#### *Offshore Protected Areas*

From a list of possible names for offshore protected areas participants most commonly selected *Marine Habitat Protection Area* and *Marine Habitat Conservation Area*. These two options were selected as ‘marine’ represented protecting the whole eco-system rather than just the fish population. Those that favoured *Marine Habitat Protection Area* liked the authoritative, and firm nature of ‘protection’, while those that selected *Marine Habitat Conservation Area* felt ‘conservation’ represented active rehabilitation. The title *Fish Habitat Refuge* was not well understood. *Designated Area for Fish Habitat Protection* was too long and implied the protection of a specific space rather than overall ecosystem.

#### *Open Net Salmon Farms*

Most had heard of and liked the idea of salmon farms but few had heard of open net salmon farms. For those that did, they were not sure how sustainable the practice was, with a few participants commenting about sea lice. When read a list of criticisms, participants were most concerned with waste being deposited into the water and its potential impact on the surrounding ecosystem, as well as the potential for diseases to be transferred to wild salmon populations. When prompted, participants felt in-land farming would help protect the ocean eco-system. However, some wondered about the cost to fish farmers and the impact it could have on the industry. Some suggested a government subsidy for those transitioning to in-land salmon farming.

#### *Healthy Eating Strategy*

To encourage healthy eating habits, participants in Montreal, Peterborough, and Saskatoon said the federal government could be doing more, including taking steps to lower the price of healthy food options, and promoting healthy eating through public education initiatives. Most referred to the nutrition facts label when making food choices and welcomed the idea of mandatory warning labels on food, as the information on these labels is useful for consumers.

Participants were then presented with 8 possible warning labels and asked to select their top choice. There was no clear consensus among the groups, though the following were the top 4 choices.



These labels were seen as easy to read, and would make people stop, think, and look for more information. Label 1 was seen as an information label rather than a warning label in Saskatoon, while those in Montreal thought it could potentially replace a nutrition label as this was already informative.

When asked if the labels might unfairly target foods that are high in fat, sugar or sodium but also contain healthy nutrients, most agreed that they would use the labels as a grading system rather than a means to make final purchasing decisions. Some felt it was unfair that a product clearly bad for your health could have a similar warning to another product with better nutritional value. Overall participants agreed that if it was in the product, the ingredient should be reported, and the consumer left to decide what they felt was best.

Banning advertising to children was seen by most as a good thing, though there was much less support for banning advertisements at events and sports activities for children. Many felt the positive effects of physical activity, made possible by sponsorship, outweighed the impact of the advertising. A number of participants noted it was up to parents to educate children about healthy eating and refuse requests to purchase a food that is bad for them. When asked about an age range for this hypothetical ban, those in Saskatoon suggested between 11 and 13 years old, while those in Montreal and Peterborough were likely to say those of high school age (less than 18 years old).

### *Gun Control*

Most participants in Peterborough, Drummondville and Saskatoon were not concerned about gun control laws in Canada, often noting this was a larger issue in the United States. Those who did express concern felt gun violence was a problem in larger urban areas, however most everyday Canadians were not affected.

Overall participants felt the current gun control laws were effective and that no significant changes were needed. When presented a list of possible gun control measures, participants felt all were reasonable and some were surprised they were not already in place in Canada. Overall, participants could not see the downside of applying such measures.

### *Immigration*

Participants in North York had mixed awareness of current immigrant classes. Likewise, there was no clear consensus among participants on what the fees were for each class of immigrant. Participants were provided with the current fee structure and subsequently asked about the idea of a \$150 increase for family class and skilled workers and a \$300 increase for the business class. Once again participants’ reactions were mixed. Overall participants were comfortable with an increase for business class immigrants, though some felt that if Canada needed their skills more barriers should not be added to the entry process. Those not in favour of fee increases most often stated that the cost of moving to Canada, as well as the burden on families financially supporting their relatives was enough of a cost. However,

when prompted with the idea that these increased fees could potentially help support more immigrants and allow for faster processing times most agreed with this justification for a fee increase.

### *Electric Cars*

Those in Halifax and Peterborough participated in a discussion on electric cars. No participants in either group owned an electric car with most identifying the cost associated with electric vehicles and the lack of charging stations as their reasons. Participants were then asked for their thoughts on potential federal government initiatives to encourage Canadians to consider the use of electric vehicles such as: improving infrastructure for electric cars such as building more charging stations, a long-term target for banning the sale of gas-powered cars, and a GST rebate when purchasing electric cars. According to participants taking steps to improve infrastructure would likely be most helpful, though many wondered about the practicality of implementing such programs. A phase out date received lukewarm support. Those who thought this was a good idea felt that given sufficient forewarning it could work; these participants often stated that it would be a very slow process, and most assumed the government would provide support for the transition from the oil and gas industry. Those who opposed a phase out date for gas-powered cars felt either that the government was overstepping its authority or that a hard stop was simply not practical. The GST rebate received mixed reactions – initially participants questioned how this would benefit those who simply can’t afford the sticker price associated with an electric vehicle. Participants were more receptive to the GST rebate option if it applied to vehicles under a certain price as this could potentially benefit a broader portion of the population. Many participants felt the shift to electric cars was inevitable and part of the evolution in transportation, much like the shift from horse and buggy to combustion.

### **Note on Interpretation of Findings**

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.

Focus group research on government priorities seeks to provide a deeper understanding of participants’ views, often complementing quantitative findings gathered through survey research. Discussions allow for deep probing on key issues that is not possible with quantitative research. This type of information is essential for the Privy Council Office in its role advising and supporting the Cabinet and its committees.