

Executive Summary

Service Delivery and Privacy Public Opinion Research

Prepared for: Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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Executive summary

Phoenix Strategic Perspectives (Phoenix SPI) was commissioned by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) to conduct public opinion research with Canadians on service delivery and privacy.

Background and Objectives

The mandate of the President of the Treasury Board includes the development of “a new service strategy that aims to create a single online window for all government services.” During the development of the strategy, service departments have cited legislation, including the *Privacy Act* and select departmental acts, as one of the barriers to providing innovative services to the public. A review of legislative obstacles to providing seamless services is a key enabler for the Government of Canada Service Strategy and has received broad support from Ministers.

The Minister of Justice has committed to reviewing the *Privacy Act*. Some departments have also tried to amend their Acts in an effort to improve services. For example, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is exploring amendments to the *Department of Employment and Social Development Act* to improve its ability to deliver services on behalf of other departments, and therefore improve the overall client journey.

To help inform its contribution to the review of the *Privacy Act* by Justice Canada and to help prioritize potential amendments to service legislation, TBS wanted to gain a better understanding of public perceptions, expectations, and concerns with regards to the sharing of government-held personal information in the context of the delivery of government services. TBS seeks to strike the right balance between privacy and efficient and effective service delivery.

This research was conducted to explore Canadians’ opinions on how government should collect, use, and disclose Canadians’ personal information in the specific context of information sharing and a “Tell Us Once” approach for better, more efficient government services. The results will guide TBS’ prioritization of efforts to modernize service legislation, including anticipated impact on the modernization of the *Privacy Act*. In addition to informing TBS’ input for the *Privacy Act* review, the collected data will be used to support analysis of other legislative barriers and prioritization of legislative changes to improve services. Finally, the research will provide a baseline for continuous public consultation around how users want service to evolve over time.

Methodology

To meet the research objectives, qualitative and quantitative research was conducted with Canadians. This included a series of 12 in-person focus groups in six locations across Canada, a 12-minute random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey of 2,500 Canadians, 18 years of age or older, and an online survey of 1,033 Canadians who are members of an online panel. All steps of the project complied with market research industry standards, including those of the Marketing Research Intelligence Association (MRIA), *The Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research*, as well as the standards and privacy requirements outlined in the Statement of Work.

Qualitative Research

Twelve in-person focus groups were conducted between March 1st and March 7th, 2018. Two sessions were conducted in each of the following cities: Toronto, Halifax, Quebec City (French), Kelowna, Calgary and Moose Jaw. Participants were Canadians between 18 and 74 years of age. The groups were segmented by age. One group in each city was conducted with Canadians under 35 years of age and the second group was conducted with Canadians 35 years of age and older. Eight to 10 participants took part in each group. In all, 99 Canadians attended the two-hour focus groups. In appreciation of their time, participants received an \$100 honorarium. This phase of the research was qualitative in nature and, as such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of members of the general public.

Quantitative Research

A 12-minute random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey was conducted with 2,500 adult Canadians from March 1st to 25th, 2018. An overlapping dual-frame (landline and cell phone) sample was used to minimize coverage error. Interviewing was conducted by Elemental Data Collection (EDCI) using computer aided telephone interviewing (CATI) technology. The margin of error for this sample is $\pm 1.9\%$, at a 95% confidence level (adjusted for stratified sampling). The survey data has been weighted by region, age and gender to ensure results that are representative of the Canadian population. Population figures from Statistics Canada 2016 Census were used to construct the weights.

In addition, an online survey of 1,033 Canadians who are members of Research Now's online panel. The objective of the online survey was to explore differences in online Canadians' views of digital service delivery compared to Canadians surveyed as part of a representative telephone survey. The online fieldwork was conducted March 15th to 27th, 2018. The results of the online survey cannot be generalized to the population because the survey sample is a non-probability sample. They can only be considered reflective of the views of online adult Canadians. Survey data has been weighted by region, age and gender to ensure results that are reflective of the Canadian population. Population figures from Statistics Canada 2016 Census were used to construct the weights.

More information about the qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be found in Annex 1.

Key Findings

Online Activities

Internet use is pervasive, with nine in 10 survey respondents reporting they use it. Among Canadians who use the Internet, large proportions use it to conduct their banking (80%), to get news (79%), to buy products or services (79%), to use social networking sites (77%), and to stream services for TV or movies (63%).

Among focus group participants, virtually everyone said they bank and shop online. The most frequently identified advantage of both was convenience. Convenience was routinely seen to include the ease and speed with which transactions can be performed, 24/7 accessibility, and not having to leave one's home. The most frequently identified disadvantage of both online banking and online shopping was possible hacking resulting in

illicit access to one's private information and potentially fraudulent financial activity and identity theft.

Use of Government Services Online

Canadians accessing government services online do so for a variety of purposes, including to download forms (60%), file taxes (39%), apply for or renew a license (34%), apply for programs or benefits (29%), or pay a fine (29%). In addition, 58% of online Canadians have accessed Government of Canada services through an online account, such as *My Service Canada Account* or *Canada Revenue Agency's My Account*. The plurality of Canadians who use these online services (45%) prefer to sign-in via a GCKey, while just over one-quarter (28%) prefer to use a sign-in partner.

Lack of need (37%) is the main reason online Canadians have not used government services online. In terms of what would encourage or motivate online Canadians to start using, or use more, online government services, three in 10 pointed to improving ease of access or making the user experience easier.

Virtually all focus group participants said they are aware that the Government of Canada offers online services, and most had used such services. Participants collectively identified a range of things they have done, including, for example, filing taxes and tax-related reporting, Canada Pension Plan-related activities, applying for/renewing a passport, using jobs.ca, and Employment Insurance-related reporting. Many participants also said they interact with the Government of Canada through *My Service Canada Account* and *Canada Revenue Agency's My Account*.

Service Channels for Contacting the Government of Canada

More Canadians prefer using the phone (46%) and Internet (33%) when they need to contact the Government of Canada than visiting an office (18%). When asked why they prefer the phone or Internet, Canadians pointed to convenience factors. Specifically, those who expressed a preference for the phone were most likely to say they prefer dealing with a real person (44%), while those who prefer using the Internet said it is more convenient than other channels (59%), easier (43%), and less time consuming (28%).

Among focus group participants, the most frequently identified advantage of using Government of Canada online services was convenience with a focus on speed and efficiency. Other frequently identified advantages tended to focus on accessibility. This included 24/7 access to service, the ability to access and track one's data, access to online forms, and access to information that is detailed and accurate. Potential disadvantages to using Government of Canada online services identified most often included technical problems or glitches and the possibility of hacking.

Reaction to "Tell Us Once" and Related Issues

Two-thirds of Canadians agree strongly (33%) or somewhat (34%) with "Tell Us Once", while a smaller majority is comfortable with the information sharing that would be necessary to support this approach to service delivery. Almost six in 10 (58%) Canadians are very or somewhat comfortable with their personal information being shared automatically with other federal services as part of a single account approach for accessing government programs

and with the Government of Canada linking the single account to their provincial or territorial government.

Support for information sharing is not surprising given that Canadians believe their personal information is currently being shared by government as part of service delivery. Specifically, 72% believe that their personal information is *definitely* or *probably* shared between federal departments and agencies and 67% believe that the Government of Canada is *definitely* or *probably* sharing their personal information with their provincial or territorial government.

Convenience factors were most often cited by Canadians as possible advantages of the provincial/territorial and federal governments sharing citizens' personal information as part of service delivery. One in five believe that they would receive faster (21%) and easier access to (20%) service as a result of information sharing, while 18% said it would simply make access more convenient all the way around and 9% pointed to shorter wait times for service. Data security-related issues topped the possible disadvantages of the sharing of citizens' personal information. This included the security of their personal information (21%), privacy breaches (20%) and identity theft (7%), as well as other unspecified privacy concerns (15%).

Among focus group participants, there was widespread, though not unconditional, receptivity to "Tell us Once", including the sharing of information it implies. The most frequently identified qualifiers were that Canadians should have the choice to accept or decline such information sharing, that their acceptance would depend on knowing what information was being shared, with whom, and for what purpose, and that adequate security measures and systems would be in place. The main concerns about information sharing related to security and functionality. Many participants shared an impression that the more information is being shared, the greater the potential risk of both technical problems and security issues.

Trust in Protection of Personal Information

Almost eight in 10 Canadians said they have at least some level of trust in the federal government when it comes to protecting their personal information. Specifically, 27% have a great deal of trust (a score of 5 on a 5-point scale) and 51% have moderate levels of trust (scores of 3 and 4). Conversely, one in five said they trust the federal government very little (9%) or not at all (12%). Canadians reported similar levels of trust when asked about banks and provincial/territorial governments. Retail companies were least likely to be trusted to protect the personal information that is shared with them. Just over two-thirds of Canadians said they have very little (25%) or no (43%) trust in retail companies.

Among focus group participants, most trust the Government of Canada to protect their personal information and keep it confidential, though reasons for such trust varied. Some made it clear that this is a hope or expectation that they have, while others said they trust the Government of Canada because they are unaware of any major problems so far. Finally, some said they trust the government because they believe it has policies, procedures, systems, and expertise to ensure the security of information. To the extent that there is lack of trust, it has less to do with any shortcomings of the Government of Canada per se and more to do with a perception that government, like any organization, is subject to breaches on the part of sophisticated hackers.

Conclusions and Implications

Findings from this research suggest receptivity among Canadians to a single online window for government service delivery that facilitates citizens' experience across different government programs and services. The research points to a population that is predisposed to accessing services online. Specifically, nine in 10 Canadians are online, and high numbers use the Internet for leisure, such as streaming TV and movies, as well as for financial transactions, such as banking, paying bills, and purchasing products or services. In addition, nearly six in 10 online Canadians have accessed Government of Canada services through an online account, and many focus group participants said they interact with the Government of Canada through a *My Service Canada Account* or Canada Revenue Agency's *My Account*.

Convenience is a key factor driving the service channels used by Canadians. Whether Canadians expressed a preference for contacting the Government of Canada by phone, online or in-person, a top reason for their preference was convenience, with a focus on speed and efficiency. When asked what would encourage or motivate online Canadians to start using, or use more, online government services, a significant minority pointed to improving ease of access or making the user experience easier. Indeed, the reason offered most frequently—by nearly four in 10 online Canadians—for not using government services online was lack of need. This was followed by the impression that online government services are too difficult to use or time consuming—in other words, neither quick nor easy to use. This reinforces the importance of online government services being easy to access and use.

Considering a key objective of applying a “Tell Us Once” principle to government services is more efficient delivery of programs and services, it is not surprising that there was widespread, though not unconditional, support for “Tell Us Once”. The likelihood of positively assessing the approach was higher among younger Canadians, which suggests that openness to a single online window for government service delivery will likely increase with time.

Support for “Tell Us Once” appears motivated by a desire for easy access to government services. The main advantage Canadians associate with the approach is convenience, a benefit clearly in line with the overall objective of the initiative. Among focus group participants, the most frequently-identified advantage was increased convenience to Canadians by eliminating redundancy. Underpinning this was the advantage of relieving individuals from having to ensure that every relevant federal and provincial department has been contacted with updated information. Since convenience factors drive service channel preferences, if “Tell Us Once” places any additional burden on Canadians or makes access to government services and programs seemingly more difficult, receptiveness could be expected to be negatively affected.

Not only are Canadians supportive of “Tell Us Once”, they are largely comfortable with the information sharing needed to facilitate an integrated single online window for government service delivery. In fact, two-thirds of Canadians believe the Government of Canada already shares the personal information it collects from citizens, both between federal departments/agencies and with their provincial or territorial governments. When asked about the main advantages of information sharing, survey respondents pointed to faster and more efficient service. “Tell Us Once” may require changes to existing legislation. The

findings suggest that Canadians would be supportive of changes to legislation, provided there is a clear benefit to them—fast, more efficient government services.

Receptivity notwithstanding, focus group participants often qualified their support for information sharing saying that Canadians should have the choice to accept or decline. For some, acceptance would depend on knowing what information was being shared, with whom, and for what purpose, and on knowing that adequate security measures and systems would be in place to protect it. Related to this, Canadians are well aware that security and privacy issues accompany online service delivery and information sharing. When potential disadvantages of information sharing between the federal and provincial/territorial governments were offered, security topped the list, following by privacy breaches and privacy in general. Notably, though, one in five Canadians said there are no disadvantages of governments sharing this type of information

Canadians, moreover, generally trust the Government of Canada to protect their personal information and keep it confidential. The majority of survey respondents have trust in the Government of Canada, placing the federal government alongside banks when it comes to privacy protection, well ahead of retail companies. Among focus group participants, to the extent that there is lack of trust in this regard, it tends to have less to do with any shortcomings of the Government of Canada and more to do with a perception that government, like any organization, is susceptible to hackers. Simply put, in recognition of reality, security and privacy are passive concerns for Canadians, but they do not appear to outweigh Canadians' desire for convenient service delivery.

While focus group participants indicated that they do not necessarily feel they have much control over their personal information, they want to exercise the control they do have over what happens to their personal information. Canadians want, and expect, to be asked for permission when the Government of Canada wants to share their personal information. Six in 10 Canadians would want to be asked each time the Government of Canada wants to share their personal information with other departments. Conversely, one-third would opt to provide permission once only. Among focus group participants, the main reason for preferring a blanket consent option was convenience, particularly eliminating the need to provide the same information to a number of departments.

Finally, while there is broad support for “Tell Us Once”, the research suggests that a perceived downside of online government services is the lack of human contact. Canadians who expressed a preference for using phone or in-person options when they need to contact the Government of Canada pointed to this as the reason. This desire for human contact should be kept in mind for online government services. One way to deal with this is to offer a chat line or a direct, toll-free telephone number for support or questions when Canadians access online government services.

Note to Readers

- The report is organized by theme, with the results of the telephone survey and focus groups integrated in each section. To help the reader clearly delineate qualitative from quantitative findings, the results of the survey are presented first, followed by the focus group findings.
- Regarding the telephone survey results:

- All results are expressed as percentages, unless otherwise noted.
- Percentages may not always add to 100 due to rounding.
- At times, the number of respondents changes in the report because questions were asked of sub-samples of the survey population. Accordingly, readers should be aware of this and exercise caution when interpreting results based on smaller numbers of respondents.
- When reporting subgroup variations, only differences that are significant at the 95% confidence level, or indicative of a pattern, are discussed in the report.
- Regarding the focus groups results:
 - This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of Canadians.
- Results for the online survey are presented in Annex 4.

Additional Information

Contract value:

The contract value was \$209,862.47 (including applicable taxes).

Statement of Political Neutrality:

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives 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 contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.



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