

Reference Document

Department of Canadian Heritage

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. This information is released under an Open Government Licence - Canada.

Disclaimer: This resource has been deemed to have business value but is not an official publication of the Government of Canada. It is provided in the original language and format in which it was created.

Document de référence

Ministère du Patrimoine canadien

© Sa Majesté la Reine du chef du Canada. Les présents renseignements sont communiqués selon les termes de la Licence du gouvernement ouvert — Canada.

Avis de non-responsabilité: On a jugé que les présents renseignements possèdent une valeur opérationnelle, mais il est possible qu'ils soient inexacts car ils sont périmés. Ils sont fournis dans la langue originale et le format dans lesquels ils ont été créés.

Open Government Canada
<http://open.Canada.ca>

Gouvernement ouvert Canada
<http://ouvert.Canada.ca>

Canada 



Canadian
Heritage

Patrimoine
canadien

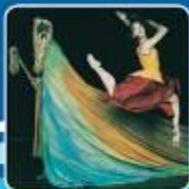
Canada



Data Collection Methods for Opinion Research

Canadian Heritage

April 2017



INTRODUCTION

- There are numerous ways that the Government of Canada can collect data regarding the perspectives, beliefs, values and opinions of the public.
- Given the complexity of Canadian society, the costs of collecting data, each method has its weaknesses and strengths, and no single method can be used in isolation to accurately capture the diverse opinions and beliefs of Canadians.
- The following methods will be discussed in this presentation:
 - Surveys;
 - Discussions with Canadians;
 - Social Media Analysis; and,
 - Big Data Analytics.

General Types of Approaches

Survey a
Population

Discussions
with
Canadians

Listen to
Discussions
Already
Occurring
Online

Analyze Other
Data Shared
(Sometimes
Unknowingly)
by Canadians

Snapshot of Ecosystem

Surveys		Discussions	Social Media Analysis	Big Data Analytics
Representative of Canadian Public	Representative of Clients & Employees	Non-representative sample	Non-representative sample	Can sometimes create a representative sample
Outside PCH (through PRG)	PRG	Can discuss complex issues	Provides insight to social media discussions	Almost real-time data
Ask who & why	Program specific	Can track demographics	Almost real-time data	Privacy concerns
Not real-time	Measure impact	Can lead to insights	No demographic data	Expensive & complex

Surveys

Contracted Public Opinion Research (POR)

PCH, through the Policy Research Group (PRG), must contract with an external consultant for POR when:

1. There is a need to get a statistically representative, randomized sample of Canadians;
or
2. There is a need for focus groups that consist of randomly selected members of the public.

There is a strict process to conduct Contracted POR.

Online Surveys

PCH, through PRG, has the internal capacity to conduct online surveys to meet clearly defined needs within the department:

1. To measure the impacts of programs, using a list of clients or employees.
2. The department must use the services of PRG, given that this is the only group in the department with the approved software by Security and CIOB.

Surveys (continued)

Statistics Canada

- Large, nation-wide surveys of the Canadian population
- GSS (Time-Use, Social Identity, etc.)
- Surveys involving more than one sector are coordinated by the Policy Research Group (PRG), and discussions are held with the Statistics Working Group.

External Surveys

- Non-funded research, but sometimes of interest and appropriate for PCH needs
- For example: World Value Survey

Contracted POR – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representative of population• Can ask questions* to clarify audience, motives, beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be expensive• Need to ask simple, direct questions• Respondent fatigue• Response rates decreasing• Not real-time data

Online Surveys (PRG) – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representative of the populations surveyed• Measures the impacts of PCH programs• Using existing contacts through PCH administrative data• Can ask questions to clarify audience, motives, beliefs• Simple and easy to run• Quick turnaround• Inexpensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to ask simple, direct questions• Respondent fatigue• Response rates decreasing• Not real-time data• Cannot use this approach for surveying Canadian public

External Surveys – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representative sample• Often with larger samples than we can pay for on our own• Can provide greater detail about specific groups (language, ethnicity, region, etc.)• Often requires no PCH funding• Run and analyzed externally• Can ask questions to clarify audience, motives, beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often PCH has less control and input• Generally not run every year• Timeliness reduced• Can sometimes be expensive• Need to ask simple, direct questions• Respondent fatigue• Response rates decreasing

Choosing Between Different forms of Surveys

It is also important to underline the differences between the various forms of surveys and the circumstances that may arise to privilege one form over another.

For example:

- When we need to know information from stakeholders regarding one of our programs, and we have their email addresses, it is often more expedient to use non-contracted surveys through the Policy Research Group.
- When we need to understand the opinions of the general population and identify a percentage regarding a society question or issue, it is obligatory to use the Contracted POR approach.
- When we need to understand complex, multi-faceted issues, it is often more practical to rely on External surveys (e.g., General Social Survey, World Values Survey, etc.).

Discussions with Canadians

Discussions with Canadians can also be used in certain circumstances, to provide a general picture of what some Canadians might be thinking about a particular issue or question. **Of note, the samples that result from these discussions are not statistically representative, but they can be useful.**

Online Consultations

- Consists of a link that is posted on dedicated websites.

Focus groups

- Convene small groups of Canadians to discuss targeted questions and issues.

Other In-Person Consultations

- Large Group Facilitation;
- Community-based or Participatory Research Projects;
- Key Informant Interviews.

Online Consultations – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simple and easy to run• Quick turnaround• Inexpensive• Can ask questions to clarify audience, motives, beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-representative sample• Cannot generalize findings• Need to ask simple, direct questions• Respondent fatigue• Response rates decreasing• Open-ended questions require additional resources and analysis

In-Person Discussions – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can discuss complex issues in nuanced ways• Easier to gain trust• Can ask questions to clarify motives, beliefs, values, fear, and more.• Can provide insights that can be subsequently tested via quantitative methods• Relatively inexpensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-representative sample• Cannot generalize the findings unless you follow-up with a quantitative approach

Social Media Analysis

Social Media Analysis allows to track **who** are discussing about events and issues of interest to PCH, as well as the **influence** of the those discussing, and the **reach** of their messages.

Social media analysis can show who is discussing an event or an issue online, as well as providing information about:

- What is being said;
- When they are saying it;
- Those who have the greatest influence in the conversation.

This sort of analysis can also provide important information regarding the effectiveness of the department's social media strategy and outreach. For example:

- Are our hashtags being used? Are there better ones being used?
- Are there potential collaborators that we should consider partnering with to increase our reach?
- What types of social media posts have resulted in the most engagement online?
- What type of online conversations should we try and be a part of?

Social Media Analysis – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close to real-time data collection and analysis• Inexpensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-representative sample• Cannot generalize the findings• Cannot ask questions to clarify motives, beliefs, audience, etc.• No reliable way of knowing who respondents are (gender, location, age, etc.)

Big Data Analytics

Big Data Analytics makes use of the vast amounts of data that Canadians leave behind them in their daily activities (often unknowingly), both online and offline.

This data can come from many sources:

- Credit card transaction data (online and offline);
- Shopping history (online and offline);
- GPS data;
- Store shopper tracking data;
- Internet of Things data (from appliances and devices connected to the internet);
- Browser history data;
- Administrative data;
- Tax data.

This data is often proprietary, but not always. It is currently being used in a largely unregulated way by private companies.

While certain governments have some over-arching policies concerning the privacy of citizens' data, this type of data management and analysis has been largely ignored by government.

Big Data Analytics – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close to real-time data collection and analysis• Can provide very detailed information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Privacy concerns• Can be very expensive• Data largely held by private companies• Cannot ask questions to clarify motives, beliefs, and values• Very complex• Requires expertise not currently available in the department

Conclusion

- Collecting the opinions and perspectives of Canadians is a complex undertaking, and requires a multitude of approaches, depending on the circumstances, the questions at hand, the sample population, and other factors.
- There is no single approach that can adequately meet all needs and all circumstances.
- Surveys, Discussions with Canadians, Social Media Analysis and other Big Data Analytics are complimentary, and should not be seen as mutually exclusive.
- The Policy Research Group is available to discuss these and other methods in greater detail in order to ensure that the methods being considered for projects best meet the needs of the department.