



**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 – Second Round of Focus Groups

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**March 24, 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 second 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:

- Awareness of recent Government of Canada actions
- Support for Bombardier
- Awareness of recent announcements related to electoral reform
- Health care funding
- Canada-US relations
- Business Innovation Program
- Affordable Housing initiative



- Net neutrality
- The Canadian Armed Forces
- Justice
- Overall goals for the Government of Canada
- Energy and the environment

## Overview of Methodology

This second wave of qualitative research was comprised of a series of twelve focus groups with Canadians aged 20 years old and above, held between February 15<sup>th</sup> and February 28<sup>th</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:

- Montreal – February 15<sup>th</sup>
- Fredericton – February 16<sup>th</sup>
- Toronto – February 22<sup>nd</sup>
- London – February 23<sup>rd</sup>
- Winnipeg – February 27<sup>th</sup>
- Vancouver – February 28<sup>th</sup>

A total of 12 participants were recruited for each session to ensure that a minimum of eight to ten participants would attend. In total, 107 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 second 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

### *Bombardier*

Awareness of government support for Bombardier varied greatly by location. Predictably those in Montreal were more aware than their counterparts in Fredericton or Toronto. Few could provide exact details on the nature of Government of Canada support. As a rule, participants had more questions than answers:

- What was the exact nature of the financial commitment?
- Why was this support needed?
- How did it compare to what the Quebec Government had provided? (In Montreal)
- When was the contribution made and what were the modalities in place for repayment?
- Was appropriate for the federal government to be providing financial support to private industry? (raised in Fredericton and Toronto)

Most were reassured when provided with more details on the nature of the contribution and the fact that it was a repayable loan.

### *Electoral Reform*

Awareness of electoral reform can best be characterized as mixed and for the most part superficial. A few participants in groups in Montreal, Fredericton, Toronto and London acknowledged having heard something about this. Comments tended to focus on the governments’ electoral promise to explore to explore electoral reform during the lead up to the last election, and this initiative would not be moving forward due to a lack of consensus on how this should be done. This outcome did not come as much of a surprise given what participants perceived to be a very complex undertaking.

### *Health Care Transfers*

As part of a brief discussion on health care related issues participants in Montreal, Fredericton, London and Winnipeg were asked if they had heard anything related to health care and new funding arrangements between the federal government and their provincial government.

Some participants in Montreal and Fredericton mentioned negotiations on new funding arrangements between the federal government and certain provinces unprompted. Those with some familiarity, particularly those in Fredericton, said they had heard that the federal government wanted some of the funds targeted to mental health and long-term care. There were cursory references in each location related to the federal government having struck bilateral agreements with certain provinces and not with others. A number of participants in Fredericton expressed support for this approach.

### *Canada Savings Bonds*

There was moderate awareness of Canada Savings Bonds (CSB) among participants in Montreal and Fredericton. There was marked indifference and no apparent strong attachment to the program and when queried as to the need for it to be maintained most felt that given the availability of other, more competitive financial products, as well as the likely costs associated with administering the program itself, the time had come for the program to be phased out.

### *Canada – US relations*

Views on Canada – US relations were abundant among participants in Montreal, Fredericton, Toronto and London where this theme was explored. Comments tended to focus on the Prime Minister’s recent visit to Washington to meet with the US President. Most felt that the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada had done a good job of underscoring how Canada would respectfully continue to act in its own best interest while looking for opportunities to collaborate with the United States when it made sense to do so.

Most felt that that US concerns related to NAFTA were mainly focused on an apparent trade imbalance between the United States and Mexico. There were those who felt that Canada should be looking to diversify our trade in order to be less dependent on the US; CETA was cited as an example of this.

When challenged to consider areas for possible collaboration with the United States participants most often mentioned:

- The environment and climate change,
- Trade and Following this initial discussion, and
- Border security cooperation and domestic anti-terrorism security

### *The Canadian Armed Forces*

Montreal participants were presented with a series of three possible broad objectives/mission statements that could potentially be used to define the Canadian Armed Forces and asked to take a few minutes to reflect on each of these objectives and to share their perspectives.

Statements tested were as follows:

- Strong at home (Force au pays)
- Secure in North America (Sécurité en Amérique du Nord), and
- Engaged in the World (Engagement dans le monde)

Of the three statements presented ‘Engaged in the world/Engagement dans le monde’ resonated most strongly. It was seen as in keeping with our long tradition of peacekeeping and of lending assistance to those abroad facing adversity due to natural disasters or otherwise. Furthermore, the use of the word ‘engaged’ was well received, it was likened to being ‘proactive’. This statement could refer to both humanitarian or military action and suggests active participation, rather than passive support.

### **Cyber Capabilities**

Participants in both Montreal sessions were asked what came to mind when they heard the words ‘cyber capabilities’. For the most part, participants offered vague references to ‘data’, ‘technology’ and more generally, ‘the Internet’. When provided with additional context as to what was meant by cyber capabilities (i.e. ‘space-based surveillance and cyber security’) most felt that this should be an area of shared responsibility between CAF, the RCMP, other federal government law enforcement agencies and local law enforcement depending on the nature of the threat – i.e. drugs, fraud, cyber-crime, cyber-terrorism, etc.

### *Justice*

When presented with a list of core objectives and asked which they felt should be the main objective of the Canadian Criminal Justice System (CJS) a number of participants stated that the **CJS should be focused on addressing the root problems behind the criminal activity**. Reasons most often used to justify this choice focused on reducing over-representation of marginalized communities in the criminal justice system. Indeed, much of the initial conversation tended to focus on crime prevention and ensuring fair and equitable treatment regardless of socio-economic attainment. Conversely, few said that the CJS should be focused **on being less hard on criminals**. Many participants expressed the view that the purpose of the criminal justice system was primarily two fold – preventing crime and ensuring reasonable punishment for crimes committed.

Most participants were in favour of mandatory minimum penalties as they are seen as a way of ensuring equal punishment among offenders of the same crime. Those less likely to support mandatory minimum penalties often spoke of the need to ensure judges had some discretionary powers to deal with the particular circumstances of each case presented to them.

### *Housing*

Participants in Fredericton were presented with a short description of a Government of Canada program to provide loans at low cost to municipalities and housing developers who construct new affordable rental housing projects. Most were supportive of this concept, they saw this as an opportunity to promote innovative approaches to the development of affordable housing, a program that encourages the construction of affordable housing. Some concerns were raised however:

- Do developers really in need of this funding?
- Is this type of program somehow going to lead to privatization of government led affordable housing programs?
- Should the government not be spending time and money addressing the root cause that lead to the need for affordable rental housing?

During this exercise, participants were also provided with a list of potential names for the program. Participants generally preferred **Affordable Rental Housing Loan Program**, and **Affordable Rental Housing Construction Program**.

### *Business Program Innovation*

The following exercise was conducted solely in focus groups facilitated in Fredericton. A government program was described to participants in which innovative businesses would be invited by the government to solve complex government problems by proposing their products as solutions. This program is intended to foster and promote the development of innovative business solutions that could benefit both the public and private sectors. Participants tended to be in favour of the program. Reasons most often cited for their support included:

- It would be effective in fostering innovation in Canada.
- It could benefit Canada as a whole and small businesses in Canada in the long run.
- It was better to look to Canadian small businesses for innovation rather than businesses

overseas.

Participants were then provided with a list of possible names for the program and asked to select their favourites, Names most often retained were:

- Innovative Solutions Canada (seen as descriptive, clear and simple yet encompassing the aims of the program)
- Solutions Canada (also simple and broadly speaks to innovation from coast to coast, focused on the ideas behind the problem being addressed – i.e. ‘the solution’)
- Canadian Business Innovation Research (most likely to sound like a government department/program)

### *Online - Net Neutrality*

Focus group participants in Toronto, London, Winnipeg and Vancouver were questioned as to their familiarity with the concept of net neutrality. Awareness of this concept was low. Despite having been provided with this additional information, participants still struggled with the concept, a number of them equating it to internet censorship.

### **Code of Conduct for digital platforms**

There was little appetite for a government regulated code of conduct for digital platforms such as Facebook and Google to ensure content reflected a diversity of views and local content. Many participants also viewed this as censorship stating that it is not governments’ role to filter content.

### **Fake News**

Participants also discussed the role of digital platforms in providing accurate information in the context of ‘fake’ news. While regulation of accurate news is ideal, most felt it was not realistic due to an inconsistent definition of fake news. For most it is the role of citizens to filter their own news, as information accuracy is often based on individual bias.

### *Themes*

Participants in Toronto and London were presented with a list of themes that might describe overarching goals for what the Government of Canada was trying to achieve. These themes were grouped into five broad sections. Participants were then asked to review each section and identify one theme within each that they preferred. They were subsequently asked to consider their five preferred themes and identify which of these resonated most positively with them.

The sections were as follows:

- **Section 1:** Building a strong middle class, Working for the middle class, Standing with the middle class
- **Section 2:** Progress for the middle class, The promise of progress, Building on progress
- **Section 3:** Skills, innovation, and middle class jobs, Middle class jobs in the new economy, tax fairness for the middle class
- **Section 4:** A healthier, stronger, and more caring Canada, A stronger Canada at home and





- abroad, A strong and fair Canada at home and in the world
- **Section 5:** Infrastructure investments, Strong and prosperous communities, Building strong communities, Building and connecting communities

### **Overall Favoured Theme**

Participants in Toronto selected “a healthier, stronger, and more caring Canada” as their preferred theme overall. It was seen as aspirational, underscored the need to strive for high standards both in terms of our innovative achievements while highlighting our reputation on the world stage as a caring nation.

Participants in London were less likely to express a strong preference for any one theme however “Building a strong middle class”, “Building on progress”, and “Strong and Prosperous Communities” tended to be retained.

### **The following discussions took place solely in Vancouver.**

#### *Opioids*

Many participants were aware of opioid and fentanyl use and had heard of this issue in the news. Participants were in general agreement that producers and dealers of opioid and fentanyl were the root of the problem. Participants were not aware of any federal government assistance of any kind, for this issue.

#### *Energy*

Though many participants were aware of pipeline projects, their specific knowledge was limited. Participants were then provided with additional information on the Kinder Morgan Pipeline and asked to list potential benefits and concerns they had. Benefits discussed included jobs, tax revenues, and royalties. Concerns focused on potential spills, tankers and the pipeline being an eyesore.

Very few participants were aware of the Oceans Protection Plan. Once provided a brief description, participant concerns related to oil spills or pipelines remained.

#### *The Port of Vancouver*

Few participants were aware of the expansion of the Port of Vancouver. Participants felt they did not have sufficient information/knowledge to engage in a meaningful discussion discuss the expansion of the South Delta Port. When informed of plans to increase storage container capacity participants’ initial reactions were to express concerns about potential increased noise, truck traffic, and street congestion as well as effects on marine life and water access.

### **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.

## Executive Summary – Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians’ Views – Round 2

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.

