



Government
of Canada

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du Canada

Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – November 2020

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

Supplier name: The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY

Contract value: \$1,618,838.00

Award date: December 18, 2020

Delivery date: January 21, 2021

Registration number: POR-005-19

For more information on this report, please email por-rop@pco-bcp.ca

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Canada 

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned The Strategic Counsel (TSC) to conduct continuous cycles of focus group research across the country with members of the public on key national issues, events, and policy initiatives related to the Government of Canada.

The broad purpose of this ongoing qualitative research program is three-fold: to explore the dimensions and drivers of public opinion on the most important issues facing the country; to assess perceptions and expectations of the federal government's actions and priorities, and; to inform the development of Government of Canada communications so that they continue to be aligned with the perspectives and information needs of Canadians, while remaining both clear and easy-to-understand.

The research is intended to be used by the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO in order to fulfill its mandate of supporting the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating government communications. Specifically, the research will ensure that PCO has an ongoing understanding of Canadians' opinions on macro-level issues of interest to the government, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between November 3rd and 30th, 2020 in multiple locations across the country including Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the Yukon. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are shown in the section below.

The research for this cycle of focus groups focussed primarily on COVID-19, as the pandemic continued to evolve across Canada and around the world. The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth including what Canadians were hearing about the Government of Canada in the news, views on how the federal government was addressing the pandemic as well as expectations and timelines regarding procurement and distribution of a vaccine, and Canadians' attitudes and behaviours in response to the evolving situation. A review of COVID-19 related advertising was conducted in several groups as was the topic of international travel and management of the borders. This cycle of the research also explored the intersection of COVID-19 and the economy, specifically in terms of the transition from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to Employment Insurance (EI), and various programs aimed at promoting job growth, skills development and training.

There were also a number of discussions held among particular subgroups of the population, including students at the post-secondary level, parents of school-age children and Indigenous people. Issues of specific relevance to each of these groups were examined in these discussions.

Other topics covered during the November cycle of focus groups included: the Nova Scotia fisheries, Indigenous issues, environmental plans, Canada-U.S. relations, western alienation, the offshore oil industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, and local issues in Whitehorse.

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.

Methodology

Overview of Groups

Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older.
- Groups were split primarily by location.
- Some groups focused on specific subgroups of the population including post-secondary students, parents of school-age children, Employment Insurance or other recovery benefit recipients, and Indigenous people.

Detailed approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Five groups were conducted with the general population in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, mid-size centres in Quebec, Lower Mainland British Columbia (B.C.) and Whitehorse.
- The other seven groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Parents of school-age children residing in major centres in Quebec and Ontario which were experiencing the second wave of COVID-19;

- Canadians receiving EI or other recovery benefits residing in Saskatchewan and in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Southwest (SW) Ontario;
- Female post-secondary students in Calgary and male post-secondary students in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA); and
- Indigenous people residing in B.C.
- All groups in Quebec were conducted in French, while all others were conducted in English.
- All groups for this cycle were conducted online.
- A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend.
- Across all locations, 81 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium. The incentive ranged from \$90 to \$125 per participant, depending on the location and the composition of the group.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Nova Scotia	1	English	Nov 3	5:00-7:00 pm	General population	7
Experiencing 2nd Wave – Major Centres Quebec (Montreal, Montérégie, Quebec City)	2	French	Nov 5	6:00-8:00 pm	Parents of school-age children	5
Experiencing 2nd Wave – Major Centres Ontario (Ottawa, Toronto, Peel and York Region)	3	English	Nov 9	6:00-8:00 pm	Parents of school-age children	8
Saskatchewan	4	English	Nov 10	8:00-10:00 pm	EI/Recovery Benefit Recipients	5
Newfoundland	5	English	Nov 12	4:30-6:30 pm	General population	5
Calgary	6	English	Nov 16	8:00-10:00 pm	Post-secondary students - women	7
GMA	7	French	Nov 17	6:00-8:00 pm	Post-secondary students - men	7
B.C.	8	English	Nov 19	8:00-10:00 pm	Indigenous	8

Mid-size Centres Quebec	9	French	Nov 23	6:00-8:00 pm	General population	7
Lower Mainland B.C.	10	English	Nov 25	8:00-10:00 pm	General population	8
GTA and Southwest Ontario	11	English	Nov 26	6:00-8:00 pm	EI/Recovery Benefit Recipients	6
Whitehorse	12	English	Nov 30	8:00-10:00 pm	General population	8
Total number of participants						81

Key Findings

Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

Government of Canada in the News (Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, GMA Male Post-Secondary Students, B.C. Indigenous Peoples, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland, GTA and SW Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Whitehorse)

In November, issues related to COVID-19 continued to be top-of-mind for participants when asked what they had seen, read or heard about the Government of Canada. Participants were focused on the following: the status of a vaccine (more mentions on this topic were generated in groups held in the latter half of the month), an increase in infection rates throughout different parts of the country, lockdowns in Western Canada, and the COVID Alert App.

On the vaccine specifically, participants recalled hearing about agreements between the federal government and various pharmaceutical companies to secure a vaccine. Views on the anticipated timeline for rolling out a vaccine across Canada varied with most assuming that the vast majority of Canadians would be vaccinated by the end of 2021.

Participants also mentioned receiving continued communications from the Government of Canada on COVID-19 safety guidelines such as social distancing and mask wearing, and many had heard about the transition from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to Employment Insurance (EI) as well as the suite of other recovery benefits.

Overall, participants rated the federal government's performance in responding to the pandemic as neutral to positive. Assessments were based on what they felt was a fairly rapid response, and reasonable support to individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic across Canada.

Suggestions for improvement, or additional actions the federal government could take, centered on enhanced communications – more authoritative messaging on safety protocols and greater transparency about the vaccine. There were also recommendations to delve more deeply into how the pandemic was impacting specific sub-groups, to conduct a full assessment of the CERB program, and to reassess border controls and movement of people through airports as a means of controlling the transmission of the virus.

Unrelated to COVID-19, other salient issues which participants referenced pertaining to the Government of Canada included the Mi'kmaq lobster fishing dispute in Nova Scotia, the federal government's contribution agreement with the WE Charity, prohibition of over 1,500 models of assault-style firearms in Canada, Canada-U.S. relations, and the federal deficit.

Government of Canada Response to Climate Change and Net-Zero Emissions (B.C. Indigenous Peoples, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland, GTA and SW Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Whitehorse)

Overall, there was very low unprompted awareness of the Government of Canada's plan to tackle climate change or its plan to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, when provided with additional information about the plan, participants were supportive. Most were of the opinion that this initiative would be beneficial for the Canadian economy in both the short and the medium-term. They believed it would create new jobs and would help to reinvigorate economic activity in a way that also directly addressed climate change. At the same time, they felt it was important to embed accountability into the plan to ensure that targets are met.

On balance, participants thought the federal government was either doing enough or too little about the environment. Some felt it was not acting quickly enough and that it had not fulfilled on earlier promises. Others believed that its actions were working across purposes and/or were contradictory (e.g., investing in pipelines and supporting the oil and gas industry while also setting targets for net-zero emissions).

Government of Canada COVID-19 Management (Nova Scotia)

A discussion of how well the Government of Canada has performed through the pandemic took place in one group in November, carrying over from similar discussions held in several focus groups at the end of October. On balance, participants felt the Government of Canada had responded well to the pandemic and cited examples of the rapid roll-out of the CERB and frequent communications about the state of the pandemic in Canada. Many participants acknowledged the unprecedented nature of this crisis and felt the federal government had performed well, and as best as could be expected, under the circumstances. At the same time, they did feel there had been some gaps, mostly related to those they perceived to have fallen through the cracks in terms of their eligibility for the CERB, as well as inconsistency in approaches to the lockdown across jurisdictions. There was also a sense that Members of Parliament should have been meeting more frequently in the early months of the pandemic to address this issue.

Participants were explicitly asked about the Government of Canada's performance in three specific areas:

- Protecting the health of Canadians from COVID-19;
- Providing information to Canadians to prevent the spread of COVID-19; and
- Providing financial support to Canadians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants' evaluations of the Government of Canada in each of these areas ranged from neutral to somewhat positive, and generally aligned with comments as noted in the section above (Government of Canada in the News). Very few expressed any negativity, although participants were somewhat more critical of the federal government's actions with respect to providing financial supports. Criticism centered mainly on concerns for people who were unable to qualify for the CERB and the potential for abuse of this program. The consensus was that the Government of Canada's performance had been relatively consistent throughout the pandemic on all three fronts – most did not feel that there had been significant or marked improvement or worsening in each of these areas since the onset of the pandemic. In terms of suggestions as to how they could improve, comments focused on two key areas:

- Communications – setting and managing public expectations and being more transparent about the outlook and federal government plans, particularly regarding distribution of a vaccine; and
- Financial supports – specifically programs and services, in addition to income supports, which would assist those in need in other aspects of their lives (e.g., affordable housing and child care) and would do so in a way which would encourage them to become less financially dependent on federal government support.

Behaviour Change (Nova Scotia, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Quebec Parents, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Ontario Parents, Calgary Female Post-Secondary Students, GMA Male Post-Secondary Students, B.C. Indigenous Peoples, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland, GTA and SW Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Whitehorse)

In nine of the twelve groups held in November, participants were asked to elaborate on the impact of COVID-19 on their lives, specifically any adaptations they have made with respect to their behaviours as the situation has evolved. The discussion also focused on their expectations over the next few months, particularly around the onset of the flu season and the holiday period.

When participants were asked if their behaviours had changed over the last few weeks, compared to the summer, their responses varied. On balance, the extent to which they had made any changes in their behaviour closely aligned with the status of COVID-19 cases and rates of infection in their locality or region.

Many participants indicated they had not substantially altered their behaviours, noting the following:

- A higher level of comfort in living with COVID-19, given that the duration of the pandemic by this point in time. Some commented that the most significant adjustments they had made had been

undertaken at the beginning of the pandemic. As such, they were continuing to follow the same routine;

- Increased confidence that others are acting responsibly (which did lead some to feel more at ease expanding their circle);
- A desire to reduce risk to others in their household or their community; and
- Ongoing strict adherence to safety precautions and advice to avoid close contact with others outside their bubble.

Other participants, particularly those residing in identified high risk zones, commented that they were being increasingly vigilant and taking further precautions to reduce exposure to the virus, including reducing the number of outings/errands, staying at home more now than they had earlier, and adopting more stringent sanitary protocols (e.g., frequent handwashing, gloves, masking at all times, washing clothes worn outside and wiping down groceries coming into the home). Indigenous participants spoke about ways in which their communities were adapting, specifically ensuring that elders and others needing care or food were able to receive it.

Expectations Regarding Flu Season and the Holiday Period (Calgary PSE Students Women, GMA PSE Students Men, B.C. Indigenous, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland B.C., GTA and Southwestern Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Whitehorse)

Relatively few participants were worried about the flu season, mostly because they felt that social distancing and greater vigilance about handwashing as well as mask wearing was likely to minimize transmission of the flu virus. Others claimed to have heard reports that influenza cases were lower than in previous years and took this as a sign that cautiousness as a result of COVID-19 was having a positive impact in this regard.

A number of participants commented on the challenges adjusting to living with the pandemic, especially as the weather changes and temperatures drop. They anticipated being more isolated and homebound through the winter months. Many felt resigned to the current situation until a vaccine became available and had been widely distributed.

On balance, most participants felt that further restrictions would be placed on the size of gatherings through the holidays. And, while many felt this was necessary, there were also concerns about general fatigue, a pent-up desire to gather with other family members, and inconsistencies in messaging. Many expected that significant numbers of people would simply ignore the advice of public health officials to restrict the size of gatherings.

Parents' Decisions on Sending Children to School (Major Centres Quebec Parents, Major Centres Ontario Parents)

Most parents had opted to send their children to school. Comments from parents suggested that, on balance, the educational and mental health benefits of interaction with teachers and classmates outweighed the perceived risks. This decision was made on the basis of several key factors, including:

- Concerns about the mental health impacts of isolation/lack of social interaction on their children;

- Issues with respect to learning disabilities;
- Disappointment with the quality of online learning; and
- Parental fatigue.

Parents volunteered that schools could be made safer by reducing class sizes, improving ventilation, promoting greater compliance with safety protocols, and generally ensuring a more organized and consistent approach to addressing COVID-19 across jurisdictions (e.g., school boards).

Views on COVID-19 Rules and Restrictions (Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland B.C., GTA and Southwestern Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Whitehorse)

In several groups, participants were asked about their views on COVID-19 rules and regulations in their community, specifically regarding clarity and whether the level of restrictions was appropriate. In all locations, participants concurred that they were receiving sufficient information, but the extent to which it was perceived to be clear varied. Some participants, primarily in British Columbia, commented positively about the information coming from the Provincial Health Officer. In Ontario, participants were more inclined to comment on what they perceived to be mixed messaging from various public officials. The basis for this view was primarily related to confusion about business closures (e.g., why small businesses were required to close while big box stores remained open) and concerns about a lack of enforcement of the safety guidelines, although many acknowledged the challenge of mandating and enforcing safety protocols.

When asked about restrictions within their community, participants' comments suggested they were divided into two camps – those who felt more restrictions should be put in place and that greater enforcement was required, and those who felt that proactive public education and information campaigns would be a more effective approach.

Impact of COVID-19 (Calgary PSE Students Women, GMA PSE Students Men, B.C. Indigenous, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland B.C., GTA and Southwestern Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Whitehorse)

Many participants expressed worries about the impact of COVID-19 on their family members and their community. Concerns were predominantly focused on elderly or immune-compromised family members. Beyond this, many participants reflected on the challenges for small businesses in their community, mentioning the loss of jobs (and people's livelihoods), increased debt and the long-term effects of business closures on economic growth and prosperity. On a community-wide scale, some participants noted that the massive shift to working from home could result in more permanent alterations to the urban landscape as businesses vacate office spaces, leaving retail and office buildings empty.

Significant concerns were raised about the mental health impacts of COVID-19, stemming from:

- Isolation
- Job loss
- Debt and bankruptcy

- Domestic abuse
- Substance use
- Inability to travel
- Lack of personal connection with family and friends
- Amplification of seasonal depression
- Grief for those who have suffered a loss

A number of participants felt there would be ripple effects which would become more evident throughout the winter months, alluding to how one or more of the above factors, in combination, could amplify the mental health impacts of COVID-19.

COVID-19 Vaccine (Whitehorse, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland, GTA and SW Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients)

Many participants mentioned the development and impending roll-out of a COVID-19 vaccine on an unprompted basis when asked about what they had heard related to the Government of Canada in the last few days. In Whitehorse, when participants were asked about the COVID-19 vaccine, participants mentioned they had heard about issues related to the timeline around receipt of the vaccine in Canada, whether it would be mandatory or not, and different plans being developed for the roll-out of the vaccine across the provinces and territories. Many participants in this group felt that front-line workers would be at the front of the queue to be inoculated, likely sometime in January through March, 2021, followed by other groups of Canadians whom they expected would be vaccinated by the summer.

In general, participants were either neutral to positive in their assessment of the Government of Canada with respect to procuring and planning for a vaccine and for its distribution. Although there was some confusion about whether Canada had secured a sufficient number of vaccine doses, many felt that the federal government had been aggressive in reaching agreements with multiple pharmaceutical companies. There was also strong support for having the military play a role in planning and executing the distribution. Overall, most felt that Canada was in a better position than many other countries to obtain and distribute the vaccine, although some could not venture an opinion as they did not feel they had sufficient information to reach a conclusion. While there was some criticism from a few participants who felt that the federal government had not produced a concrete plan for the roll-out, others thought that Canada was in a relatively good position given the existing national infrastructure, the cooperative nature of communities and Canadians' experience and adeptness with respect to the logistics of moving supplies over long distances and in harsh conditions.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Students (Calgary Female Post-Secondary Students, GMA Male Post-Secondary Students)

Discussions with post-secondary students covered a wide range of topics focused on the impacts of the pandemic on their lives, including their post-secondary educational (PSE) experience, employment

prospects, and their views on the financial supports for post-secondary students and recent post-secondary and high-school graduates.

PSE students identified many issues and challenges stemming primarily from the shift to remote learning as a result of COVID-19. Most students were disappointed with the quality of the education they were receiving online, citing the poor quality of lectures, a lack of social interaction with staff and other students, increased workload, cancellation of lab sessions and changes to exam protocols which had adversely affected their experience, among other issues.

Most students felt that the protocols which had been put in place for the current semester had negatively impacted the quality of their post-secondary education. The consensus was that the impact of COVID-19 had been significant, especially for those in their first year of studies who have been unable to establish any real connections due to lack of time spent on campus, and that their education had been devalued as a result.

On the employment front, students' experiences through the summer had varied, although all were very concerned about their future employment prospects. They anticipated fewer jobs and a more competitive job market, facing competition from people with much more on-the-job experience who had been laid off as a result of COVID-19.

Government of Canada Programs and Benefits

Some participants were aware of the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and had applied for it. Others had opted to apply for the CERB as they felt they qualified and the benefit amount was higher compared to the CESB.

When shown a list of four Government of Canada initiatives intended to help students during the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown below, students reacted positively to all of them.

- *Creating 80,000 summer job placements via the Canada Summer Jobs Program*
- *Creating an emergency student benefit of \$1,250/month for students who had lost their job or were unable to find work due to the COVID-19 pandemic*
- *Doubling student grants*
- *Increasing the amount of student loans by 50%*

Most felt that the creation of 80,000 summer job placements would make the biggest difference for them personally, given their concerns about obtaining on-the-job experience. However, when asked what would make the most difference for students across Canada, not just themselves, participants favoured those initiatives they assessed as benefitting the largest number of students, including summer placements along with increasing the amount of student loans.

Participants were split as to whether the Government of Canada was doing enough to support students. Suggestions included improved communications around the existing programs and initiatives, capping tuition fees and extending the CESB year-round, even if it meant offering a lower benefit level.

CERB to EI (Saskatchewan EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, GTA and SW Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients)

Many participants felt the Government of Canada had done a good job in regards to its performance in providing financial supports to people affected by the pandemic. They were complimentary of the federal government's quick response and its focus on getting support to those who needed it. However, when asked to compare its performance now relative to the early days and months of the pandemic, participants were somewhat less effusive, commenting that recent changes to the financial supports had meant a reduction in benefit levels for some. They also raised issues which they had either heard about or experienced themselves in regards to errors in the application and/or processing of benefits. This negativity was also linked to a general uncertainty about the continuation of financial supports as well as the open-ended nature of the pandemic.

While some participants had heard recently about the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and/or about Employment Insurance (EI), they were short on details while noting some changes had been proposed or implemented which they felt did not significantly impact key features of the program other than the name. When provided with further clarifying details on the suite of three new Recovery Benefits – the Canada Recovery Benefit, the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit and the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit – most viewed the approach favourably with a few concerns relating to the potential for fraud and the difficulty in documenting hours worked as part of qualifying for the new EI. At the same time, participants appreciated that the new programs provided benefits for self-employed persons and/or those employed in the gig economy, which they felt had been a gap in the original design and implantation of the CERB. They also felt that eligibility for EI had generally been made easier with the lowering of the required hours of work to 120 in total. Nevertheless, concerns remained that this may be challenging for some including seasonal workers and others competing for a limited number of jobs as the pandemic has resulted in closures, lay-offs and reduced hours for many. There were also concerns that these programs did not sufficiently address the needs of seniors, disabled persons and students.

Concerns were raised about the transition from the CERB to EI primarily associated with the speed of the change which it was felt might increase the danger of errors and result in some recipients falling through the cracks and not being moved quickly from one program to another.

When asked how long they felt that the suite of three recovery benefits would need to stay in effect, participants' responses varied – some felt it would be required through the third quarter of 2021, others thought it should be in place until a vaccine has been widely distributed, while some were of the view that setting a definitive date would be unwise at this time and that there was a need for more analysis of the evolving situation before reaching a decision. In general, however, when told that the simplified EI system and the new recovery benefits would be in place for one year and would provide a minimum entitlement of 26 weeks of regular benefits (aside from the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit), most felt this approach was reasonable and sensible.

Job Growth, Skills Development and Training Programs Name Testing (Nova Scotia, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Quebec Parents, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Ontario Parents, Newfoundland and Labrador, Calgary Female Post-Secondary Students)

Participants in several groups held during November were provided with details on three specific programs being launched by the Government of Canada to promote employment prospects for young people (aged 15 to 30), and job growth, skills and training for Canadians, more generally. Based on a brief description of each program they were asked to select what they felt to be the most appropriate name, from a selection of four or five options.

One of the programs specifically targeted vulnerable youth (e.g., youth with disabilities, from low-income households or Indigenous youth). Of the four names tested most participants gravitated towards *Youth Training and Employability Program* as it was thought to be a clear and straightforward option and clearly referenced the program benefit and the goal. Several participants favoured *Youth @Work* as well as *Experience Building Program*. The former stood out primarily for the use of the '@' symbol which suggested the program was relevant to the digital era. It was also felt that it would likely appeal to the younger cohort of digitally savvy program participants. The latter name was preferred by those who felt that it positioned the program within a more positive context, specifically framing the program around building experience rather than employability which they thought implied the target audience was either unemployable or less employable relative to other young Canadians. Although *Skills Builder Program* was the least preferred of all the names, those who chose it did so specifically because the name spoke directly to the benefit of the program (e.g., skills development) and did not include a direct reference to youth. Some felt the use of the term youth was inaccurate given the wide age range of the target audience, including those in their twenties. Participants actively debated whether those in their twenties, and especially those verging on 30 years of age, would consider themselves youth. If they did not, they felt there was a risk that these individuals would then inadvertently exclude themselves from eligibility for participation in the program.

Participants were provided with a brief description of a second program also targeted to youth (though not specifically vulnerable youth). They were told that this program would run for a limited time and would aim to help young Canadians find work placements through partnerships with employers from in-demand sectors. Of the four possible options, the most popular name among participants was *Youth Skills, Training and Employment Program (Y-STEP)* as many were drawn to the acronym (Y-STEP). Participants also expressed positive views towards the names *Canada Recovery Work Placements for Youth* and *Youth Work Partnership Program* seeing these options as adequately describing the program aim (work placements) and the approach (partnerships). There was very little enthusiasm for *Job Creators*. While some participants appreciated its brevity, others viewed the name as vague and nondescript.

Finally participants were asked to consider five options for the name of an initiative by the federal government to promote job growth during the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, in part, through job and skills training for Canadians and support for employers and communities.

Participants expressed a preference for three of the five: *Canada Workforce Recovery Strategy*, *Canada Workforce Training Initiative* and *Canada Recovery Training Action Plan*. These were selected over other options as it was felt that they effectively described the goal of the program or because the terms 'strategy,' 'recovery,' 'training' and 'action plan' were meaningful and resonated strongly with participants. The reference to an action plan in particular connoted a concrete outcome. In general, participants were opposed to using the word 'reskilling' (incorporated into the option *Canada Workforce Reskilling Plan*) while others expressed some apprehension towards *Canada Recovery Plan for Workers* feeling that it sounded impersonal and did not adequately explain the aim of or rationale for the program.

Advertising Campaign Review (Mid-size Centres Quebec Lower Mainland, GTA and SW Ontario EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients)

Throughout the pandemic, the federal government has launched various advertising campaigns to inform Canadians about COVID-19 as well as the public health guidelines and measures which are in place to keep Canadians safe. Participants were shown videos of three such advertisements and engaged in a discussion of their thoughts on each. Once the three were reviewed individually, participants were then asked to choose the one they felt would be most effective at encouraging people to change their behaviours to limit the spread of COVID-19. The three ads were titled '*This is for That*,' '*Glitter*' and '*Dr. Theresa Tam/Dr. Njoo*' the last ad featuring the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada (in English) and the Deputy Chief Public Health Officer (in French), respectively. Links to the videos shown in each of the groups are provided in both the Detailed Findings and the Appendix.

Overall, '*This is for That*' was the ad that participants overwhelmingly thought would be most effective. This ad struck a strong emotional chord. Scenes depicting milestone events and celebrations in peoples' lives served to reinforce why Canadians should continue to diligently follow COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Participants were drawn to the underlying message of unity and working together to overcome the pandemic. And, they responded positively to depictions of diverse Canadians and multiple generations all of whom are shown looking forward to a resumption of what were seen as highly cherished activities being undertaken with family and friends.

The remaining two ads, '*Glitter*' and '*Dr. Theresa Tam/Dr. Njoo*,' both received positive commentary but were not viewed as being effective to the same extent as '*This is for That*.' While participants reacted favourably to the way in which glitter was used as an analogy for the virus, most felt the ad '*Glitter*' primarily targeted youth and young adults, a demographic which they believed would be less responsive to the message given their sense of invincibility in terms of both contracting and recovering from the virus. The main criticism of the third ad, '*Dr. Theresa Tam/Dr. Njoo*,' was that participants described it as being prescriptive in style and tone. However, they found the ad to be clear and appreciated hearing from authoritative spokespersons, but also commented that the key messages were well-known and oft-repeated. With little new advice or direction, they questioned the extent to which the ad would prompt any significant change in people's behaviours.

Opening International Borders (Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Quebec Parents, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Ontario Parents, Saskatchewan EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Newfoundland and Labrador)

When asked under what conditions Canada should re-open the Canada-U.S. border, participants believed that this decision should be made when COVID-19 hotspots have been brought under control, the situation in the U.S. with respect to transmission rates has improved, and once the efficacy of the vaccine roll-out has been demonstrated. Additional suggested measures included mandatory quarantine for those arriving in or returning to Canada, tougher enforcement of public health measures, and widespread implementation of rapid, mandatory testing for COVID-19.

While there was some desire among participants to resume international travel for Canadians, they also expressed some reservations. Participants were concerned about travel to their destination and the situation there (e.g., infection rates, access to public health facilities), but were particularly anxious about issues they might face in advance of or upon returning to Canada. A middle ground that a number of participants agreed seemed reasonable was permitting travel to controlled destinations (e.g., a restricted access resort located in a mild climate).

Relatively few participants were familiar with a program aimed at travellers entering Canada by land or air which the province of Alberta was piloting. The program allowed these travelers the option of being tested at the border upon arrival. They could forego the 14-day quarantine if they agreed to a test upon arrival and to self-isolate until they received their test results. If the results came back negative, they would then be permitted to end isolation as long as they remained in Alberta for the first 14 days. The response to this approach was positive and the policy was viewed favourably. At the same time, some were concerned that it relied too heavily on an honour system and that travelers may not abide by the rules of the program, specifically that they would not self-isolate while awaiting test results. Ticketing those who did not abide by these rules was not seen as being a strong enough enforcement tool.

Part II: Other Issues

Nova Scotia Fisheries (Nova Scotia)

Most participants in this group were aware of the fisheries dispute between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers in the province, although they also felt there was a general lack of understanding among the broader public of the facts and historical context regarding this issue. Some thought the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) should have intervened more quickly, but most felt the issue required a negotiated settlement and, specifically, a clearer definition of what constitutes a 'moderate living,' arising from the *1999 Supreme Court of Canada Marshall Decision* which gave Indigenous fishers the right to hunt, fish and gather under these terms.

All participants agreed that this was an important issue which should be address by the Government of Canada. While some viewed it as a key priority given the federal government’s commitment to improving Indigenous peoples’ quality of life and economic prosperity, most participants simply felt the issue had gone unresolved far too long. When asked specifically what the federal government should do, responses varied but primarily centered on negotiating a settlement with Indigenous communities which would involve clearly defining the parameters of a moderate living. The sense was that this was the first step to ensuring peaceful cooperation and co-existence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous commercial fishers in the future. Moreover, it was felt that clarity on this front was a necessary step preceding any attempts at enforcing the law, which some participants also thought was required to remedy the situation.

Indigenous Issues (B.C. Indigenous Peoples)

An in-depth exploration of Indigenous issues was discussed in one focus group comprising Indigenous participants from British Columbia. To begin, participants identified several issues which they felt the Government of Canada should focus on, including health care, Indigenous capacity building and assistance for Indigenous people transitioning from off-reserve to urban living. In terms of health care in particular, there were concerns raised about limited access to health care services, poor health outcomes for Indigenous people and general discriminatory practices vis-à-vis Indigenous people within this sector. In addition to these issues, participants spoke about systemic discrimination in other sectors like the criminal justice system, which they felt needed to be examined and addressed.

While they credited the Government of Canada for its efforts to extend Internet service into small, rural and remote communities, they felt much more could be done to support First Nations children, address issues of addiction within the community, and implement initiatives to address racism and discrimination which many felt was pervasive.

Nova Scotia Fisheries

There was widespread awareness of the issues related to Indigenous and commercial fishers in the lobster fishery in Nova Scotia. Participants were critical of the media, the RCMP and the federal government in terms of how the issue had been dealt with and felt it reflected a general inequity in the treatment of the Indigenous population relative to non-Indigenous people. They also felt that misperceptions had been allowed to develop which, in their view, were related to confusion about the definition of what constitutes a ‘moderate livelihood’ stemming from the Supreme Court decision in the Marshall case. They were in agreement that the Government of Canada should address this issue along with others, including clean water on reserves.

There was a modest level of awareness of the Mi’kmaq communities reaching an agreement to buy the Nova-Scotia-based Clearwater Seafood in a deal worth \$1 billion. Most were enthusiastic about the potential benefits to the Indigenous community, believing it would add to Indigenous capacity-building, increase economic diversification and generally enhance economic development. However, some expressed concerns that the deal may lead to the voluntary departure of some employees and attributed this to racist sentiments associated with employment in an Indigenous-owned company.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

On an unprompted basis, there was little familiarity with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). When asked what changes they would expect to see if Canada fully implemented UNDRIP, participants' comments centered on having a stronger voice in decisions and matters affecting Indigenous peoples, although some remained skeptical about the speed with which UNDRIP could be implemented.

Systemic Racism

While some participants were unfamiliar with the term 'systemic racism', there was a general consensus that racism towards Indigenous people was common in Canada, reflecting comments made earlier in the discussion. Participants felt systemic racism was evident in many institutions and systems across Canada, including the child welfare system, health care, the legal-judicial system, housing and education. When asked what changes needed to be made to improve the treatment of Indigenous people within these institutions and across these systems, participants' main suggestion focused on improved cultural agility – a better understanding by institutions and organizations of the various cultural communities they serve – particularly in the fields of education and health care. With regards to the RCMP and local police, many felt the issues of racism within law enforcement were rooted in recruiting, hiring and training practices which were inherently biased against Indigenous people.

Drinking Water

Many participants were aware of the basic information with respect to long-term drinking water advisories on reserves and that the Government of Canada was actively taking steps to address the issue. Participants were shown an infographic summarizing the federal government's progress in this area (see the Detailed Findings and the Appendix). While some of the participants felt that modest progress had been made, many remained critical, noting that this has been a longstanding issue and one which should have been resolved long before now. Moreover, they felt that clean water was essential to the health of entire communities and that it was even more vital to address this issue in the current pandemic context. Questions were raised as to why other major infrastructure projects (e.g., micro-grids to deliver electricity to small communities) could be implemented more quickly. They recommended that the Government of Canada assign a higher priority to the issue, allocate more funding, commit to completing improvements within a faster timeline and undertake a thorough investigation to ascertain how and why the issue had devolved to this point.

Environmental Plans (Nova Scotia, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Quebec Parents, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Ontario Parents, Newfoundland and Labrador, Calgary Female Post-Secondary Students, GMA Male Post-Secondary Students)

Participants identified a number of environmental priorities such as climate change, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and transition away from fossil fuels in addition to lowering pollution (general), waste management, and specifically, recycling and composting programs. Other priority areas included public transit, water management (e.g., clean water, oceans, pollution of freshwater

sources, and safe drinking water for Indigenous people), reducing the use of plastics, maintenance of forests and green spaces, and wildlife conservation.

When asked how well the Government of Canada was doing addressing these issues, participants noted progress in some areas (e.g., banning single use plastics, expanding public transit ridership, and taxing companies on carbon emissions). Many were, however, less clear on what the federal government was doing about these issues, often attributing this to the more recent shift in focus to addressing the pandemic. Overall, the Government of Canada's environmental plans were described as being low-key, although some participants did say that they did not feel that they knew enough to speak knowledgeably or fairly on this topic.

Participants were shown a list of different ways to describe environmental plans and asked to select those they felt best summed up what they thought the Government of Canada should focus on, including the following:

- *A healthy environment and a healthy economy*
- *Building tomorrow's green economy*
- *Canadian green growth plan*
- *Clean jobs today and tomorrow*
- *Pathway to a more resilient economy and environment*
- *Reducing pollution, growing the economy*
- *Securing jobs for the future and protecting our environment*
- *Tackling climate change now*
- *The clean growth and climate action plan*

Many participants focused on *A healthy environment and a healthy economy* as this phrase was seen to adequately capture the vital and delicate balance of protecting both jobs and the environment while avoiding use of the term climate change, which was viewed as more value-laden. There was also reasonable support for *Reducing pollution, growing the economy*, *Securing jobs for the future and protecting our environment*, and *Tackling climate change now* despite earlier comments, in reference to the third phrase, recommending avoidance of the term 'climate change.' In selecting one or more of these options participants again stressed the balance between economic and environmental issues.

Many participants made their selection on the basis of specific words or phrases which resonated strongly with them, although there were mixed interpretations of some terms:

- 'Green' – many were familiar with this term and felt it alluded to incentives rather than penalties, but others interpreted it as being narrowly focused on sustainability of the natural environment only.
- 'Climate change' – this was viewed as a very polarizing term – understood by many, but thought to have become highly politically charged.

Participants were drawn to terms such as 'pathway' and 'plan' which suggested a roadmap, direction and a process. Incorporation of the term 'healthy' also generated a favourable response as participants felt it could be widely interpreted and suggested a focus on health in relation to people,

the environment and the economy. The term 'resilient' also resonated with a few participants as it connoted economic diversification and an ability for the economy to rebound quickly.

Other terms such as 'clean' struck a strongly negative chord. The phrase *Clean growth and climate action plan* was viewed as outdated and not reflective of today's world. More specifically, the term 'clean' de facto suggested some jobs could then be classified as 'dirty,' essentially discrediting the livelihoods and efforts of those working in these types of jobs many of which were deemed necessary and important to the economy.

Canada-U.S. Relations (Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Quebec Parents, Experiencing 2nd Wave Major Centres Ontario Parents, Saskatchewan EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients, Newfoundland and Labrador, Mid-size Centres Quebec, Lower Mainland)

Following the United-States presidential elections which were held on November 3, 2020, many participants thought it was likely that Canada-U.S. relations would improve, reflecting a belief that a greater openness to seeking resolution on a range of issues would occur. Descriptions of the relationship over the last four years were generally negative – terms such as 'toxic' and 'bullying' were commonly used – although participants were proud of Canada's firm stance on issues of importance to Canadians and the Canadian economy. There was significantly more optimism about the future and participants' descriptions reflected a more upbeat, hopeful tone. Many saw an opportunity to better leverage shared values between the two countries. Most felt that it was in the sphere of international affairs that many improvements could be made in terms of the Canada-U.S. relationship.

Although participants predicted that the tone and nature of the relationship would likely improve, they also thought that a number of irritants would remain specific to certain industries and issues (e.g., the dairy sector, pipelines). The expectation was that there would be continued friction on trade issues. A range of other issues were mentioned as possible areas of conflict, including the approach to COVID-19 which many felt was the most important short-term priority for the two countries. Other areas in which participants predicted there may be some degree of friction included geopolitics, specifically in terms of policies and relationships with Cuba, Israel and China, in addition to addressing carbon pollution through carbon pricing/taxation, and an array of broader social concerns.

Over the longer-term, others pointed to key priority issues such climate change, defence and relations with China. Participants were asked if Canada and the U.S. should work together to set joint environmental standards or if Canada should proceed notwithstanding what the U.S. does. There was a strong feeling expressed that both countries should work cooperatively on environmental initiatives and on setting standards. This view was however, clearly balanced with a tone of realism about the challenges of working together, especially given the wide range of standards set within the various jurisdictions. Overall, participants supported greater cooperation in environmental regulations, standards and policies but also felt that Canada should not feel constrained. The bottom line for some participants was that Canada should be willing to do what is right and that it should exercise leadership on the environment.

Western Alienation (Saskatchewan EI/Recovery Benefits Recipients)

In Saskatchewan, participants described the relationship between the federal and provincial governments in negative terms, reflecting their perception that the province was generally neglected. When asked what the Government of Canada could do to demonstrate a greater understanding for the issues and concerns of people in Saskatchewan, participants made three specific suggestions: recognition of the province's contribution to equalization, better representation and a stronger voice at the federal level, and taking more steps to incentivize a quicker transition to a green economy.

Several issues, specific to Saskatchewan, were put forward by participants in response to a question about areas to which the federal government should pay more attention. These included: crime in rural areas, improvements to health care specifically to enhance access and reduce wait times for treatment, and generally a more visible presence by the federal government in the province. On this latter point, participants desired greater acknowledgement of the contribution of key sectors in the province to the Canadian economy – forestry, mining and oil and gas.

Offshore Oil Industry (Newfoundland and Labrador)

In Newfoundland and Labrador, participants pointed to the resource sector (e.g., oil and gas, mining) as one of the most important industries or sectors in the province – the sector was seen as vital to the province's future economic success, creating significant employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly, and contributing significantly to the provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Relatively few were aware of the recent announcement made by the Government of Canada to provide \$320 million to the provincial government in Newfoundland and Labrador to support workers and lower carbon emissions from the province's struggling offshore oil industry, in addition to the \$75 million already committed in April to an offshore emissions reduction fund. Most reacted positively and were supportive of the approach to flow funds through the provincial government rather than directly to offshore oil companies. However, participants wanted to ensure this money would be used appropriately. In their opinion, this meant ensuring effective stewardship of current resources and promoting further growth in the offshore oil sector.

Most felt that the Government of Canada was doing a good job of supporting the industry. At the same time, they expressed a desire that the value-added from downstream processing of oil and gas resources should benefit Canadians as owners of the raw materials and resources. In their view, this approach would address the issue of exporting Canadian resources at a low cost and subsequently buying the end products back at a significantly higher cost. Additionally, some participants felt that the federal and provincial governments should be actively diversifying the provincial economy, specifically leveraging green technologies while also providing ongoing support for the offshore oil industry to assist in the transition away from fossil fuels.

Local Issues (Whitehorse)

In Whitehorse, participants identified a number of important issues for their community, both on an unprompted and prompted basis, including: the high cost of living in the North, specifically affordable housing and daycare, access to health care and mental health services, shortages of food and basic supplies, crime and substance use, employment prospects and skills development for the local workforce, as well as opportunities for youth and young adults.

While crediting the Government of Canada for the various financial supports offered to address those affected by the pandemic (e.g., the CERB), participants were concerned about abuse of these supports and the financial consequences for those who may later be deemed ineligible to have received them. They also felt there were opportunities for the federal government to address key infrastructure deficits in the areas of energy supply (e.g., when supply outstrips demand for power) and broadband Internet access.

When asked about environmental concerns in their community, participants focused on several issues: over-reliance on heating oil as a primary fuel source and the need to shift to more environmentally friendly sources such as solar and biomass, for example, in addition to the environmental impact of abandoned mining sites. At the same time, some participants commented that environmental initiatives must be evaluated thoroughly and decisions made cautiously, noting that consideration should be given to the full life cycle impact of any initiative on the environment, as well as possible unintended consequences or externalities.

Job availability and gun control were among the various issues about which participants were most worried. On the former, participants underscored the need for better human resource planning and targeting of employment opportunities to the local workforce. On the issue of gun control, the concern centered on new regulations prohibiting certain types of firearms which were seen as overly-restrictive, particularly in a community where many rely on hunting as a food source. Concerns were also raised about the lack of opportunities and infrastructure for youth and young adults. Relatedly, there was a perception among some participants that crime was on the rise in Whitehorse and this was thought to be, at least in part, a factor of youth disengagement, demotivation and under-employment, as well as an uptick in the availability and use of substances.

MORE INFORMATION

The Strategic Counsel
Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY
Contract award date: December 18, 2020
Contract value: \$1,618,838.00
