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Public Opinion Research on the Contract Security Program (Part 2 – Interviews)

Final Report

Prepared for Public Services and Procurement Canada

Supplier: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

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For more information on this report, please contact Stephen Ayres at (613) 946-3077

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français



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Final Report

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Supplier name: **EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.**

Date: June 24, 2019

This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of one-on-one telephone interviews conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Public Services and Procurement Canada. The research study was conducted with 20 Canadian businesses between May 14 and June 11, 2019.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre Recherche sur l'opinion publique au sujet du Programme de sécurité des contrats (Partie 2 – Entrevues)

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SUMMARY

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) is examining the contract security screening process to help improve its practices. A 2018 survey established a baseline on current performance and satisfaction among a target audience of companies currently registered with the Contract Security Program (CSP). The current study involves qualitative follow-up research to better understand how CSP's target audience understands and calculates the average time, effort, and direct cost incurred in order to obtain and manage individual security screening applications.

Qualitative interviews were conducted in May - June 2019 with individuals responsible for management of the security screening function within their organization. Recruitment was based on an opt-in question in the quantitative survey, in which respondents expressed willingness to be re-contacted for a follow-up interview. This produced a list of 121 Company Security Officers (CSOs) who are actively engaged in CSP by submitting security screening applications at least once every three months. Of these, interviews were conducted with 20 individuals, in the format of a 60 minute telephone interview. Among these individuals, the security screening function is managed internally by the organization.

Security screening is most often initiated by a recruiter, hiring manager or an employee's supervisor. The CSO or Alternate Company Security Officer (ACSO) then works with the applicant directly to obtain information and manage the process. The end of the application process is typically when approval is obtained by the CSP, although many organizations complete the process with a de-briefing session with the applicant about what information they can and cannot share in order to remain compliant.

The length of the process stated by participants varies considerably. Most said that processing times have decreased in recent years, particularly in 2018, with Reliability status obtained within days in some cases. Nonetheless, many said that Reliability status can still take weeks to months. Secret clearances may now have a "quick" turnaround, according to many participants, with a processing time of a few weeks. Most described the wait time, once submitting the application, as two to three months. For any clearance, participants emphasized that the timelines can increase drastically in instances where the applicant is not born in Canada or has lived or worked outside the country.

A number of issue areas were identified by participants as a source of frustration or inefficiency. Most often, participants would like to see more specific information provided by CSP in terms of the status of an application. Access to information and contact with the CSP representatives was also noted in terms of communicating directly with the representative reviewing the file, along with the

long wait times when making an enquiry through the general call centre or e-mail avenues available. Participants said the process would go more efficiently if application forms were updated for clarity and consistency between paper and online versions and if contact was made through e-mail rather than fax, which was described as a source of concern for at least a few participants. Although most participants appreciate the improved processing time for applications, the unpredictability and perpetual delays of some applications are still a hindrance on the process. Finally, the Online Industrial Security Services (OLISS) system is noted to have ensured forms are comprehensively completed; however, the system is described by most as not intuitive or forgiving of errors, and occasionally offline.

Most participants indicated that their organization does not formally track costs associated with the security screening process. The cost per application varies greatly between organizations, and can not be used to predict or extrapolate to other organizations. Most often, organizations do not consider cost on a per application basis; rather, think of the percent of annual salaried time they may spend on the process overall, including facility clearances and site visits. At an application level, costs are driven by the salary level of the CSO or ACSO, and the applicant. Additionally, in some cases, an organization does not pay for the time for the applicant to complete the application, the time to obtain fingerprints, nor the fingerprints costs themselves. Further, participants can describe a wide range of active time it takes a CSO or ACSO to work on an application, from 20 minutes to 8 hours. A few participants said that the costs for the security screening process are inconsequential to their organization, while a few others say that compliance and related inefficiencies are a burden with the cost passed on to their clients.

Suggestions to improve the efficiency of the process include:

- a single CSP representative assigned to an application to directly contact;
- an estimated time to complete a file and more details on the status of a file;
- OLISS used as a single source of information and status updates;
- updated forms and instructions to complete an application;
- shorter call centre wait times and more knowledgeable call centre staff,
- linkages of government systems to share information;
- customizable export fields in OLISS; and,
- updated/revamped webinars.

The contract value for the POR project is \$17,622.92 (including HST).

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To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail Stephen Ayres: Stephen.Ayres@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca

POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by: Susan Galley (Vice President)