USE OF RESEARCH-BASED EVIDENCE IN PUBLIC POLICY IN CANADA

Prepared for the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA)
MAY 2015

by Philippe Azzie, PhD, CMRP
The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) is a Canadian not-for-profit association representing all aspects of the market intelligence and survey research industry, including social research, competitive intelligence, data mining, insight, and knowledge management. Members include over 1,800 practitioners, small to large research houses, and the many buyers of research services, such as financial institutions, major retailers, insurance companies and manufacturers. The industry accounts for almost three quarters of a billion dollars in market research activities annually.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) is the voice of the marketing and public opinion research and marketing intelligence industry in Canada. The MRIA undertook comprehensive research to explore how data and information are used in governance and policy making, and how such usage could be improved, with a focus on public opinion research data. One phase of this research consisted of in-depth interviews with opinion leaders with knowledge of policy decision-making in government.

A set of 39 in-depth interviews was conducted with members of the following target audiences between September 9, 2014 and February 6, 2015:

- Current and former senior federal public servants
- Current and former politicians, including federal elected officials and senators
- Current and former political strategists and staff
- Public opinion research (POR) coordinators and evaluation personnel
- Members of academia
- Representatives of think tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national associations
- Members of the media
- International experts in public opinion research

A list of participants can be found at the end of this summary as well as in the appendix to this report.

This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. Taken together with the small sample size and non-probability sampling, the results provide an indication of participants’ views about the issues explored. As such, the results cannot be generalized to the full population of any of the audiences included in this research. The findings are a summary of the feedback provided by participants and do not necessarily represent the position of the MRIA or the author of the report.

The expressions ‘participants,’ ‘opinion leaders,’ and ‘thought leaders’ are used interchangeably throughout the report to designate those individuals who took part in this study. Similarly, the expressions ‘data’ and ‘information’ are used interchangeably, as are ‘programs’ and ‘services’.

TYPES OF INFORMATION CONSIDERED IMPORTANT IN GOVERNANCE

Five types of information were most often identified as being important to guide, manage and administer the government: demographic information, information in government databases, socio-economic information, expert research (governmental and non-governmental), and public opinion research data. These were routinely described as important for the following reasons.

1. Demographic information describes the basic characteristics of populations, informs in the planning and allocation of resources, provides basic data that feed into analyses, and provides a baseline for social science survey research (e.g., weighting data back to population frequencies).

2. Information in government databases informs the government about the nature and extent of its interactions with individuals (e.g., as program users, benefit recipients, taxpayers), informs program evaluations, and can be cross-referenced in ways that can yield useful information.

3. Socio-economic information informs economic, fiscal, and social government policies.

4. Expert analyses provide evidence-based information that can help inform government policy and keep the government accountable.

5. Feedback on the role and importance of public opinion research data is detailed separately below.

PERCEIVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE TYPE OF INFORMATION USED BY THE GOVERNMENT

The opinion leaders routinely identified three perceived shortcomings in the data used by government.

1) Longitudinal data have gaps. This inhibits the government’s ability to identify and track trends, and to effectively address emerging issues and challenges (e.g., how to react to an aging population, how to react to a changing climate).

2) Data are not sufficiently rich nor detailed. This limits the government’s ability to conduct the analyses needed to understand issues fully and in all their complexity (e.g., understanding changes over time, understanding differences between groups of people).
3) Data are often outdated. This problem is increasingly difficult to address in a world where even the most up-to-date information can become irrelevant in a relatively short period of time.

Shortcomings identified less frequently include:

- data that is partial or limited,
- gaps resulting from information that is not being collected (e.g., lack of national environmental tracking data),
- difficulty transforming massive amounts of data into useful information,
- difficulty identifying and measuring data because of its nature (e.g., how to measure the integration of new citizens), and
- answering the ‘why?’ question (e.g., why outcomes are not being achieved, why people think the way they do).

PERCEIVED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE WAY INFORMATION IS USED BY GOVERNMENT

Subordinating evidence to politics was the most frequently identified perceived shortcoming in the way government uses information. This was seen to take various forms, including:

- ‘Cherry-picking’ or focussing on information that supports a certain agenda or policy and at the same time ignoring or dismissing information that does not.
- Employing a self-serving, partisan bias in the decision-making process (e.g., what will enhance electoral success rather than what constitutes sound policy).
- Basing policy on hunches, unfounded assumptions, or anecdotal evidence instead of research-based evidence.
- Giving greater importance to the opinions of a certain audience even when the issue relates to a broader population.

Three other perceived shortcomings in the way government uses data were also identified relatively frequently:

1) Insufficient analysis of data (e.g., focussing on nationwide findings without examining regional variations).

2) Focusing on shorter-term considerations (e.g., the electoral cycle, the next budget) instead of longer-term considerations (e.g., the demographics of an aging population and its implications).

3) Too many restrictions on data linking and sharing which ultimately impedes the government’s ability to collect and use relevant information.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S USE OF INFORMATION OVER THE LAST DECADE

Nearly all of the thought leaders felt that the federal government’s use of information in decision-making has changed during the last 10 years. Moreover, for the most part, they were critical of ways in which they think this has changed. Two perceived changes were most frequently identified, often together:

1) a lack of interest in data and

2) an increasing tendency to consider some evidence as less important due to partisan considerations.

Participants routinely provided examples of what they consider to be the government’s lack of interest in data. The most frequently cited example was the decision to replace the long-form census (LFC) with the National Household Survey (NHS) despite the fact that the NHS provides neither the richness of data nor the reliability of the LFC. Many also pointed to the closure of research and advisory bodies, with specific mention of the following: North-South Institute, National Council of Welfare, Law Reform Commission of Canada, Health Council of Canada, Canadian Labour and Business Centre, and National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. In addition to these, some participants pointed to reductions in the public service’s internal capacity (e.g., cuts to research budgets and elimination of policy shops) as examples of the government’s lack of interest in data.

Examples of what is considered to be the government’s tendency to consider some evidence as less important due to partisan considerations included:

- The government’s concern with issues such as violent crime, voter fraud, and birth tourism (traveling to other countries for the sole purpose of giving birth in that country) despite evidence that they are not major problems.

- The cut to the GST despite widespread criticism from experts regarding the soundness of this policy compared to other fiscal options.

- Cuts to the funding of arts programs despite evaluations indicating that such programs are judged to be very useful, and data showing that investment in arts is profitable.

A number of impacts were frequently identified as resulting from this lack of interest in data and subordination of evidence to politics.

1) The federal government is gathering less data and lower quality data, with changes to the long form census often given as one example.
2) It is more difficult to evaluate government policies and hold the government accountable. This is because its policies are either not based on evidence or it is unclear what evidence informs those policies.

3) Public service employees are no longer considered a source of ideas, and the erosion of their capacity is rendering it less and less capable of fulfilling this role. It was suggested that this role is being taken over by other groups. The government’s recent reliance on a CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) analysis regarding the EI (employment insurance) hiring credit was offered as an example.

Some suggested that another important way in which the federal government’s use of data over the past decade has changed relates to increasing difficulties with public access to information. Examples included:

- the government’s reluctance to provide cost estimates for new prisons and jet fighters to Parliament,
- the Federal Information Commissioner’s investigation of complaints that government departments aren’t releasing data in easy-to-read or easy-to-interpret formats,
- the shutdown of the CAIRS (Coordination of Access to Information Requests System) database in 2008,
- federal government scientists being restricted from talking publicly about their research, and
- budget documents containing much less analysis than before.

Results or impacts seen to arise from this preoccupation with controlling information included the following:

- greater effort is required to find and interpret information that is made public,
- public debate is less informed because there is less publicly accessible knowledge and information,
- it is more difficult to hold the government accountable for its decisions because the basis for taking many of these decisions is not public knowledge, and
- the government tends to go on the offensive against voices that challenge this tendency to ignore or hold back information.

PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH (POR) IN THE MECHANICS OF GOVERNANCE

Opinion leaders were unanimous in agreeing that it is important for the government to consult with Canadians and relevant stakeholders when making decisions. In explaining why, many identified POR (Public Opinion Research) as a practice that reflects a healthy democratic society. Specifically, a government that derives its mandate from the people, and is accountable to those people, must concern itself with the views of the people it represents. For their part, citizens in a democracy tend to take it for granted that the government will consult with them not only during elections but also between elections, and give them the opportunity to express their opinions on issues that concern them. POR is a mechanism that allows for such periodic consultations.

There was an equally widespread impression that POR is important because it informs the government in a way that improves policy and decision-making. Specifically, POR keeps the government informed about and attuned to the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values, and concerns of the people that government policies affect. This can improve decision-making in a variety of concrete ways:

- Helping ensure that government programs meet the needs of their target audiences.
- Augmenting and enriching statistical data with the real experiences of citizens, and/or the knowledge of expert stakeholders. This is particularly important if public impressions seem to be at odds with what other data reveal (e.g., if crime rates are declining but many people feel unsafe, if the economy is growing but many people feel insecure).
- Correcting misconceptions or unfounded assumptions on the part of government.
- Offering ideas and insights that the government may not have considered (e.g., potential barriers to a certain initiative, possible impacts of a certain policy, unanticipated consequences of a certain program).

Participants routinely added that, while important, POR is only one tool available to the government.

The overriding impression among thought leaders was that POR is an effective tool for consulting with Canadians and target audiences when it is properly conducted. They often added that this means conducting research according to accepted industry standards and sound methodological practices. Participants also routinely said that they have confidence in POR when it is conducted in a methodologically sound manner by reputable practitioners adhering to well established industry-wide standards.

POR was identified as useful at various stages of the decision-making process from the initial development of policy, to helping develop communications strategies, to
measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services. That being said, it was seen to be most useful in two areas.

1) Measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services (e.g., government programs for meeting client needs, websites for content and user-friendliness, communications materials for clarity).

2) Helping develop communications strategies (e.g., helping government understand where the public stands on certain issues and why, and what it should address when communicating about these issues).

A number of perceived risks of using POR in governance decision-making were identified but two were identified most often:

1) Relying on it too heavily (e.g., trying to tap issues that will enhance one’s electoral success, or being reluctant to advance sound policy because it might not be popular).

2) Misinterpretation and poor interpretation of results. (e.g., ‘cherry picking,’ pulling results out of context, drawing conclusions not supported by the findings, and remaining at the surface instead of probing more deeply to discover sub-group variations).

IMPRESSIONS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S USE OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH OVER THE LAST DECADE

Most participants said they believe that the Government of Canada’s use of public opinion research has changed over the last 10 years. And, for the most part, they were critical of the ways in which they think this has changed. The most frequently identified change was a reduction in the amount of POR undertaken which was seen to have three main impacts:

1) Public debate is less informed because there is much less knowledge available about what Canadians think about various issues.

2) It is increasingly difficult to gauge the extent to which the government’s agenda is attuned to the views of Canadians. Therefore, it is more difficult to hold the government to account for its decisions.

3) Government departments are less literate when it comes to POR in that now they are less competent to understand and use it.

In addition to reducing the amount of POR conducted, there is a belief that the government has restricted the type of POR conducted by focussing primarily on ad testing research. Moreover, some participants think that such research is being used primarily for the partisan purpose of trumpeting the government’s achievements or improving its image with the public (e.g., ads on the economic action plan or about services for veterans). Cynicism among members of the general public towards POR was identified as the likely effect of this focus on ad testing, a cynicism based on the impression that POR is mainly a tool used by the government for partisan purposes.

Opinion leaders were almost equally divided between those who were aware and those who were unaware that the Government of Canada’s spending on POR went from a high of almost $33 million in 2006/2007 to a low of $4.3 million in 2012-13. Most interpreted the decline as evidence of the current government’s negative attitude towards evidence in general and POR in particular. On the other hand, some leaders did not think they were in a position to interpret this decline. Reasons included a need to understand the kind of research undertaken as well as the types of projects that have not been undertaken because of these cuts. The view here is that there is no right amount to target, and the impression that new ways of collecting data from and about the general public may justify less reliance on traditional POR.

EXAMPLES OF VALUE OF POR

Approximately half of the thought leaders provided examples where they believe public opinion research was an important factor contributing to the soundness of a decision. Most examples fell into two categories: measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services, and helping inform communications strategies and policy direction.

Examples of POR that has had an impact on government programs included various studies that informed the evaluation of government programs, as well as the following types of studies:

- POR conducted by Passport Canada, particularly the use of research that was related to developing online information for the e-passport (especially FAQs).
- POR conducted by Health Canada and used for health promotion.
- POR conducted by Service Canada (e.g., client satisfaction surveys) and used to help inform decisions related to client services.
- POR conducted by various departments (e.g., Canada Revenue Agency) to understand and respond to citizen preferences regarding services (e.g., websites, communications materials, service delivery).
Examples of POR that informed government decision-making in terms of communications strategies and policy direction tended to focus on research that helped mobilize support for new initiatives. One example was the Liberal government’s decision to tackle the deficit when it came to power in 1993. This decision was informed by POR that consistently showed that deficit reduction was an important priority for Canadians. It was suggested that this type of research helped motivate the government to eliminate the deficit. Related to this, it was suggested that budgets throughout the deficit-cutting era were informed by a desire to address issues that concerned Canadians as was revealed through POR. Another example was POR conducted in the context of the Free Trade Agreement and the introduction of the GST, described as informing the Progressive Conservative government’s communications strategies concerning these issues.

A majority of thought leaders also provided examples of decisions made without any public opinion research to support it and which they think would have benefitted from such research. The focus was on recent or relatively recent decisions taken by the current government. The following examples were identified most often:

- **Changes to the long-form census:** It was observed that there was no widespread call for these changes and that the changes were criticized by experts. It was suggested that since the government claimed that it made the changes based on privacy concerns, it would have been a good idea to survey Canadians to determine the extent to which this was the case. It was also suggested that the government could have conducted research among experts to explore the ramifications of the changes it was proposing. This decision was described by some as a mistake and waste of taxpayer money because the instrument that has replaced the long-form census will be more expensive to administer while the data collected will be less reliable.

- **The Fair Elections Act:** In this case as well, it was observed that there was no widespread call for the changes introduced by this legislation (e.g., concern over voter fraud, concern over communications between Elections Canada and electors). Given that this legislation will have a direct impact on many citizens (i.e., acceptable voter ID), it was suggested that the government should have explored some of the issues through POR. This decision was also described by some as a mistake and waste of taxpayer money. This is based on the impression that it was introduced for partisan reasons and because citizens need to feel involved in decisions that affect them. Some indicated that government decision-making needs to be informed by longitudinal data which implies more research (i.e., tracking over time). Finally, it was suggested that more POR increases the store of public knowledge and supports research in general because findings can be accessed and used by different people (e.g., academics, business, municipal and provincial government).

Most of the other opinion leaders felt that this question cannot be answered in a general way, but feel that attention to substantive questions of content and relevance is needed (i.e., what should be explored and why).

**SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE POR**

Participants made a variety of suggestions related to how POR could be better done. These included suggestions that were methodological, procedural (e.g., rules, regulations, requirements), and substantive (e.g., what topics to explore). None of the specific suggestions was identified by more than a few participants.

On the topic of how POR could be better used, the most frequently-made suggestion was improving access to research findings. This includes making results publicly available within a reasonable timeframe, providing access to all POR-related information (i.e., not just results but methodology, instruments, and datasets), and providing access to these in a user-friendly way.
## Annex: List of Participants

### Current and Former Senior Federal Public Servants

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position and Affiliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Mostafa Askari</td>
<td>Assistant Parliamentary Budget Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Mel Cappe</td>
<td>Professor, School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto; former Clerk of the Privy Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ivan Fellegi</td>
<td>Former Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Andrew Griffith</td>
<td>Former Director-General, Citizenship and Immigration Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Alex Himelfarb</td>
<td>Director, Glendon School of Public and International Affairs; former Clerk of the Privy Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Charles-Antoine St-Jean</td>
<td>Managing Partner, Government and Public Sector, Ernst &amp; Young; former Comptroller General of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. David Zussman</td>
<td>Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management, University of Ottawa; former Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet for Program Review and Machinery of Government in the Privy Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Former Deputy Minister</td>
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### Current and Former Politicians

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Scott Armstrong</td>
<td>Member of Parliament, Conservative Party of Canada; Chair of the Atlantic Conservative Caucus</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hon. Perrin Beatty</td>
<td>See ‘Think Tanks, NGOs and National Associations’ below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. James Cowan</td>
<td>Senator, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Dr. David Emerson</td>
<td>Senior Advisor, CAI Private Equity; former Federal Cabinet Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hon. Geoff Regan</td>
<td>Member of Parliament, Liberal Party of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Nycole Turmel</td>
<td>Member of Parliament and former leader of the New Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Member of Parliament, Liberal Party of Canada</td>
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### Current and Former Political Strategists/Staff

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Ian Brodie</td>
<td>Director, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary; former Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Harper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Tom Flanagan</td>
<td>Distinguished Fellow at University of Calgary, School of Public Policy; former Manager, National Campaign of the Conservative Party of Canada; former Senior Advisor to Prime Minister Harper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. David Herle</td>
<td>Owner, The Gandalf Group; former Partner, Earnscliffe Strategy Group; former National Campaign Chair, Liberal Party of Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Chaviva Hosek</td>
<td>Professor at the School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto; former Director of Policy and Research, Prime Minister’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Brad Lavigne</td>
<td>Vice-President, Hill and Knowlton; former Principal Secretary to Jack Layton, Leader of the Official Opposition in Canada; current Senior Campaign Adviser to the NDP</td>
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### Evaluation Experts and Public Opinion Research Coordinators

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<tr>
<td>Mr. Benoit Gauthier</td>
<td>President, Canadian Evaluation Society</td>
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<td>Mr. Ian McKinnon</td>
<td>Chair, National Statistics Council</td>
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<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Manager, Public Opinion Research, Government of Canada</td>
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<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Audit and Evaluation Director, Government of Canada</td>
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<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Evaluation Director, Government of Canada</td>
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### Representatives of Think Tanks, NGOs and National Associations

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<tr>
<td>The Hon. Perrin Beatty</td>
<td>President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Chamber of Commerce; former federal Minister; former President and CEO of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Graham Fox</td>
<td>President, Institute for Research on Public Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. William Robson</td>
<td>President and Chief Executive Officer, CD Howe Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Peggy Taillon</td>
<td>President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council on Social Development</td>
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### Members of Academia

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Paul Adams</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Journalism, Carleton University</td>
</tr>
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<td>Dr. Caroline Andrew</td>
<td>Professor, School of Political Studies and Director of the Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Scott Matthews</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Memorial University of Newfoundland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Andrew Owen</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia</td>
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### International Experts in Public Opinion Research

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Scott Keeter</td>
<td>Director of survey research, Pew Research Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Robert Shapiro</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Political Science, Columbia University, New York City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Stuart Soroka</td>
<td>Professor of Communication Studies and Political Science, University of Michigan</td>
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### Members of the Media

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. James Baxter</td>
<td>Founding Editor and Publisher, iPolitics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Susan Delacourt</td>
<td>Senior Writer, Toronto Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Eric Grenier</td>
<td>Founder, ThreeHundredEight.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. L. Ian MacDonald</td>
<td>Editor and Publisher of Policy; National Affairs Columnan with the Montreal Gazette and the National Post</td>
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*Given their careers and the positions they have held, some participants could have been included in more than one category.*
The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) is a Canadian not-for-profit association representing all aspects of the market and public opinion research and business intelligence industry. Its mission is to promote a positive environment that enhances the industry’s ability to conduct affairs effectively and to the benefit of the public and members.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

MRIA undertook research designed to explore how data and information are used in governance, with a focus on how public opinion research data are used in governance and policy-making and how such usage could be improved. The Study consisted primarily of in-depth interviews with some of Canada’s leading opinion leaders with knowledge of and experience in policy and decision-making by government. This Report presents the findings and analysis from those interviews.

This phase of the research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. As such, the results provide an indication of participants’ views about the issues explored but cannot be generalized to the full population of any of the audiences included in this research. In addition, the findings reported below are a summary of the feedback provided by participants and do not necessarily represent the position or views of MRIA or the author of the report.

Below, we identify the target audience, followed by a detailed description of the research methodology. The Study and its findings will be widely disseminated to key stakeholders with an interest in sound policy-making and good governance.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this phase of the research consisted of opinion leaders on the topic of policy decision-making in government with a focus on Canadian opinion leaders. The research targeted members of eight different categories within the target audience:

- Current and former senior federal public servants
- Current and former politicians, including federal elected officials and senators
- Current and former political strategists and staff
- Public opinion research coordinators and evaluators
- Members of academia
- Representatives of think tanks, NGOs and national associations
- Members of the media
- International experts in public opinion research

The following specifications applied to this phase of the research project.

- In total, 39 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the target audiences between September 9, 2014 and February 6, 2015.
- Interviews were conducted by telephone and averaged approximately 45 minutes.
- All telephone interviews were conducted by a professional, independent researcher commissioned to conduct this phase of the study on MRIA’s behalf.
- There was a mix of participants by category. The following table presents the breakdown of interviews by category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Interviews Completed</th>
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<tr>
<td>Current/Former Senior Federal Public Servants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Tanks, NGOs, National Associations</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Efforts were made to get a mix of participants within different categories (e.g., mix of federal public servants by role and department, mix of politicians and political staff by party affiliation, mix of POR coordinators/evaluation personnel by department).
- Sample for the interviews (i.e., contact lists) was generated by members of the MRIA Research Team, which is comprised of representatives of MRIA’s Government Relations Committee.

2 A list of participants can be found in the appendix to this report.
• Given the senior nature of the targeted individuals, intermediaries were engaged to assist with the recruitment process. Specifically, MRIA team members, and others partnering in this research, initiated contact with potential participants by phone or email in order to help secure their agreement to participate in the study. As part of this process, those initiating contact provided background information about the research, encouraged participation, offered assurances of confidentiality, and provided details about next steps in case the individual in question agreed to participate in the study.

• A background letter was also prepared to inform potential participants about the research. This letter was offered on an as-needed basis. The letter was signed by MRIA’s Chief Executive Officer and printed on MRIA letterhead. It explained the background and purpose of the research, introduced the independent researcher conducting the interviews, offered assurances of confidentiality, encouraged participation, and provided contact information for a representative of MRIA who could answer questions about the study.

• Once individuals agreed to participate, their contact information was provided to the independent researcher who followed up with them to schedule a day and time for the interview. As part of this process, participants were sent a short email confirming the timing of the interview. A copy of the interview guide was sent with the email so that participants could reflect on the issues and offer more considered feedback.

• Participants were interviewed in the official language of their choice. Language preference was determined during the recruitment and scheduling of the interviews. Although a few participants could be considered French speakers or representing Quebec, all but two of the respondents were interviewed in English.

• The first few interviews served as a pre-test of the interview guide, where the interviewer was attentive to the functioning of the instrument to determine whether any adjustments were required. Minor changes were made to the guide on the basis of these first interviews.

• Participants’ comments are provided in quotation marks or italics, and have been paraphrased to reflect the intent of the remark.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY
The expressions ‘participants,’ ‘opinion leaders,’ and ‘thought leaders’ are used interchangeably throughout the report to designate those who took part in this study.

The principal investigator for this phase of the study was Philippe Azzie, PhD, CMRP, who conducted the English and French interviews and drafted the report.

Appended to this report are the following:
• List of participants
• Background letter (English and French)
• Interview guide (English and French)
This section presents participants’ views regarding the use of information in governance with a focus on the following: kinds of information considered important for guiding, managing and administering government; shortcomings in the type of information the government uses and the way it uses it; and changes in the use of information by the federal government during the last 10 years.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA MOST OFTEN IDENTIFIED AS IMPORTANT FOR GOVERNANCE

Opinion leaders identified various kinds of information as important for guiding, managing and administering government, but the kind identified most frequently, and often first, was demographic information. Demographic data was routinely described as basic information about the characteristics of populations, usually the general population but also specific populations such as clients of government programs/services. Examples of such data included age, education, income, employment status, ethnicity, religion, and dwellings.

Demographic data were seen to be collected primarily through the census, but also through surveys administered by Statistics Canada (e.g., labour market surveys) and government databases. Some participants specified that, to be useful, such data must be up-to-date, longitudinal (i.e., tracked over time), and sufficiently granular to allow for detailed analysis of subgroups (e.g., province, Central Metropolitan Area).

Opinion leaders provided the following reasons to explain the importance of demographic information:

• Government needs to know the basic characteristics of its population and how this is changing or evolving. Demographic data can provide this information precisely because its unit of analysis is usually populations (i.e., every single person), not samples (i.e., some of the people). In other words, demographic data tends to be comprehensive or complete, hence reliable.

• Demographic data inform government planning and allocation of resources. Examples included the following:
  – Effectively allocating resources to integrate new citizens relies on accurate data about the ethnic diversity of the population.

  – Effectively allocating resources for health care (e.g., building hospitals) and education (e.g., building schools) depends on accurate age-related data.

  – Longitudinal data revealing a trend towards an aging population help government anticipate and prepare for the implications this will have in areas such as healthcare, benefit allocation, and housing.

• Demographic data feed into a variety of analyses undertaken by the government and other groups. Examples included the following:

  – Measuring the impact of government programs and policies (e.g., uptake of a program).

  – Analyses on how various subgroups compare to the population in relation to certain variables such as income and education.

  – Evaluating the relationship between programs of study and employment opportunities to help address issues of skills matching and skills shortages.

• Demographic data provide the government and other groups with baselines and standards for social science survey research (e.g., the data is used to weight other research properly and ensure samples are representative).

• Demographic data help keep government accountable and help assess its effectiveness. For example, data on education can be linked to employment outcomes and used to assess the effectiveness of education systems.

RELATIVELY WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHER TYPES OF INFORMATION

While identified most often, demographic data was never identified exclusively as important for guiding, managing and administering the government. Four other kinds of information were identified with relative frequency as important in this regard:

1) administrative information,
2) socio-economic information,
3) expert analyses, and
4) public opinion research data.
Close to half the participants, including members of all stakeholder groups, identified each of these as important. Moreover, these data were often grouped together along with demographic data.

**Administrative information:** This was described as information collected by government departments in databases (e.g., Employment Insurance data, Canada Revenue Agency tax data). They were described as important for the following reasons:

- They are regularly updated and tend to be comprehensive in terms of the target audiences they concern.
- They include basic demographic data on users or clients as well as operational data (e.g., uptake, type of support provided). Therefore, these data inform government about the nature of its clientele and the reach of its programs and services.
- They provide government with necessary information to assess the effectiveness of its programs (e.g., are they reaching the target audiences?, are they satisfying needs?, are they meeting their objectives?).
- Such data can be cross-referenced with data from other government program files. This can yield useful information about the characteristics and behaviour of government clients and citizens.

**Socio-economic information:** This was seen to include both macro-economic data (e.g., unemployment rate, growth rate, gross domestic product, inflation rate) and micro-economic data (e.g., consumer behaviour). To some participants, the importance of such data to governments seemed self-evident. Specific reasons given to explain their importance included the following:

- These data inform and guide government economic, fiscal and social policy. More specifically, they help orient the government in its efforts to achieve goals such as low inflation, stable growth, and high levels of employment. These data also help the government to balance considerations of growth and efficiency with those of equity and fairness.
- They assist government in making plans, projections, and forecasts regarding such things as deficits, debt, and investments (e.g., in infrastructure, training programs).
- They provide information about behaviour, especially consumer behaviour (e.g., what people are purchasing, how much they are purchasing). It was suggested that such information helps government understand what motivates people, described as important because motivators tend to be more constant than opinions and often inform the latter.

**Expert analyses:** Sources of such information were seen as both internal and external to the government. Examples of external sources included academia, think tanks, research institutes, industry, international organizations, and NGOs (non-governmental agencies). Internal sources were seen to include departments, agencies, and crown corporations with expertise in various areas (e.g., National Research Council, Statistics Canada, Geological Survey of Canada, Atomic Energy of Canada). Also included were financial institutions that establish monetary policy, provide information on economic performance, and monitor trends and developments, as well as reports by the Auditor General which provide oversight of government activities and its handling of public funds.

Reasons given to explain the importance of expert analyses included the following:

- They provide evidence-based analyses based on the interpretation of data and contain important insights, perspectives, or considerations that the government may not have taken into account regarding a particular issue. Consequently, experts can help inform government policy.
- Research that is non-partisan, evidence-based, and subject to peer review enhances the legitimacy of government policies or initiatives. This can help justify policy and generate support for the policies or initiatives in question.
- Expert analyses help keep the government accountable by obliging it to explain, defend, or justify a course of action that is contradicted, questioned, or criticized on the basis of reputable research.

**Public opinion research:** A number of participants identified public opinion research (POR) as important for guiding for guiding, managing, and administering government. Because POR is the focus of later questions, the feedback will be reported in the next section.

**COMMON STRENGTHS OF MOST FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIED TYPES OF IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Participants focussed on what the most important types of information have in common that makes them important. These explanations included the following:

- These types of data help government address the following types of questions when it comes to policy making and public administration:
What is the problem we are faced with?

Why is this issue important?

What is our goal (e.g., who are we trying to help)?

What options are available?

What has been done before and what is the track-record to date?

What are the costs and benefits associated with different options?

These types of information help the government understand and evaluate policy options, as well as justify its policies. It was suggested that any government that wants to make informed decisions about the society it governs needs such information.

These types of information help assess the effectiveness of government programs, ensure accountability, and allow for corrections and improvements in government.

They provide government with the longitudinal and comparative data it needs to guide, manage, and administer affairs.

In addition to what they have in common, it was suggested that these five types of information are complementary. Demographic data tells the government who its population is, behavioural data tells the government how its population acts or what it is doing, and public opinion research data tells the government what its population is thinking and why.

ADDITIONAL TYPES OF INFORMATION SINGLED OUT AS IMPORTANT TO GOVERNMENT

Other types of information were also considered important for governance, but these were identified much less frequently and usually by no more than a few participants. However, those who identified them emphasized their importance. They included the following:

Big data: A few thought leaders identified ‘big data’ as increasing in importance for guiding, managing and administering government. Big data was described as the ability to combine and analyse data yielded by a variety of potentially rich information sources. Such data was described as important because it tends to be up-to-date and voluminous. It was suggested that the ability to mine such data (e.g., sift through and connect data from a variety of sources) can yield results that help the government to make timely decisions.

Environmental indicators (e.g., emissions levels, fresh water levels in lakes, environmental degradation): A few thought leaders suggested that this type of information has become much more important over time and has to be taken into consideration because of the economic, social, and political impact of environmental issues. Such data, it was observed, helps the government ensure that economic development is sustainable.

Social data (e.g., perceived well-being, perceptions of government, concerns about the future): While these data can be difficult to measure, it was suggested that such information is important because it helps measure phenomena as social cohesion and trust in government.

International data: The focus here was on ‘information sharing,’ including data provided by governments and international or transnational entities. Such data, it was suggested, has become more important in an era of globalization where what happens in one region can quickly impact another (e.g., diseases, security threats).

Health-related data (e.g., changes in life expectancy, waiting times for treatment services, public health surveillance and protection, health promotion and disease prevention): It was suggested that this type of data helps government identify health-related problems, identify trends, set priorities, and formulate health-related policies (e.g., emergency preparedness, public health information).

Voluntarily disclosed data (e.g., data found on social media like Facebook and Twitter): It was suggested that this can provide useful data about peoples’ behaviour.

Government outreach (e.g., conferences, roundtables): Such activities were described as effective ways of fostering information sharing and brainstorming about issues.

CAVEAT REGARDING USE OF DATA IN GOVERNANCE

A few participants contextualized their feedback about information considered important for governance by observing that governance is by its very nature a partisan and political enterprise. Consequently, they suggested, government is going to be informed and oriented by some vision, philosophy, or core set of beliefs and values. In short, they believe that governance is guided by politics, not just data, and that it would be an illusion to believe that there can be a purely technocratic, de-politicized approach to governance based exclusively on data.
BIGGEST PERCEIVED SHORTCOMING IN INFORMATION USED BY GOVERNMENT IS ITS QUALITY

The most widespread impression among opinion leaders, regardless of stakeholder group, was that the biggest shortcomings in the type of information used by government relate to its quality. Participants often used expressions like ‘evidence-based,’ ‘up-to-date,’ ‘comprehensive,’ ‘accurate,’ ‘detailed,’ ‘relevant,’ ‘valid,’ ‘reputable,’ ‘rich,’ and ‘reliable’ to describe the type of information that should inform and guide government. Three shortcomings in the type of data used by government were routinely identified: lack of longitudinal data, insufficiently detailed information, and outdated information.

• Lack of longitudinal data: The need for longitudinal or tracking data was frequently identified by participants from various stakeholder groups as crucial for informing government decision-making. Such data allows for time-series analyses that can reveal developments that cannot be captured through discrete, single point in time studies. As noted earlier, longitudinal data allow government to anticipate issues and formulate a longer-term orientation as well as evaluate the effectiveness of programs and policies. One participant summed up the importance of longitudinal data by saying that ‘a government that is not guided by such data is navigating in the dark’.

• Insufficiently detailed information: Another frequently identified shortcoming in data used by government was described as the lack of detail, precision, or richness in the data gathered. It was suggested that in order for data to inform decision-making effectively one must be able to ‘drill-down’ and ‘get into the weeds,’ and conduct cross-tabulations and comparisons based on age, gender, income, region, and other variables. Data that is too general is too abstract to be useful. Another problem of insufficiently detailed data was described as it doesn’t allow one to investigate why people think the way they do (i.e., investigating what they think without investigating the core values and beliefs informing opinions).

• Outdated information: The lack of up-to-date information was identified by many as a shortcoming. But, collecting and using up-to-date information was identified by some as a challenge because of the increasingly limited shelf-life of information. It was suggested that because reality has become more and more a moving picture, information can become irrelevant in a relatively short period of time. A few people suggested that this increases the importance of tracking data and regular updates of government databases.

The following perceived shortcomings in types of data were identified less frequently.

• Partial data: It was observed that data, even if it is evidence-based, may be partial or limited. Lack of complete data (i.e., data from all relevant sources of evidence) can adversely affect decision-making, especially when the government introduces new policies or changes directions. It was suggested that it is important for the government to know how different lines of evidence compare to one another (e.g., do they contradict, support, conflict with each other).

• Gaps in knowledge because of information not being collected: It was suggested that certain types of information relevant to governance are not being collected and this results in important gaps in knowledge. Examples in the Canadian context include the absence of national environmental tracking data (e.g., biodiversity data, hydro-geological data), the absence of nation-wide data on crime and criminal justice, and the lack of nation-wide health-related data.

• Determining the relevance of data: A few participants suggested that wading through data to determine what is relevant is a growing challenge as the mass of data available to the government grows. In their opinion, one of the main challenges government faces is how to turn the massive amounts of data at its disposal into useful or relevant information. As one participant put it, a crucial question for government is what does this data mean or tell us?

• Difficulty collecting the data sought: It was observed that, in some instances, the data sought is difficult to identify and measure because of its nature. For example it can be difficult to measure phenomena like social cohesion and happiness, or to measure certain outcomes or objectives with a view to improving services or programs (e.g., how does one measure something like integrating new citizens, or meeting the objective of enhancing the value of citizenship).

• Answering the ‘why?’ question: It was suggested that answering the ‘why?’ question can be difficult. Government, it was observed, typically does a good job tracking such things as who gets what, when, and how. But, it is often difficult for government to determine why things are happening (e.g., why outcomes are not being achieved). It was observed that another why question that can be difficult to answer is why people think the way they do (i.e., getting below the surface to understand the values and beliefs informing opinions).
BUDGETARY AND TIME CONSTRAINTS ON GOVERNMENT RECOGNIZED BY SOME

Some opinion leaders pointed out that government faces time-related and/or budgetary constraints that can affect the quality of data at their disposal.

- **Time-related constraints:** Some observed that government often must deal with immediate issues and crises. The result, in their opinion, is that some decisions have to be made relatively quickly with little time for thoughtful consideration of all the relevant information. Moreover, it was observed that, even when there is time to collect and consider all the relevant information, some of it may no longer be relevant by the time it is analysed. For example, program evaluations typically take much time and by the time they are completed some of the data may no longer be actionable or relevant.

- **Budgetary restraints:** Some noted that budgetary restrictions can adversely affect the quantity of information collected as well as its quality (e.g., lack of resources for data cleaning, quality assurance, monitoring of data collection). One participant noted in this regard that collecting good quality data can be an expensive undertaking.

SUBORDINATING EVIDENCE TO POLITICS – MAIN SHORTCOMING IN HOW GOVERNMENT USES DATA

When it came to perceived shortcomings in the way government uses information, participant feedback focussed most often on the phenomenon of subordinating evidence to politics. In other words, they focussed on the problem of government considering some information to be less important in the process of political decision making. Typical ways of describing this phenomenon included references to ‘being guided by partisan considerations,’ ‘sacrificing policy to politics,’ and ‘being guided mainly by conviction, special interest, or ideology’. Examples of how this can manifest itself in the use of data were offered by participants from all stakeholder groups. They included the following:

- ‘Cherry-picking’ information that supports a certain agenda or policy and ignoring or dismissing data that does not.
- A disproportionate emphasis on partisan considerations and potential political consequences rather than on good policy (e.g., focusing on enhancing electoral success rather than what constitutes good policy).
- Basing policy on hunches, unfounded assumptions, or anecdotal evidence instead of research-based evidence.

This was sometimes described as ‘solutions in search of problems’ or decision-making taken to advance an agenda rather than to address an actual existing problem.

- Narrowly interpreting the public interest. This was described as associating the general interest with a certain audience and giving that audience primacy in considerations of the public interest. It was suggested that this can affect a government’s views about the type of data it needs in order to govern (e.g., an impression that constituent and supporter feedback is more meaningful than other types of information).

A few people who identified the subordination of evidence to politics as a shortcoming specified that it would be naïve to think that partisan considerations are unimportant. They pointed out that concern with election or re-election is important because a political party has to gain and maintain power in order to implement good policy. However, it was suggested that while a concern with good policy cannot be separated from political calculations, there needs to be a balance wherein politics does not trump good policy.

Other perceived shortcomings in the way government uses data that were identified relatively frequently included the following:

- **Improper analysis of data:** A number of thought leaders from various stakeholder groups identified this phenomenon but the focus was not on ‘cherry-picking’ or ignoring data. Rather, the focus was on what was described as superficial interpretation of data. Examples included drawing conclusions based on general results of a survey without examining subgroups, focussing on data from a snapshot in time instead of analyzing longitudinal data, and pulling results out of context.

- **Focus on the short-term:** This shortcoming was identified mostly by current and former civil servants and representatives of think tanks, NGOs, and national associations. It was described as a disproportionate preoccupation with getting information quickly and for specific and immediate purposes to the neglect of developing a coherent longer-term approach to issues based on analysis of trends and what they reveal about the ‘big picture’ or on the basis of taking ‘the longer view’. Its characteristics were identified as greater reliance on discrete data than longitudinal and comparative data, and preoccupation with short-term considerations (e.g., the electoral cycle, the next budget) instead of longer-term considerations (e.g., the identification of an aging population and its implications).
• **Not linking data and sources:** This shortcoming was identified mostly by current and former civil servants, but also by a few politicians. It was suggested that limitations and restrictions related to data linking and data sharing (often for reasons of confidentiality) prevent the government from collecting and using relevant important information that can improve policy. The following examples were provided:

  – A program that matched data from customs declaration forms with data from employment insurance claimants. This program could identify individuals’ dates of departure from and arrival back in Canada to reveal that false EI claims had been filed by some individuals. The evidence, however, was dismissed based on the argument that such data matching violates privacy rights. Granting the importance of ensuring a right to privacy, it was suggested that in situations where data linking reveals that crimes are being committed, evidence should not be dismissed on the basis of a right to privacy.

  – Linking post-secondary student identification numbers to income tax returns, it was suggested, would provide consistent labour market information (LMI) on employment and earnings outcomes. It was observed that this would require co-operation between organizations collecting data (e.g., universities and the Canada Revenue Agency), but that this would provide more precise LMI because of its comprehensiveness.

Three other perceived shortcomings in the way government uses data were identified:

• **Controlling information:** This perceived shortcoming was identified by some journalists, political staff, and representatives of think tanks, NGOs, and national associations. It was seen to take two forms: 1) not making information publicly accessible, and/or 2) making information accessible but in ways that are not user-friendly. A few participants specified that difficulty accessing information makes it difficult to hold the government accountable for its decisions.

• **Reliance on ‘traditional’ sources of information:** A few participants identified government reluctance to use data it has not generated itself as a shortcoming. They believe that government needs to modernize the ways it collects and analyses information in light of the huge volumes of data that are now available and the technologies that are available to analyse those data. It was noted that this can be risky because government has traditionally relied on structured and cleaned data rather than unstructured information and less reliable data. However, it was suggested that government has to meet this challenge by learning how to access such data and extracting what is valuable and relevant.

• **A reluctance to make difficult decisions warranted by available data.** This was identified as a tendency to take a ‘wait and see attitude’ to an identified problem (e.g., *let’s wait a little while to see if things change*).

**NEAR UNANIMOUS IMPRESSION THAT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S USE OF INFORMATION HAS CHANGED**

Nearly all thought leaders think that the federal government’s use of information in governance/decision-making has changed during the last 10 years. Moreover, for the most part, participants across various stakeholder groups were critical of ways in which they think this has changed. They routinely provided examples of how, in their opinion, federal government decisions and practices over the past decade reflect the shortcomings identified previously in reference to the use of data by government. A few felt unable to comment on this issue, mainly international experts in public opinion research.

**LACK OF INTEREST IN DATA, SUBORDINATING EVIDENCE TO POLITICS – MAIN IMPRESSIONS OF HOW USE OF DATA AT FEDERAL LEVEL HAS CHANGED**

The most frequently perceived changes in the federal government’s use of information over the past decade were identified as 1) a lack of interest in data, and 2) an increasing tendency to subordinate evidence to politics. Comments such as the following were routinely offered by participants.

  – “The current federal government is driven by an ideological agenda and is therefore not interested in data and research-based information, at least not in data and information that do not support its agenda. The government believes it has the answers, and if you have the answers you don’t need research and analysis.”

  – “This government has a tendency to chart a course in advance of any data analysis, and then turn to the data to see if and how it supports this pre-charted course.”

  – “The last decade has witnessed a growing disregard and lack of demand for data which is ironic since we live in age where access to sources of information and data has never been higher.”
“The collection and use of information has become much more subject to partisan and ideological considerations than in the past.”

“There is a blurring of the line between evidence and opinion in policy-making.”

A few participants making such comments added that while governments have always used data for partisan purposes, the tendency seems to have become much more prevalent at the federal level over the past decade. A few others suggested that while all governments are guided by a certain perspective, vision, or outlook, the tendency to subordinate evidence and data to ideological and partisan considerations has become more acute over the past decade.

A different impression was the suggestion that the federal government is very sensitive to the repercussions of its decisions which has given rise to a misperception that it does not care about evidence and data.

EXAMPLES OF SUBORDINATING EVIDENCE TO POLITICS AND LACK OF INTEREST IN DATA

Opinion leaders provided what they take to be evidence of this mindset on the part of the federal government. These included the following, identified by participants from various stakeholder groups:

- **Changes in research conducted by Statistics Canada, with a focus on changes to the Long Form Census.** Replacement of the long-form census (LFC) with the National Household Survey (NHS) was the single most frequently given example of the federal government’s lack of interest in data. Participants routinely observed that the NHS does not provide the reliability and richness of information provided by the LFC. Moreover, it was observed that the changes make tracking difficult or impossible because the NHS does not collect the same data as its predecessor. As further evidence of the government’s lack of interest in evidence, a few participants also pointed to cutbacks on surveys conducted by Statistics Canada including the Workplace and Employee Survey, the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics.

- **Elimination of sources of information:** Many participants pointed to the closure or elimination of research and advisory bodies as evidence of the federal government’s lack of interest in data. They included the following:
  - The North-South Institute

- **Reducing the public service’s capacity:** Some participants pointed to reductions in research capacity (i.e., cuts to research budgets) and analysis capacity (i.e., elimination of policy shops) as examples of the government’s lack of interest in data. A few added that, in fairness, it must be noted that this process began under Liberal governments in the 1990s when the drive to eliminate the deficit resulted in massive program reviews. At the same time, it was noted that after the downsizing in the 1990s, Clerks of the Privy Council tried to restore policy capacity. It was suggested that reductions in internal capacity have accelerated under the current government. In addition to cuts to research budgets and the weakening of internal policy shops, it was noted that ministries no longer provide their internal working papers series through which papers on various issues were produced and subject to comment and external scrutiny.

- The National Council of Welfare
- The Law Reform Commission of Canada
- The Health Council of Canada
- The Canadian Labour and Business Centre
- The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

- **Ignoring data in policy development:** Many leaders pointed to specific government policy as evidence of its willingness to subordinate policy to politics. Examples included the following:
  - The current government’s concern with such issues as violent crime, voter fraud, birth tourism (i.e., women coming to Canada to give birth in order to take advantage of Canadian services) despite evidence that none of these are major problems.
  - The cut to the Goods and Services Tax despite widespread criticism from experts regarding the soundness of this policy compared to other fiscal options.
  - The above mentioned changes to the long form census despite widespread warnings from experts that this would adversely affect the quality and reliability of data collected by the government.
  - Federal government cuts to funding of arts programs even though evaluations revealed that these programs were judged to be very useful and data showed that investment in arts is profitable (i.e., the arts return more than what is invested in them).
PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF SUBORDINATING EVIDENCE TO POLITICS AND LACK OF INTEREST IN DATA

Opinion leaders identified a variety of results seen to arise from subordination of evidence to politics and/or lack of interest in data. Those identified most often included the following:

- **Less data and lower quality data.** A number of participants suggested that the elimination of and changes to sources of information means the federal government is gathering less data and lower quality data. Loss of data collected through the long-form census (LFC) was often given by way of example, including the inability to conduct reliable longitudinal analyses. It was also observed that the LFC was not only a rich source of data but the benchmark for Statistics Canada’s monthly labour market surveys. It was suggested that the volatility witnessed in recent monthly labour market surveys (i.e., the unprecedented fluctuations in employment numbers) is likely due in part to use of data from the NHS for weighting purposes. In other words, it was suggested that because this data is not as reliable as that collected through the LFC, the result has been more volatility in the monthly survey findings.

- **Loss of ability to effectively evaluate the success or failure of policies:** Some participants suggested that when policy-making is not based on evidence (or it is unclear what evidence is informing a policy), it becomes difficult to assess those policies. Related to this was concern that the main question for the current government when it comes to policy is not ‘does the evidence support us in what we want to achieve?’ but rather ‘how do we get done what we want to achieve?’ It was suggested that the danger when this becomes the primary consideration is that any policy decision can be considered successful as long as it results in the desired effect (e.g., enhancing electoral success).

- **Civil service is no longer considered a source of ideas:** This point was made primarily by current/former civil servants who suggested that decision-making has become much more of a top down process than in the past. Ministers, it was observed, are not asking for policy-related ideas from public servants to inform their decisions. Rather, Ministers have ready-made policies which public servants are expected to implement. At the same time, it was suggested that the public service’s role in providing advice is being replaced by other groups (e.g., think-tanks, advocacy groups, lobbyists). As an example, a few participants pointed to the government’s recent reliance on a Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) analysis regarding the EI hiring credit. It was observed that there was nothing wrong with consulting the CFIB, but that this should have been one line of evidence, not the sole source of evidence. One perceived result of such reliance on external sources is that the government is more susceptible to their influence because it has fewer internal resources to review what external sources produce.

The following perceived effects or results arising from subordination of evidence to politics and/or lack of interest in data were also identified:

- Increased cynicism and suspicion towards the federal government and the information it uses based on the assumption that the government cherry-picks its information for partisan purposes.

- The government is better able to control the public agenda because by cutting back on both the quantity and quality of research it conducts, it is less likely to be confronted by the need to address problems or issues that such research might reveal.

GREATER CONTROL OVER INFORMATION – ANOTHER WAY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS CHANGED

Some leaders suggested that another way in which the federal government’s use of data over the past decade has changed concerns access to information. These participants, primarily civil servants, journalists, and political staff, suggested that the current government is much more concerned than previous ones about controlling public access to information. Data and information, it was suggested, are seen as something to be controlled and regulated rather than shared and disseminated. A few leaders suggested that this attitude goes hand-in-hand with the previously identified lack of interest in information and data. In the words of one of person, ‘a government that is not interested in using data is not interested in disseminating it either’. A few described this as ironic give that the current government once campaigned on issues of openness, transparency, and accountability. Examples offered to show how this control has manifested itself included the following:

- Reluctance to provide cost estimates for new prisons and jet fighters to Parliament by declaring these matters of cabinet privilege.

- The Federal Information Commissioner’s investigation of complaints that government departments aren’t releasing data in easy-to-read or easy-to-interpret formats.
• Shutdown of the Coordination of Access to Information Requests System (CAIRS) database in 2008.
• Destruction of data from the long gun registry.
• Federal government scientists being restricted from talking publicly about their research.
• Government of Canada budget documents containing much less analysis than previously.

The following perceived effects arising from this preoccupation with controlling information were identified:

• Researchers or journalists making requests for information have to spend more time and effort interpreting data. As an example, one participant pointed to difficulty interpreting federal government financial data because those data do not adhere to any accounting standards with which they were familiar.

• Public debate is impoverished because it is less and less informed by publicly accessible knowledge and information. It was suggested that public debate assumes a public or shared world, and a publicly accessible body of knowledge should form the backbone of this shared world.

• It has become more difficult to hold the government accountable for its decisions because the basis on which many decisions are taken is not public knowledge.

• A tendency for the government to go on the offensive against independent voices that challenge its tendency to ignore or hold back information (e.g., Parliamentary Budget Officer).

EXPLAINING THE GOVERNMENT’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS DATA

Those critical of the government’s attitude towards data typically explained it by suggesting that it is more ideological or partisan than previous governments. Other explanations, including variations on the primacy of ideology argument, included the following:

• A belief that there is no such thing as objective facts or non-biased evidence: It was suggested that the current government believes that there is always an ideological perspective underlying and informing perceptions of reality. Consequently, so-called facts and evidence are always informed by an ideological perspective. It was suggested that the current government thinks Canada is chained to a ‘liberal’ mindset and its goal is to change this to a more ‘conservative’ mindset. Related to this, it was suggested that the current government suspects a ‘liberal’ bias in the federal public service which has led to distrust of the bureaucracy and a belief that it should implement decisions made by the government not try to inform these decisions.

• A belief that ‘society’ does not exist: It was suggested that the current government’s attitude to research is encapsulated in the statement that in trying to understand certain phenomena we should avoid ‘committing sociology’. It was suggested that this comment reflects a more fundamental belief, the view once articulated by Margaret Thatcher that ‘society does not exist’. If there is no such thing as society, then socio-economic phenomena do not constitute legitimate objects of research or inquiry. The implication is that everything is reducible to the individual, and the answer to every problem lies in the individual (e.g., if you are wealthy it is because you are deserving, if you are poor it is because you are lazy, if you are a criminal it is because you are bad).

• A desire to control the political agenda: According to some, the current government is overly preoccupied with maintaining control of the political agenda. Research, it was suggested, introduces an element of uncertainty because results of research are never predictable. Consequently, the current government’s attitude to research reflects a desire to avoid having to deal with information that might force it to recognize a problem or an issue that needs to be addressed, particularly one that is not a priority in its political agenda.

ADDITIONAL WAYS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S USE OF DATA HAS CHANGED

The following perceived changes in the use of information by the federal government during the last 10 years were also identified. All three were viewed as positive developments.

• Tighter guidelines regarding the parameters and rationale for collecting data, with a focus on ensuring protection of privacy. One perceived result of this is that there are more limits on sharing information between government departments and on how data can be used (e.g., linking data files).

• More emphasis on measuring accountability. It was suggested that this has resulted in more evaluations being conducted by the federal government regarding its programs, and a greater emphasis on results-based information.

• Greater receptivity to taking advantage of the explosion of sources of information available. As a result, it was suggested that ministers and ministerial staff are less reliant on the civil service, their traditional source of information and data.
• A narrow view of the public interest: It was also suggested that the current government takes a relatively narrow view of what constitutes the public interest, identifying it more with a core constituency than with the population in general. As a result, there is a tendency to develop policies that appeal to this constituency whether they are based on evidence (e.g., a tough-on-crime agenda, abandoning the long-form census as invasive, destroying the gun registry). Related to this, it was suggested that the government and its ministers will focus more on what they hear from members of this constituency over what bureaucrats and researchers have to say, the implication being that their political insights are as relevant if not more relevant than research-based evidence. It was suggested that this tendency can go so far as to denigrate those who talk about evidence and research as ‘intellectuals’ or people who ‘commit sociology’.

• Short-term thinking: Some suggested that the current federal government’s attitude towards information is linked to a focus on short-term rather than long-term thinking. They suggested that there is less emphasis on understanding the ‘big picture’ and more on addressing specific issues or resolving specific problems. As a result, the government is less interested in understanding and addressing long-term complex challenges (e.g., the impact of an aging population on health-care costs, the impact of climate change), and more preoccupied with a narrow yield – finding ‘nuggets’ of data or ‘silver bullets’. In terms of timeframes, it was suggested that more strategic attention is focussed on the next throne speech or the next budget than on long-term policy development. It was suggested that the last budget’s focus on a consumer-first agenda designed to give individuals more choice in the marketplace is an example of this way of thinking.
ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH (POR) IN MECHANICS OF GOVERNANCE

This section presents participants’ views regarding the role of public opinion research (POR) in the mechanics of governance. Issues explored with participants included the importance, effectiveness, and usefulness of POR, its advantages and disadvantages, changes in the use of POR by the federal government during the last 10 years, and degree of trust in POR.

CONSENSUS THAT PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT IN MECHANICS OF GOVERNANCE

There was unanimity that it is important for government to consult with Canadians and relevant stakeholders when making decisions. Nearly half of the leaders described this as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ important, or used expressions like ‘crucial’ or ‘essential’ to qualify its importance. Moreover, as noted in the previous section, many had identified POR among types of information important for guiding, managing, and administering government. Some participants qualified their impressions or added a caveat. This included specifications that POR is only one instrument at the government’s disposal, and that it should inform, not drive, decision-making.

VARIOUS REASONS GIVEN TO EXPLAIN IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Opinion leaders, regardless of the stakeholder group, tended to provide similar explanations for the perceived importance of POR. Those explanations included the following:

• Importance of consultation in a democracy: Many participants suggested that POR is important in a democratic regime for the following reasons:
  – In well-functioning democracies, public consultation is not limited to the electoral cycle. There is a tacit trust or implied social contract that the government is concerned with the views of the public it represents, and citizens take it for granted that they should have a say in public affairs more than once every 4 to 5 years. Therefore, it was suggested that there should be mechanisms allowing for periodic consultations with citizens, one of which is POR.
  – Government decision-making affects people and government interacts with people in many important ways. Consequently, people should be consulted about issues that concern or will have an impact on them.
  – POR shows a sense of openness and transparency on the part of government by revealing to citizens what it is interested in knowing, and showing that it is interested in what citizens have to say. As a result, POR can increase interest and involvement in civic affairs by triggering public discussion about an issue and/or giving those consulted a sense of ownership regarding the issues explored. Conversely, it was suggested that the lack of such consultation can contribute to civic disengagement, political apathy, and cynicism.
  – An elected government must govern for all citizens, not only those who voted for it. Indeed, it was suggested that consent to be governed is based in part on the belief that government will act in the interest of all, including those who did not vote for it. POR allows government to reach out beyond its supporters to show that it is working in the broad public interest. It requires government to think of people in broad terms – as citizens, not as political partisans or members of a niche political market. In the words of one participant: ‘POR breaks government out of its bubble, a bubble in which it typically hears mainly from like-minded people’.
  – POR provides a way for people to hold their government accountable. For example, it was suggested that once consulted, people can legitimately follow up to query results and find out what has been done on the basis of the research findings.

• Importance of understanding the context for decision-making: Participants routinely suggested that POR is an important way to help the government understand the environment in which its policy development occurs, an environment that includes the opinions of citizens and stakeholders. It was observed that POR keeps government attuned to the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values, and concerns of citizens and stakeholders (e.g., what is demanded or expected, what will be resisted or rejected). According to these participants, POR helps ensure that the policy process remains connected to the various public groups that government policies affect.
• POR yields important information to improve policy/decision-making: Many participants suggested that POR is important because government decision-making can be improved through information and data provided by POR. Examples of how POR can help improve policy decision-making included the following:

– It can help ensure that government programs are relevant and meet the needs of their target audiences.

– It augments and enriches statistical data with the lived experiences of citizens and/or the knowledge of expert stakeholders. It was suggested that this is important especially if public impressions seem to be at odds with what other data reveal (e.g., crime rates are declining but many people feel unsafe, the economy is growing but many people feel insecure).

– It can correct misconceptions on the part of government (e.g., ‘We thought our clients would think X but they think Y’).

– It helps government gauge both resistance and receptivity to its programs and policies. For example, it was suggested that public receptivity to a policy direction, especially a new one, can provide government with the confidence it needs to proceed and can also make it less vulnerable to counter-pressure exercised by interest groups. Conversely, in a situation where POR reveals resistance, such results can be used to help government develop communications strategies to explain and build support for policies.

– It can yield ideas and insights that the government may not have considered or taken into account (e.g., potential barriers to a certain initiative, possible impacts of a certain policy, unforeseen consequences of a certain program).

• Targeting the appropriate audience(s): Participants who identified this as a consideration explained that POR should be conducted among members of audiences that can provide the requisite type of knowledge or feedback. For example, it was observed that consulting members of the general public on specific policy issues such as what a new law on prostitution should include or the kind of fighter jet should Canada purchase would not be a very effective use of POR. However, asking Canadians if they think prostitution should be legal or not was identified as an effective use of POR. The reason given is that it informs government about the mindset of members of the general public and the extent to which the government’s view on prostitution coincides with the views of the general public or specific subgroups of the general public. Targeting the appropriate respondents was also seen as a way to avoid the danger of ‘cherry-picking’ respondents (i.e., those likely to provide the type of feedback sought).

• Questionnaire design: Some participants observed that questions asked of respondents should not be biased in terms of content, sequencing, or response options. As an example, a couple of them referred to a sequence from an episode of the comedy program Yes Prime Minister showing how leading questions can produce two diametrically opposed answers to the same question (www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0ZZJXw4MTA).

• Representative sampling: Others noted that effective survey research (i.e., quantitative POR) is effective when it is based on probability sampling as opposed to self-selected sample.

• Large sample sizes: A few observed that in order to be effective, quantitative POR (i.e., surveys) should use sample sizes sufficiently large to allow for sub-group analyses.

In addition to these, some participants identified considerations that they described as enhancing the effectiveness of POR. These included the following:

• Longitudinal research: It was suggested that the effectiveness of POR is enhanced by research that is longitudinal (i.e., conducted over time) because results can reveal trends, developments, and changes instead of being limited to a snapshot in time.

• Linking opinions to values and beliefs: Some suggested that POR is more effective when it probes below the surface and links people’s opinions on issues to the basic values and beliefs informing them. Such research provides a more expansive understanding of respondents (e.g.,
not only what they think but why). It was suggested that qualitative research can be more effective than quantitative research in this regard because the ‘why’ questions are more effectively investigated in focus groups and/or interviews.

- **Including open-ended questions:** Regarding questionnaire design, a few participants added that survey research is more effective when at least some of the questions are open-ended because these allow respondents more leeway in responding as they want.

- **Linking opinions to knowledge of issues:** It was suggested that people often respond in a top-of-mind way to issues they have not really thought about. Therefore, linking respondents’ opinions to their level of knowledge and understanding of the issues explored can yield fruitful information. For example it was suggested that POR can help understand the degree of engagement with an issue, or reveal discrepancies between perceptions and reality that are worth exploring (e.g., *the reality is X but most people believe Y*).

- **Cooperation between researcher and client:** It observed that even when POR is technically sound and methodologically sophisticated, the quality of the research can be limited by the researcher’s restricted understanding of the issues. It was suggested that this can be addressed by ensuring that the research is a cooperative enterprise in which the client provides the substantive background information necessary to enhance the researcher’s understanding of goals and objectives of the research and how to achieve them.

**PERCEIVED CHALLENGES REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POR**

A few participants completed their reflections on this topic by identifying what they consider to be specific challenges to the effectiveness of POR. They included the following:

- **Measuring behaviour:** A few participants expressed reservations about the effectiveness of POR in measuring behaviour. For example, it was suggested that respondents may say they did something when they did not, or vice versa, in to avoid looking bad or engaging in socially unacceptable behaviour (e.g., saying they voted in an election or contributed to a charity when they did not).

- **Non-response:** Difficulty reaching potential respondents and difficulty persuading them to participate in research was identified a growing challenge that is driving a debate about techniques like internet and IVR (Interactive Voice Response) surveys, online focus groups, and the use of social media. It was observed that while techniques like internet surveys and online focus groups may facilitate participation, they may not be as effective as telephone surveys and in-person focus groups in terms of the quality of feedback they elicit. Similarly, it was suggested that while POR needs to keep pace with changes in the way people interact by engaging more with social media, it also needs to be attentive to methodological challenges posed by these media.

- **Ensuring representative sample:** The growing migration from the use of landlines to the use of cell phones was identified as increasing the challenge of ensuring representativeness in telephone surveys.

- **Cost of good research:** It was observed that good POR can be expensive because of the cost implications of some of the factors that contribute to making research effective, such as robust and representative sampling, and tracking over time. It was observed that the reality is that there are limits on the extent to which research can be funded. On the other hand, it was also noted that budgetary restrictions can adversely affect the quality of research.

**GENERAL CONFIDENCE IN POR WHEN IT IS PROPERLY CONDUCTED**

Thought leaders also routinely said that they have confidence in POR when it is conducted in a methodologically sound manner by reputable practitioners who adhere to well established industry-wide standards. The existence of such standards, some added, subjects practitioners to potential scrutiny and review by their peers. Beyond this general expression of confidence, the following were routinely identified by participants as factors that enhance their confidence in POR:

- Public access to results, methodology, and data.

- Identification of limitations of the findings (e.g., margins of error, non-representative nature of qualitative findings).

- Research conducted by professional, independent researchers, using a methodology that can be reproduced.

- Surveys conducted with large sample sizes and good response rates.

- A methodology that attends to considerations such as sample source (e.g., probability sampling vs. self-selection), question wording, question sequence.

- Tracking studies because they allow for comparisons over time, particularly relating to the stability or fluctuation of opinions on various issues.
**FACTORS LIMITING CONFIDENCE IN POR**

Some participants identified factors or tendencies that worry them and/or have begun to limit their degree of confidence in POR. These factors included the following:

- It was suggested that budgetary restrictions are forcing federal government departments to ‘do more with less’ in terms of POR (e.g., using smaller sample sizes, only reaching out to certain target audiences). The concern is that this will affect the reliability of results.

- The conduct of POR at cost. This tendency was described as the case primarily for media polls, especially during elections. It was suggested that as a result of conducting research at cost and usually very quickly, findings are less reliable.

- Declining response rates which make it increasingly difficult to get representative random sampling in general public surveys. This was attributed primarily to potential respondents being more difficult to reach (e.g., more cell phone users, more texting/use of social media), and being less willing to participate in research once reached.

**BROADLY-SPEAKING, POR SHOULD INFORM GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING**

Thought leaders routinely indicated that the role of public opinion research, broadly speaking, is to help inform government decision-making, with many leaders adding or re-iterating that it is only one of the tools at the government’s disposal. The following statements give an indication of participants’ views on the general role of POR in governance.

- “*Its role is to keep government informed about and attuned to the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values, and concerns of citizens and stakeholders.*”

- “*Public opinion research keeps government on its toes and attuned. Conducting POR can be a real eye-opener for governments.*”

- “*Public opinion research informs government without really constraining it. It does not tell government what it must do or should do but rather what it should consider when deciding what to do or how to proceed.*”

- “*POR provides an indication of the situation on the ground (e.g., what are people’s starting assumptions, what is their degree of interest in an issue, what are their intuitions regarding supporting or opposing a certain policy direction).*”

**POR SEEN AS USEFUL IN SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING AT VARIOUS STAGES**

More specifically, POR was identified as useful at various stages of the decision-making process, from the initial development of policy, to helping develop communications strategies, to measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services. While many participants identified POR as useful in more than one of these areas, POR was most likely to be considered useful or very useful in measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services, and helping develop communications strategies.

- **Measuring the effectiveness of government programs:** This was the only area in which POR was identified as useful by a majority of participants. While the focus was on evaluating the effectiveness of programs or services (e.g., government programs for meeting client needs, websites for content and user-friendliness, communications materials for clarity), it also included measuring the success of government campaigns (e.g., *we wanted to achieve X, did we succeed?*). POR was described as most useful in program evaluation because service delivery is the area where individuals interface directly with the consumer side of government operations, and findings can be used in very direct and actionable ways to improve the administration of government programs and services.

- **Developing communications strategies:** Many participants from various stakeholder groups described POR as useful or most useful in helping government...
communicate with the public about complex issues and its policy direction and decisions. POR, it was suggested, can be very effective in helping the government understand where the public stands on certain issues and why (e.g., concerns, priorities, perceptions of a problem) and what it should take into account when communicating with the public on these issues. Moreover, it was suggested that, in so doing, the government can help generate support for its policies.

• Formulation/development of policy: Some participants from a variety of stakeholder groups indicated that POR can be useful at the stage of policy development. However, POR with members of the general public was not considered useful in developing specific policy measures because of the complexities these tend to involve. Where it was seen as useful is in testing the direction a government wants to take. It was suggested that no democratic government wants its policies to be out of tune with the views of its citizens and that POR can help assess the extent to which a government’s agenda and priorities resonate among the citizenry. According to some, this in turn can help ascertain the feasibility or potential impact of certain decisions (e.g., if we do this ... then it is likely that …). In terms of developing specific policies, a few participants identified POR among expert stakeholders as useful because it can enlighten government about possible implications, risks, or obstacles involved in a certain course of action.

USEFULNESS OF POR DEPENDS ON ELICITING FEEDBACK FROM RELEVANT AUDIENCES

On the issue of when POR is most useful in supporting government decision-making, some participants observed that it can be very useful in a variety of areas but that the objectives of the research will determine the audience to consult. For example, if the objective is to assess and improve service delivery, POR conducted among users of the programs is crucial. If the goal is to assess the extent to which a government initiative is clear, intelligible, or likely to elicit public support, then POR conducted among members of the general public is useful. Finally, if a government is looking for input regarding policy development in a specific area, POR conducted among experts in that area can be very helpful. In the words of one participant: members of the general public are qualified to answer the question how satisfied were you with your last visit to the hospital? but not qualified to answer the question does capital punishment work?

OVER-RELIANCE ON AND MISINTERPRETATION OF DATA – MAIN PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES OF POR

A number of perceived disadvantages of POR in governance decision-making were identified but two were identified relatively frequently: 1) relying on it too heavily and 2) misinterpreting or interpreting results poorly.

• Relying on POR too heavily: As noted already, a number of participants indicated that POR has its place but is only one tool among others when it comes to informing government decision-making. A number of leaders identified reliance or over-reliance on POR as a disadvantage or risk. Examples included relying on it to develop policy (e.g., trying to develop policy that taps ‘hot button issues’ in order to enhance one’s electoral success), or being reluctant to advance sound policy because it might not be popular. Some participants added that while it is important to consult people through POR, it is the business of government to lead and govern, and this often means taking unpopular decisions while trying to justify them based on evidence.

• Misinterpreting or poorly interpreting results: A number of participants observed that there is always a risk that the results of POR will be misinterpreted or poorly interpreted due to one-sided or simplistic interpretations of results. Examples included the following:

– Cherry picking or focussing on results that support a certain pre-conceived position or advance a pre-established agenda.

– Demonstrating results by pulling them out of context (e.g., taking results that represent a snapshot in time and treating them as if they are fixed or immutable).

– Over-interpretation (e.g., drawing conclusions not supported by the findings).

– Under-interpretation (e.g., staying at the surface and not drilling down ‘into the weeds’). It was suggested that under-interpretation allows governments to make statements such as: ‘Canadians have told us that …’. It was suggested that in reality there is no ‘average Canadian,’ and that it is important to take into account key socio-demographic factors that differentiate publics (e.g., gender, age, urban/rural residence, education level). It was also noted that for policy purposes it is less important to know what most people think than to know how members of particular groups of people think.
The following perceived disadvantages were identified by smaller numbers of participants:

- **Poorly designed or poorly executed studies:** Some participants observed that POR results are only as good as the design and execution of the study, and that a methodology that is flawed will result in findings that are of limited value and/or misleading. It was suggested that if not conducted properly, with sensitivity to context, POR can generate the results that are desired by those commissioning the research. It was observed, for example, that questions need to be anchored and contextualized because one may get different results to the following two questions: *Are you in favour of a tax increase?* vs. *Are you in favour of a tax increase to fund health-care?*

- **Probing the surface or top-of-mind reflections:** This was seen to involve asking routine questions such as ‘what are the most important issues facing the country’ without drilling down to try to understand the beliefs or attitudes that inform such top-of-mind reflections.

- **Good POR can be expensive:** It was suggested that if taken seriously and executed properly, POR can be expensive (e.g., large samples allowing for subgroup analyses, open-ended questions, tracking of results over time). Because of this, there is always the potential danger of wanting to take short cuts or ‘do research on the cheap’.

- **Unpredictability of results:** It was suggested that one of the risks of conducting POR is that the results cannot be used to predict, so that a government conducting POR may be confronted with results it does not like or which may potentially cause it some embarrassment (e.g., results at odds with its assumptions or plans).

- **Limited validity of results:** This perceived disadvantage was associated with discrete studies that collect data at a specific point in time. The disadvantage associated with such studies was seen to be that results have a relatively limited shelf-life, especially given the amount of information to which people have access today and the speed with which information circulates.

- **Results of POR may shape or influence what should be measured.** For example, it was suggested that if people read that ‘most Canadians’ are concerned about crime and corrections they might wonder whether they should rethink their own views (e.g., ‘what do they know that I don’t know?’). In other words, results of POR can potentially create a bandwagon effect.

- **Difficulty understanding what has been measured:** The issue identified here concerns the way in which one should understand the nature of the feedback one has captured. For example, does it reflect firmly held beliefs, top-of-the-mind impressions, judgment based on experience and knowledge, or simply an answer created on the spot.

- **Results of POR could be used for a certain amount of bureaucratic gamesmanship, (i.e., bureaucrats using results to try to ensure some influence over politicians).**

**WIDESPREAD IMPRESSION THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA’S USE OF POR HAS CHANGED**

Most opinion leaders are under the impression that the Government of Canada’s use of public opinion research has changed over the last 10 years. A couple of participants are under the impression that it has not changed fundamentally, while a few felt unable to comment on this issue.

**DECREASE IN THE AMOUNT OF POR CONDUCTED – MOST FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIED CHANGE**

The most frequently identified change in the Government of Canada’s use of POR was a decline in the amount being conducted. Other changes were identified less frequently and included the following:

- **Greater focus on communications-type research:** Some participants believe that the type of research conducted by the federal government focusses much more than before on messaging and communications-type research, particularly ad testing and research designed to meet procedural requirements set out by the Treasury Board for federal government ad campaigns. Much less research, it was suggested, is being conducted in the area of social policy and client satisfaction research.

- **Greater concern with political messaging research:** Some participants, mainly politicians and political staff, think that over the past decade or so, POR has been used more and more for partisan purposes and political messaging. Here again, participants focussed on the perceived increase in ad-testing research and its perceived use to trumpet the government’s achievements or communicate its agenda (e.g., ads on the economic action plan) or improve its image with the public (e.g., ads about services for veterans). In the words of one participant: ‘At present, not enough POR is being conducted and too much of it is publicity testing that is a proxy for testing the government’s image with the public’.
• **Changes to the approvals process:** This change, identified by POR coordinators/program evaluation personnel and current and former civil servants, focussed mainly on the requirement for ministerial approval for all POR.

The participants who believe that the Government of Canada’s use of public opinion research has not changed fundamentally over the last 10 years provided two reasons to explain why: 1) the impression that the main purpose of POR remains, as it has always been, to develop communications objectives and priorities regarding government policies, and 2) the impression that cuts to POR have been implemented primarily for budgetary reasons, not for ideological reasons.

**PERCEIVED IMPACT OF CHANGES IN THE USE OF POR**

Listed below are participants’ impressions of the impacts resulting from the previously identified changes to POR. The following impacts were seen as resulting from the reduction in the amount of POR conducted by the federal government:

- There is much less knowledge in the public domain about what Canadians think on various issues which has impoverished discussion in the public domain. It was noted in this regard that the term ‘public’ in POR refers not only to research with members of the public, but also to the public dissemination of that research.

- Because there is less research, it was suggested that it is more difficult to gauge the extent to which the government’s agenda is attuned to the views of Canadians, and therefore more difficult to hold the government to account for its decisions. This, in turn, it was suggested, has given the government a freer-hand and more leeway in its decision making.

- It was suggested that there is decline in departmental competence to understand and use POR (i.e., a decline in POR literacy). One participant offered the example of someone in their department asking the question: “How do we conduct a client satisfaction survey? We haven’t done one in years”.

On the positive side, it was suggested that the reduction in the government’s use of omnibus polls has been a good thing.

The following perceived impacts were seen as resulting from the need for ministerial approval on POR:

- Hesitation to take research proposals to the Minister because there is a sense that this government does not like POR.

- Departments have become more ‘creative’ in their research. This includes doing what they can with the resources they have and undertaking research in-house.

- Because ministerial approval is required for all POR, it was suggested that the burden of proof for justifying POR is much higher than it used to be.

The main impact resulting from the perceived primacy of message testing and the partisan use of POR was identified as cynicism towards POR based on the impression that it is mainly a tool used by the government for partisan purposes. It was also suggested that this could adversely affect the likelihood of people participating in POR. According to one participant: ‘it could be disastrous for POR if, in addition to a government that does not believe in it, there is a general public that does not trust it.’

**EXPLAINING THE GOVERNMENT’S APPROACH TO POR**

Opinion leaders tended to associate changes in the federal government’s use of POR with changes in its use of information in general. Consequently, they provided similar reasons to explain these changes. These included the following, each of which was advanced by a small number of participants:

- **The primacy of ideology and politics:** Some suggested that the current government has a much less ‘technocratic’ approach to government decision-making, including its relationship to its civil service. They suggested that it tends to view everything through a political lens and believes that government is guided primarily by politics. As a result, it views its public service’s role as one of implementing and executing policies established by politicians, and does not tend to view POR as an independent ‘input’ to help shape its views.

- **A desire to control the political agenda:** Other leaders reiterated their impression that the current government tends to be very risk-averse and preoccupied with controlling the public agenda, managing risk, and keeping things on message when it comes to governance. It was suggested that because POR results cannot be predicted and controlled, the current government is concerned with how results of its POR might reflect or impact on it (e.g., media using results to show the government in a negative light, calls for government to act on the results of its own POR).
• **A narrow view of the public interest:** A few leaders re-iterated that this government has a narrower view of what constitutes the public interest, identifying it more with a core constituency than with the population in general. Consequently, it was suggested that the opinions of stakeholders and the citizenry in general count less than the anecdotal evidence provided by the various groups or communities the government hears from or reaches out to.

**PARTICIPANTS DIVIDED REGARDING AWARENESS OF DECLINE IN AMOUNTS SPENT ON POR**

As noted above, the most frequently identified change in the Government of Canada’s use of public opinion research was a decline in the amount of POR being conducted. After being asked if they thought that the Government of Canada’s use of public opinion research had changed over the last 10 years, participants were informed that spending on POR went from a high of almost $33 million in 2006-07 to a low of $4.3 million in 2012-13.

Thought leaders were almost equally divided between those who were aware of this and those who were unaware of it. Those aware of this were mainly POR Coordinators/Program evaluation personnel, current and former civil servants, members of the media, and representatives of think tanks, NGOs and national organizations. Those who were unaware included mainly members of academia and international experts on POR. Among those who were unaware of this, a few expressed surprise or shock, while a few others said that they were not surprised based on their experience with the current government.

**MOST INTERPRET DECLINE OF SPENDING IN POR CRITICALLY**

Most participants interpret the decline in spending as evidence of the current government’s negative attitude towards evidence in general and POR in particular. Some stated that cost saving measures and vigilance over public expenditures on POR justified a certain decrease and that there needed to be greater coordination of POR throughout the public service. That being said, it was suggested that a decrease of over 80% indicates something more than a concern with ensuring that public monies are well spent. According to these participants, it reflects an indifference or aversion to public opinion research, a belief that the public service should implement policies in line with the government’s ideological perspective rather than advise it, and wariness about information that is publicly accessible.

The following interpretations of the decline in POR were also offered:

• It provides a measure of the missed opportunities to consult Canadians on various issues.

• The full measure of the decline needs to take into account the fact that at the same time that the government has reduced spending on POR, it has increased spending on advertising.

• Such a budget is simply inadequate given the many ways in which the federal government interacts with and has an impact on Canadians.

• It was suggested that the reduction in POR is not only ideological in the sense that official POR is not needed because the government already knows what it thinks. It is also strategic in the sense that the governing party has resources that other parties do not have. Consequently, the reduction of ‘official’ POR does not affect its capacity to conduct its own POR, but it does limit other parties’ access to official POR data and information that might be useful to them.

**SOME RESERVE JUDGEMENT ON DECLINE OF SPENDING ON POR**

Some opinion leaders, including ones aware of the decline, do not feel that they are in a position to properly interpret this decline. They offered the following reasons to explain why.

• A need to understand the kind of research that was undertaken as well as the types of projects that have not been undertaken because of these cuts.

• There is no right amount of POR to target. The criterion should be legitimate use of POR and the government has both the right and the duty to monitor its use of POR to ensure that it is used appropriately. It was suggested that previous governments were perhaps a little too lavish when it came to spending on POR.

• New developments in terms of collecting data from and about the general public may justify less reliance on traditional POR.

**NEED TO FACTOR IN PARTISAN/PARTY POLLING TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH POR OCCURS**

In the course of discussing the use of POR, some participants noted that a distinction should be made between official POR conducted for the Government of Canada and POR...
conducted by political parties. They suggested that in order to properly understand the context in which POR is being conducted, it is important to realize that while POR conducted by the government of Canada has declined, POR conducted by the Conservative Party has probably increased. This was seen to be relevant because results of such research are not in the public domain. Specifically, it was observed that POR conducted by a party or caucus is not subject to access to information requests which means that a party can ask whatever it wants in the research and is the only one who has access to the results.

The assumption was that these results are used for partisan purposes. Specifically, it was suggested that through the use of sophisticated means of data analysis, researchers can mine POR data to ‘dice and slice’ the electorate and build profiles of respondents that can be used for partisan purposes (e.g., developing targeted initiatives that will appeal to a specific cross-section of the electorate). It was suggested that this type of research helped the Conservative Party make inroads into immigrant communities, traditionally seen as supporters of the Liberals. It was also suggested that this way of using POR has become more important as political parties realize that they can win a majority government by mobilizing less than the majority of the population. On this topic, one participant suggested that political databases such as CIMS (Constituent Information Management System) are becoming too important as a tool, the problem being that they are private (i.e., not accessible to the public) and the data they contain are used for partisan purposes instead of being used to develop good policy.

MOST THINK FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS THE TOOLS TO MAKE SOUND DECISIONS

Feedback on whether the federal government has the tools needed to make sound decisions regarding policies and programs was typically nuanced, mixed, or qualified. While there was a widespread perception that it has access to many or most of the resources necessary, participants routinely identified issues that could potentially limit its effectiveness or may already have begun to do so. For the most part, participants re-emphasized issues or topics they had identified earlier when discussing changes in the federal government’s use of information. These issues included the following, each of which was identified by members of various stakeholder groups:

• **Tools are only useful if used:** Some observed that the federal government has the tools they need at their disposal but the extent to which they are used is up to them. It was suggested that the problem with the current government is that it is not interested in using such resources. In the words of one participant ‘the problem is not on the supply side but on the demand side’. An example of how a lack of demand can affect supply was described as reticence to take research proposals up to the Minister because there is a sense that this government has no taste for POR.

• **Erosion of internal capacity:** Some re-iterated that the internal capacity of the public service to analyse policy options and provide advice to government has begun to erode and, if not reversed, the public service will lose the capacity to deal with the important issues and complex challenges Canada will face. Examples included cuts to research budgets and the elimination of policy shops. As a result, it was suggested that the government will become increasingly dependent on external sources of expertise and also more susceptible to their influence because it will have lost the internal analytic tools required to analyse the advice that was provided. Another perceived result of this growing dependence on external expertise is that it will redefine the policy analysts’ job in government. Specifically, it was suggested that they will no longer be experts in their policy fields but ‘aggregators’ of information.

• **Changes to the long-form census:** This was identified by some leaders as one way in which the federal government does not have the tool it needs to make sound evidence-based decisions. The reason is that the instrument that has replaced the long-form census (i.e., the National Household Survey) no longer collects the same information and is no longer mandatory. The result is that it does not provide the reliability and richness of information that was collected before, and the changes have compromised the ability to conduct viable longitudinal analyses. In the words of one participant ‘the decision to scrap the long-form census and replace it with a voluntary survey creates a huge information gap that undermines the value of nearly a century of census data’.

• **Elimination/ of sources of information:** Some suggested that the closure of various research and advisory bodies has deprived the government, and future governments, of valuable resources. These include the National Council of Welfare, the Law Reform Commission of Canada, the North-South Institute, the National Council of Welfare, the Health Council of Canada, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

Concern about these issues was heightened by the belief that they not only affect the current government’s ability to make sound decisions, but subsequent governments as well.
A few participants also suggested that the government needs to modernize both the sources and ways it collects and analyses information. Examples included data linking through administrative databanks, and mining of big data. Regarding the latter, it was suggested that public servants will lose their relevance if they continue to rely on ‘traditional’ sources of information and do not take advantage of the massive amounts of new data available to inform and advise government in a timely and effective way. It was suggested that politicians’ ability to access such sources of information explains in part the reduced need for civil service policy capacity.
This section presents and reports on examples identified by participants to show the value of POR.

**MANY IDENTIFY EXAMPLES OF VALUE ADDED BY POR**

Opinion leaders were asked if they could think of any instances where public opinion research was an important factor contributing to the soundness of a decision. In response, approximately half, including members of each stakeholder group, provided examples. Most examples fell into two categories: 1) POR measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services, and POR informing communications strategies/policy direction. They are identified below, organized by category.

**POR measuring the effectiveness of government programs and services:**

The following were offered as specific examples of public opinion research that had an impact on government programs and services (including evidence-based policy making), and/or served as a line of evidence to inform the evaluation of government programs and services. Each was identified by individual participants.

- Status of High Performance Athletes in Canada Survey.
- Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey.
- Canadian Culture Opinion Survey.
- Veterans Affairs Canada Life After Service Surveys.
- Summative evaluation of the Court Challenges Program conducted by Heritage Canada in 2003.

The following were offered as general examples of such public opinion research:

- POR conducted over the years by Passport Canada, particularly the use of research related to the e-passport to develop online information (especially FAQs) about the e-passport.
- POR conducted by Health Canada and used for health promotion.
- POR conducted by Service Canada (e.g., client satisfaction surveys) used to help inform decisions related to client services.
- POR conducted by various departments and agencies (e.g., Canada Revenue Agency) to understand and respond to citizen preferences regarding services (e.g., websites, communications materials, service delivery).

**POR informing communications strategies/policy direction:**

The following were offered as examples of public opinion research that informed government decision-making in terms of communications strategies/policy direction. This includes research that helped mobilize support for certain decisions or initiatives.

- Liberal government decision to tackle the deficit: A few participants offered this as an example of POR informing policy direction and communications strategies. It was observed that the Liberal party that came to power in 1993 had not campaigned on a platform of deficit reduction. Indeed, it was suggested that many members of the party were not interested in this issue and felt that it would be politically imprudent to campaign on it. However, it was observed that POR consistently showed that deficit reduction was an important priority for Canadians. These findings helped the government find the courage to tackle the deficit and eliminate it.
- Government budgets: Related to the previous example, a few participants believe that the budgets introduced throughout the deficit cutting era were informed by a desire to address issues that concerned Canadians throughout this period as revealed through POR.
- Free trade agreement (FTA) and introduction of the GST: A few participants stated that POR conducted during the debates about the FTA and the GST helped the Progressive Conservative government develop its communications strategies concerning those issues.
- Public opinion research was identified as an important factor in the Romanow Commission report on health care reform in Canada. Specifically, it was suggested that POR was a factor that led to the creation of the commission (i.e., it revealed concerns regarding health care) and also a line of evidence used by the Commission (i.e., focus groups).
- It was suggested that research conducted in the 1990s that showed Canadians were sensitive to issues of child poverty and the working poor helped mobilize political support to address these issues.
It was suggested that the genesis in Ottawa of the Women’s Initiatives For Safer Environments (WISE - www.wiseottawa.ca) was partly in response to a survey commissioned by the Ottawa Citizen dealing with safety concerns. Results of the survey revealed that women were much more likely than men to be apprehensive about going out at night due to concerns about safety. In response to these findings, Ottawa City Council helped found and fund the Women’s Initiatives For Safer Environments.

**POR informing evaluation/review of policy:**
Two examples were provided of how POR has helped inform the evaluation or review of policy.

- It was suggested that results from a study (i.e., *Minority Views on the Anti-terrorism Act: A Qualitative Study*) were used to help inform the Parliamentary review of the Anti-terrorism Act.
- It was also suggested that results of a study (i.e., *Public Opinion Research Into Genetic Privacy Issues – 2003*) were used as part of an effort to consider and evaluate policy and legal needs to ensure that Canadians are comfortable with the protections provided to their genetic information.

**POR improving public awareness:**
It was suggested that POR surrounding Government of Canada ads about tax-filing options and available tax credits provided value for taxpayers by increasing their awareness of the possibilities of which they could take advantage.

Looking ahead, it was suggested that POR will likely inform the debate surrounding issues such as legalizing marihuana, prostitution, and assisted suicide. Specifically, it was suggested that if they have not done so already, political parties will examine the results of the Justice Department’s 2014 survey exploring the issues of marihuana and prostitution in order to inform or justify their positions on these issues.

**DECISIONS MADE WITHOUT POR THAT WOULD HAVE BENEFITED FROM POR**
A majority of thought leaders also provided examples of decisions made without any public opinion research to support it and which they think would have benefitted from such research. The focus was on recent or relatively recent decisions taken by the current government. When interpreting this feedback, it should be remembered that participants responded based on their awareness of existing and available POR. In other words, to their knowledge, no public opinion research available in the public domain was used in support of the decisions in question.

The following examples were identified most often by participants:

- **Changes to the Statistics Canada long-form census:**
  It was observed that there was no widespread call for the changes made to the long-form census and that these changes were widely criticized by experts. It was suggested that since the government claimed that it made the changes based on privacy concerns, it would have been a good idea to survey Canadians to determine the extent to which this was the case. In addition, it was suggested that it could have conducted research among experts to explore the ramifications of the changes it was proposing.

- **The Fair Elections Act:** As with the changes to the long-form census, it was observed that there was no widespread call for the changes introduced by this piece of legislation (e.g., concern over voter fraud, concern over communications between Elections Canada and electors). Given that this legislation will have a direct impact on many citizens (i.e., acceptable voter ID), it was suggested that the government should have explored some of the issues through POR.

- **Elements of the government’s ‘tough-on-crime’ agenda** (e.g., mandatory minimum sentences, building new prisons): It was suggested that this legislation is designed to appeal to a core constituency and could have benefited from POR. This was seen to include POR with members of the general public to assess the extent to which the agenda is in line with public perceptions and attitudes, as well as POR with experts to understand the implications of measures such as mandatory minimum sentencing.

The following examples were also offered:

- **Setting up and dismantling the long gun registry:** It was suggested that POR at both ends of the spectrum would have been informative in order to assess public support for the long gun registry. Regarding the set-up of the registry, it was suggested that POR at the time indicated that concern about guns centered mostly around hand guns, not long guns. Therefore, it is possible that more POR would have revealed the strength of opposition to the long gun registry.

- The government’s decision to review the words of the national anthem (announced in the throne speech in 2010), a decision it reversed after a backlash from members of its base. It was suggested that POR would have provided the
government with access to the opinions of the population beyond its supporters and given it some justification for proceeding with its decision (or not).

- The federal government’s decision to re-introduce the term ‘Royal’ into the Canadian Armed Forces. It was suggested that this decision should have been informed by public opinion research to explore the extent to which this change resonates with the Canadian public or at least with members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

- The decision in 2006 to cut the budget of the Court Challenges Program in September 2006, especially given that POR was one line of evidence used in 2003 to determine that the program was effective.

- The decision to purchase the F-35 jet. It was suggested that this decision would have benefitted from POR with experts and stakeholders.

- The decision in 2008 to cut funding for the arts in Canada. It was suggested that the government underestimated the backlash to this measure, especially in Quebec where the YouTube video ‘La culture en péril’ went viral. It was suggested that POR could have revealed the extent of support for such programs.

- Revisions to the citizenship test: It was observed that when the federal government revised the citizenship test in 2010, the new questions were not focus group tested for clarity and ease of understanding before the test was rolled out. Subsequent research revealed that the high failure rate on the test was due in part to lack of clarity in some questions (i.e., people who should have passed the test were failing it because some questions were unclear). As a result, some of the questions had to be revised and people who had failed the test had to retake it (which apparently was allowed during the initial roll-out period). It was suggested that this, along with other changes (particularly anti-fraud measures) and the closure of a number of regional offices, increased the backlog in the number of people waiting to become citizens.

- It was observed that in the 1990s when the federal government was delegating powers to the provinces over labour market training, it did not anticipate concerns about the impact of delegating minority language rights in certain provinces. It was suggested that POR might have detected this concern and helped address it before it manifested itself in the form of complaints in certain provinces during the process of devolution.

- The government’s decision to increase the eligibility age for Old Age Security (OAS) to 67.

- The roll-out of Bill Clinton’s Health Care Plan in 1993. It was suggested that POR might have helped meet and address concerns about the program as well as the opposition to the plan mounted by Republicans and the insurance industry.

Exploration of this topic also elicited the following reflections or reactions:

- It was suggested that it would be very useful to conduct POR on the issue of supply management regimes in Canada (i.e., policies that control the price of products) to see how much support there is for them.

- Curiosity as to whether POR was conducted by the governments of BC and Ontario concerning the introduction of the HST, given that the government of Ontario introduced it successfully and that of BC did not. Specifically, there was curiosity as to whether any results of POR were used by the Ontario government to frame the issue in such a way as to help make its introduction successful.

- It was suggested that perhaps the federal government should have conducted POR in the context of its commemorations of the War of 1812. The reasoning was that these commemorations seem to have resonated little with the public and the amount of money spent on them took place against the backdrop of cuts to the budget for Library and Archives Canada, the laying off of public servants, and questions about adequate services to Veterans.

**SOME DECISIONS DESCRIBED AS MISTAKES AND/OR WASTE OF TAXPAYER MONEY**

The following examples of decisions that would have benefitted from POR were also identified by some as decisions that, in their opinion, proved to be mistakes and/or a waste of taxpayer money:

- The changes to the long-form census, based on the belief that the instrument that has replaced it will be more expensive to administer while the data collected will be less reliable. It was noted that according to the auditor general’s report, the new voluntary NHS added $22 million to the cost of administering the census in 2011 yet resulted in a drop in the overall response rate from 94 per cent in 2006 to 69 per cent.
• The decision to re-introduce the term ‘Royal’ into the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), based on the impression that there was no widespread demand for this in the general public or the CAF, and that the rebranding (e.g., changing insignia) will be expensive.

• The Fair Elections Act, based on the impression that it was introduced for partisan reasons and that there will be costs associated with separating the office of Commissioner of Elections from Elections Canada.

• The policy of imposing mandatory minimum sentences based on the belief that it will increase the costs of administering the criminal justice system without reducing crime or making the public safer.

• Revising the citizenship test without focus group testing the questionnaire for clarity. As noted previously, there was an impression that the need to re-administer the test contributed to the backlog in the number of people waiting to become citizens. It was also believed that the additional resources required to address the backlog would not have been as large and the additional burden on applicants and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) staff not as great, had the questionnaire been pre-tested through POR.

Looking ahead, it was suggested that the government’s position on the criminalization of marihuana might eventually fall into this category (i.e., a mistake and waste of taxpayer dollars). The reasoning was that this position may be at odds with public opinion on this issue (based on recent Justice Department survey results). Consequently, it could result in taxpayers’ dollars being devoted to the cost of enforcing criminalization when people may think it better to devote their tax dollars elsewhere.

RELATIVELY WIDESPREAD IMPRESSION THAT MORE POR SHOULD BE CONDUCTED

Just over half the participants think that more POR should be conducted. This group was made up mainly of POR coordinators and evaluation personnel, academics, members of the media, and representatives of think tanks, NGOs and national associations. Various reasons were given to explain why.

• Some participants took their bearings from the current situation, suggesting that changes to POR made by the current government need to be corrected. This includes the belief that the current amount of POR is insufficient given the various ways in which government interacts with Canadians, and the impression that balance must be restored in the type of POR being conducted (e.g., a shift from communications-related research towards research on socio-economic issues and performance measurement/service delivery).

• Some focussed on the importance of POR in a democratic regime, suggesting that more POR should be conducted because it keeps the government attuned to the opinions of Canadians (and in so doing makes it less vulnerable to pressures exercised by special interests), and because citizens need to feel involved in decisions that affect them.

• Some indicated that more POR needs to be conducted because government decision-making needs to be informed by longitudinal/time series data, which implies more research (i.e., tracking over time).

• Finally, it was suggested that more POR increases the store of public knowledge and supports research because data can be accessed and used by many different people (e.g., academics, business, municipal and provincial governments).

Most of the other participants felt that this question cannot be answered in a general way, but requires attention to substantive questions of content and relevance (i.e., what should be explored and why). POR should not be conducted simply for the sake of conducting POR or because money is available in the budget. A few participants were unsure about whether more POR should be conducted.
This section presents feedback from participants regarding ways to improve POR. These included suggestions on how to improve both the conduct and the use of POR in government decision-making.

**SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE CONDUCT OF POR FOCUS ON DIFFERENT ISSUES**

Opinion leaders made a variety of suggestions related to how POR could be done better. These included suggestions that were methodological (e.g., design-related issues), procedural (e.g., rules, regulations, requirements), and substantive (e.g., topics to explore). None of the specific suggestions was identified by more than a few participants. They are identified below, organized by category.

**Suggestions with a focus on methodological issues:**
- Robust oversampling should be used whenever possible in order to collect rich data on various sub-groups of the general public.
- Attempts should be made to include at least some open-ended questions in surveys because these provide respondents with more leeway to answer as they want.
- Research should focus more on linking people’s opinions to core values and beliefs, and/or linking opinions to knowledge of the issues explored.
- Better multivariate analyses should be conducted in order to produce more sophisticated results.
- Government needs to keep abreast of new techniques for exploring public opinion and analyse these, in consultation with the industry, to determine their relevance and reliability (e.g., use of social media).
- External service providers should be used whenever possible in order to maintain an arms-length relationship between the client and the researcher. It was suggested that this enhances the independence and neutrality of the research process, which in turn can improve both the likelihood of participation and the nature of the feedback collected. It was suggested, for example, that government clients may feel uncomfortable in a research setting where they are talking directly to representatives of the department providing them with services.
- There should be increased use of deliberative polling (i.e., exploring what conclusions the people would reach when they have the opportunity to become more informed and more engaged about the issues explored). It was suggested that this would help create a more informed and reflective type of public opinion.
- There should be a discussion within the POR industry about the point at which cost considerations begin to interfere with quality research. It was suggested that on the government side, the value for dollar formula used to evaluate research proposals should be re-assessed because it encourages competitors to cut costs that may be warranted methodologically in order to improve their chances of winning a project. It was observed that while government should be concerned about costs, it should not automatically choose the least expensive research option because it might not be the soundest one from a research perspective.
- There needs to be re-investment in and greater use of focus group research.

**Suggestions with a focus on substantive issues:**
- Clients or buyers of POR need to assist practitioners by coming to them with clear, well thought out research projects. It was suggested that a vague, unfocussed, indeterminate research project will generate poor results.
- Departments need to build-up or re-build strong research teams with knowledge of POR.
- There should be more exploratory research on controversial issues, such as prostitution and end-of-life suicide, in order to get a better sense of where Canadians stand on such issues.
- Departmental tracking surveys that have been reduced to a small number of questions should be restored to their more broader versions.

**Suggestions with a focus on procedural issues:**
- The need to obtain sign-off from ministers for POR should be ended. It was suggested that such decisions should be taken at the Director General level, or by Assistant Deputy Ministers or Deputy Ministers.
• The approvals process in departments needs to be less restrictive so that projects are assessed on the basis of their inherent merit and research need rather than on the basis of a limited number of projects that can approved each year.

• The ban on syndicated studies should be relaxed but perhaps with more coordination between departments so as to avoid unnecessary duplication (i.e., different departments purchasing the same studies).

• There should be greater integration of POR throughout government by centralizing it within one government office. It was suggested that a more centrally directed effort would allow for better coordination of POR, which in turn would help address gaps in research capabilities between departments as well as gaps in types of research being conducted.

**SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE USE OF POR**

**FOCUS ON ACCESS TO RESULTS AND DATA**

When the focus shifted to how POR could be better used, the most frequently made suggestion was improving access to research findings. This included making results publicly available within a reasonable timeframe, providing access to all POR-related information (i.e., not just results but methodology, instruments, and datasets), and providing access to these in a user-friendly way. Other suggestions included the following:

• There should be more public education about POR in order to help people understand why it is worthwhile and important.

• There should be more transparency about what government does with the results of the POR it conducts and why. In addition to procedural requirements, such as the requirement to make POR reports accessible through Library and Archives Canada, there should be a substantive requirement that the government explain periodically how it acted on the basis of its POR.

• Researchers need to find ways to make results of multivariate analyses more understandable to their clients.

**PRACTITIONERS MUST PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN MAKING CASE FOR THE VALUE OF POR**

A few thought leaders suggested that the POR industry must play a leading role when it comes to determining how POR can be done better and used better, adding that a key part of this is making a strong case for the value of POR. Indeed it was suggested that the actual ‘mechanics’ are less important than the general attitude towards POR, and that meaningful changes to decision-making practices or the availability, quality, and use of public opinion research must be based on the recognition of the value of POR.

Moreover, making the case for the value of POR was seen as more important in the current context where it was suggested that POR is faced with the following challenges:

• growing publicity about the lack of accuracy of surveys,

• new and relatively inexpensive techniques for gathering data and information from and about the general public, and

• a government that does not believe in the value of POR.
Annex 1: List of Participants

### Current and Former Senior Federal Public Servants
- Dr. Mostafa Askari  
  Assistant Parliamentary Budget Officer
- Dr. Mel Cappe  
  Professor, School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto; former Clerk of the Privy Council
- Dr. Ivan Fellegi  
  Former Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada
- Mr. Andrew Griffith  
  Former Director-General, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- Dr. Alex Himelfarb  
  Director, Glendon School of Public and International Affairs; former Clerk of the Privy Council
- Mr. Charles-Antoine St-Jean  
  Managing Partner, Government and Public Sector, Ernst & Young; former Comptroller General of Canada
- Dr. David Zussman  
  Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management, University of Ottawa; former Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet for Program Review and Machinery of Government in the Privy Council
- Anonymous  
  Former Deputy Minister

### Current and Former Politicians
- Mr. Scott Armstrong  
  Member of Parliament, Conservative Party of Canada; Chair of the Atlantic Conservative Caucus
- The Hon. Perrin Beatty  
  See ‘Think Tanks, NGOs and National Associations’ below
- The Hon. James Cowan  
  Senator, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
- The Hon. Dr. David Emerson  
  Senior Advisor, CAI Private Equity; former Federal Cabinet Minister
- The Hon. Geoff Regan  
  Member of Parliament, Liberal Party of Canada
- Ms. Nycole Turmel  
  Member of Parliament and former leader of the New Democratic Party
- Anonymous  
  Member of Parliament, Liberal Party of Canada

### Current and Former Political Strategists/Staff
- Dr. Ian Brodie  
  Director, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary; former Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Harper
- Dr. Tom Flanagan  
  Distinguished Fellow at University of Calgary, School of Public Policy; former Manager, National Campaign of the Conservative Party of Canada; former Senior Advisor to Prime Minister Harper
- Mr. David Herle  
  Owner, The Gandalf Group; former Partner, Earnscliffe Strategy Group; former National Campaign Chair, Liberal Party of Canada
- Dr. Chaviva Hosek  
  Professor at the School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto; former Director of Policy and Research, Prime Minister’s Office
- Mr. Brad Lavigne  
  Vice-President, Hill and Knowlton; former Principal Secretary to Jack Layton, Leader of the Official Opposition in Canada; current Senior Campaign Adviser to the NDP

### Evaluation Experts and Public Opinion Research Coordinators
- Mr. Benoit Gauthier  
  President, Canadian Evaluation Society
- Mr. Ian McKinnon  
  Chair, National Statistics Council
- Anonymous  
  Manager, Public Opinion Research, Government of Canada
- Anonymous  
  Audit and Evaluation Director, Government of Canada
- Anonymous  
  Evaluation Director, Government of Canada

### Representatives of Think Tanks, NGOs and National Associations
- The Hon. Perrin Beatty  
  President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Chamber of Commerce; former federal Minister; former President and CEO of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)
- Mr. Graham Fox  
  President, Institute for Research on Public Policy
- Mr. William Robson  
  President and Chief Executive Officer, CD Howe Institute
- Ms. Peggy Taillon  
  President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council on Social Development

### Members of Academia
- Mr. Paul Adams  
  Associate Professor of Journalism, Carleton University
- Dr. Caroline Andrew  
  Professor, School of Political Studies and Director of the Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa
- Dr. Scott Matthews  
  Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Memorial University of Newfoundland
- Dr. Andrew Owen  
  Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia

### International Experts in Public Opinion Research
- Dr. Scott Keeter  
  Director of survey research, Pew Research Center
- Dr. Robert Shapiro  
  Professor, Department of Political Science, Columbia University, New York City
- Dr. Stuart Soroka  
  Professor of Communication Studies and Political Science, University of Michigan

### Members of the Media
- Mr. James Baxter  
  Founding Editor and Publisher, iPolitics
- Ms. Susan Delacourt  
  Senior Writer, Toronto Star
- Mr. Eric Grenier  
  Founder, ThreeHundredEight.com
- Mr. L. Ian MacDonald  
  Editor and Publisher of Policy; National Affairs Columnist with the Montreal Gazette and the National Post

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*Given their careers and the positions they have held, some participants could have been included in more than one category.*
Annex 2: Study background letter (English)

September, 2014

Dear Sir/Madam:

Re: The Use of Research-Based Evidence in Public Policy in Canada

The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) is a Canadian not-for-profit association representing all aspects of the market intelligence and survey research industry. Its mission is to promote a positive environment that enhances the industry's ability to conduct affairs effectively and to the benefit of the public and members. MRIA is conducting research designed to explore how public opinion research data is used in governance and policy-making and how such usage could be improved.

An independent researcher, Philippe Azzie, has been commissioned to conduct this study on MRIA's behalf. The research will consist of a set of telephone interviews with forty of Canada's leading opinion leaders on the topic of policy decision-making in government.

The interview would last approximately 30 minutes and would be conducted in the official language of your choice. When you are contacted for this research, please consider taking part. Your feedback is very important and will be an essential input for informing how policy development in Canada can be enhanced.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary but would be greatly appreciated. The information you provide will be held in the strictest confidence and used for research purposes only. Although the list of participating opinion leaders will be published in this report, all input provided will be summarized and no individuals or organizations will be identified with their feedback in any way.

If you have any questions or desire more information about this research, please feel free to contact Greg Jodouin, MRIA’s Government Relations Consultant. He can be reached by telephone at 613-860-1685, ext 202 or by email at gjodouin@paceconsulting.ca.

On behalf of MRIA, I would like to thank you in advance for considering taking part in this important initiative.

Best regards,

[Signature]

Kara Mitchemore, MBA, FMCA
Chief Executive Officer

94 Cumberland Street, Suite 601, • Toronto, ON M5R 1A3, Canada
Tel: 416-642-9793 • Fax: 416-644-9793
Toll Free in North America: 1-888-602-MRIA (6742)
Annex 3: Study background letter (French)

Le 5 septembre 2014

XXXX

Cher XXXX,

Objet :

L'Association de la recherche et de l'intelligence marketing (ARIM) est une association canadienne sans but lucratif qui représente tous les aspects de l'industrie de la recherche et de l'intelligence marketing. La mission de l'ARIM est de promouvoir des conditions qui favorisent la prestation efficace par l'industrie de services susceptibles de conférer des avantages au public et à ses membres.

L'ARIM effectue une étude afin de connaître la façon dont les données de la recherche sur l'opinion publique sont utilisées dans les processus de gouvernance et d'établissement des politiques et la façon dont cette utilisation pourrait être améliorée.

Un chercheur indépendant, Philippe Azzie, a été mandaté pour mener cette étude au nom de l'ARIM. L'étude comprendra des entrevues téléphoniques avec 40 des principaux leaders d'opinion canadiens sur la question du processus décisionnel lié à l'établissement des politiques au gouvernement.

L'entrevue durera environ 30 minutes et sera faite dans la langue officielle de votre choix. Lorsqu'on communiquera avec vous pour l'étude, envisagez d'y participer. Votre rétroaction est très importante, voire essentielle, en vue de l'amélioration du processus d'établissement des politiques au Canada.

Votre participation à l'étude est entièrement volontaire, mais sachez qu'elle serait grandement appréciée. L'information que vous fournirez sera strictement confidentielle et sera utilisée aux fins de recherche uniquement. Bien que la liste des leaders d'opinion participants sera publiée dans le rapport, toute l'information recueillie sera résumée et aucune personne ni aucun organisme ne seront associés aux renseignements.

Si vous avez des questions ou voulez avoir plus d'information sur l'étude, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec Grégoire Jodoin, consultant en relations gouvernementales pour l'ARIM. Vous pouvez le joindre par téléphone au numéro 613-860-1685, poste 202, ou par courriel à l'adresse gjodoin@paceconsulting.ca.

Au nom de l'ARIM, je tiens à vous remercier à l'avance d'envisager de participer à cette importante initiative.

Veuillez agréer mes salutations distinguées.

Karà Mitchelmore, MBA, FCMA
Présidente-directrice générale

94, rue Cumberland, Suite 601, • Toronto (Ontario) MSR 1A3, Canada
Tél : 416-642-9793 • Téléc : 416-644-9793
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Annex 4: Interview Guide (English)

Use of Research-Based Evidence in Public Policy in Canada

Stakeholder Interview Guide

FINAL VERSION

INITIAL CONTACT:

• Explain nature/purpose of the research.
  – Reference email and background letter that was sent. Resend if needed.

• Secure agreement to take part in the research and set a time for the interview.

• Inform him/her that the interview guide will be sent in advance of the interview. Ask participant to review the guide before the interview.

• Email guide to participant; get email address, if needed (i.e., if initial contact was by phone, not email).

SUBSEQUENT CONTACT:

• Refer to the interview guide that was sent in advance. Resend if needed.

• Determine if person is available for interview. If not available, reschedule.

• Interview should take approximately 45 minutes.

• Note that responses are confidential (i.e., comments not for attribution, but his/her participation in the study would be included in report as part of an appended list of all interviewees).

• Record name, position, organization, phone number, interview length, and date.

GENERAL USE OF DATA AND INFORMATION IN GOVERNANCE

We’re interested in knowing how data and information are used in governance and how this could be improved. Our primary interest is in public opinion data. However, I’d like to begin with a general discussion of the use of data and information in guiding government.

1. What kinds of information are particularly important for guiding, managing and administering government, and why are they important?

   Probe: - identify different types of tools/evidence used
   - what makes them important

2. What are the biggest shortcomings in the type of information government uses?

3. What are the biggest shortcomings in the way government uses information?

4. Thinking of the federal government, has the use of information changed in governance/government decision-making during the last 10 years? If so, how, why and to what effect?

ROLE OF POR IN MECHANICS OF GOVERNANCE

I’d now like to focus on one type of tool that governments and others use – public opinion research. This includes both quantitative and qualitative research, including surveys, whether by phone, online or other methodologies, as well as focus groups and stakeholder interviews like this. It also includes research conducted with the general public and with specific stakeholder audiences (e.g., clients, communities of interest).

5. In your view, how important is it for government to consult with Canadians or relevant stakeholders when making decisions? Why?

6. Do you think public opinion research is an effective tool for consulting with Canadians or targeted audiences? Why/why not?

7. Thinking more broadly, what role should public opinion research play in governance/government decision-making?

*Questions identified with an asterisk are of lower priority, asked only if time permits.

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Note: Given the nature of the stakeholder audience, the default method for first contact would be email, attaching a background letter, with phone follow-up (for those for whom we have email addresses). This script assumes that. If initial contact is by phone, offer to email the background letter to secure participation (with or without the interview guide at that point in time).
8. When is public opinion research most useful in supporting government decision-making?

Probe: - by type of decision-making (development of policies/programs/services; performance measurement/evaluation)
- by stage in the process (early, middle, end)

9. *What do you think are the advantages or value of using public opinion research in governance/government decision-making? Any others?

10. *And what do you think are the disadvantages, if any, of using public opinion research in governance/government decision making? Any others?

11. Do you think the Government of Canada’s use of public opinion research has changed over the last 10 years? If so, how, why and to what effect?

12. Do you think that the federal Government (bureaucrats and politicians) have the tools they need to make sound decisions regarding policies and programs?

13. Government of Canada spending on public opinion research has gone from a high of almost $33 million in 2006-07 to a low of $4.3 million in 2012-13. Were you aware of this? What do you think about that?

14. How much trust or confidence do you have in public opinion research? Why do you say that?

Probe: - if lack of confidence, compare now vs. 10 years ago

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH POR AND EXAMPLES OF ITS VALUE

I’d now like to focus on specific instances or examples where public opinion research has been used by government, whether federal, provincial or municipal.

15. *Have you ever used public opinion research done for a government agency? If so, please explain. Here, we are thinking of the full range of possible areas, but some examples might be use in program or policy design, improving targeting and effectiveness of communications, and performance measurement and accountability. What impact did it have?

16. Can you think of any instances where public opinion research was an important factor that led to a sounder decision because of it? FOR THIS AND THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, RECORD SPECIFICS FOR POSSIBLE USE AS CASE STUDIES.

More specifically,

17. Can you think of any instances where public opinion research resulted in savings and value for taxpayers? That is, where public opinion research informed the decision-making process and resulted in a more effective program, policy or service?

18. Can you think of any instances where a decision was made without any public opinion research to support it, where you think the results would have benefitted from public opinion research?

19. Can you think of any instances where a program, policy, or service was initiated without any public opinion research to support it, and which proved to be a mistake or wasted taxpayer money?

20. *Do you have a sense of how other organizations use public opinion research to inform their decisions?

Probe: - private sector, governments outside Canada

21. Generally, should more of this kind of work be done? How could it be done better? How could it be better used?

22. *Are you aware of instances where a department chose to do public opinion research in-house rather than through a professional research agency, to avoid delays in approval or due to budgetary cuts? If so, was it useful? Did it prove accurate?

FUTURE FOCUS

Looking ahead,

23. Are there any changes you would propose to current government decision-making practices? How about with respect to the availability, quality and use of public opinion research in government decision-making?

CONCLUSION

24. Do you have any final comments or ideas you’d like to offer before we conclude the interview?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTFUL FEEDBACK. IT IS VERY MUCH APPRECIATED.
Annex 5: Interview Guide (French)

Utilisation de la recherche fondée sur les preuves dans le processus d’élaboration des politiques publiques au Canada

Guide d’entrevue avec les intervenants

VERSION FINALE

CONTACT INITIAL5 :

- Expliquez la nature ou l’objet de la recherche.
  - Mentionnez le courriel et la lettre d’information qui ont été envoyés. Renvoyez-les au besoin.
- Obtenez le consentement pour participer à la recherche puis fixez une date et une heure pour l’entrevue.
- Informez le participant que le guide d’entrevue sera envoyé avant l’entrevue. Demandez au participant de lire le guide avant l’entrevue.
- Envoyez le guide au participant; demandez au participant de vous fournir son adresse électronique, au besoin (c’est-à-dire si le contact initial a été fait par téléphone et non par courriel).

SUBSEQUENT CONTACT:

- Mentionnez le guide d’entrevue qui a été envoyé au préalable. Renvoyez-les au besoin.
- Demandez au participant s’il est disponible pour faire l’entrevue. Dans la négative, fixez une nouvelle date ou une nouvelle heure.
- L’entrevue devrait durer environ 45 minutes.
- N’oubliez pas que les réponses sont confidentielles (c’est-à-dire que les commentaires du participant ne seront pas associés à son nom, mais que sa participation à l’étude sera incluse dans le rapport dans la liste de tous les participants en annexe).
- Prenez en note le nom, le titre de poste, l’organisme, le numéro de téléphone, la durée de l’entrevue et la date.

5Les questions marquées d’un astérisque sont d’une priorité moindre. Posez-les donc seulement si vous en avez le temps.

5 Remarque : Compte tenu du type d’intervenant, la méthode par défaut pour le contact initial sera un courriel auquel sera joint une lettre d’information puis un suivi par téléphone (pour les personnes dont nous avons l’adresse électronique). Le script repose sur cette méthode par défaut.

Si le contact initial se fait par téléphone, offre à l’intervenant de lui envoyer la lettre d’information par courriel afin d’assurer sa participation (avec ou sans le guide d’entrevue).

UTILISATION GÉNÉRALE DES DONNÉES ET DE L’INFORMATION DANS LE CADRE DU PROCESSUS DE GOUVERNANCE


1. Quels types de données ou d’information sont particulièrement importants pour orienter, gérer et administrer le gouvernement? Pourquoi sont-ils importants?

   Posez les questions nécessaires pour :
   - Déterminer les types d’outil et de preuve utilisés
   - Déterminer les raisons pour lesquelles ils sont importants

2. Quelles sont les plus grandes lacunes relativement au type de données et d’information que le gouvernement utilise?

3. Quelles sont les plus grandes lacunes relativement à la façon dont le gouvernement utilise les données et l’information?

4. L’utilisation des données et de l’information au gouvernement a-t-elle changé au cours des dix dernières années en ce qui concerne les processus décisionnel et de gouvernance? Dans l’affirmative, pourquoi et quelles ont été les répercussions?

RÔLE DE LA RECHERCHE SUR L’OPINION PUBLIQUE DANS LE PROCESSUS DE GOUVERNANCE

Je vais maintenant mettre l’accent sur un type d’outil que les gouvernements et d’autres organismes utilisent, soit la recherche sur l’opinion publique. Elle comprend la recherche quantitative et qualitative, notamment les sondages (par téléphone, en ligne ou par d’autres moyens) ainsi que les groupes de discussion et les entrevues avec les intervenants comme la présente entrevue. Elle comprend également la recherche effectuée auprès du grand public et auprès d’intervenants précis (p. ex. clients, communautés d’intérêt).
5. Selon vous, dans quelle mesure est-il important pour le gouvernement de consulter la population canadienne ou les intervenants pertinents lorsqu’il prend des décisions? Pourquoi?

6. Pensez-vous que la recherche sur l’opinion publique est un outil efficace pour consulter la population canadienne ou les publics cibles? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?

7. De façon plus générale, quel rôle la recherche sur l’opinion publique devrait-elle jouer dans le processus décisionnel ou de gouvernance?

8. Dans quelles circonstances la recherche sur l’opinion publique est-elle le plus utile pour appuyer le processus décisionnel du gouvernement?

9. *Selon vous, quels sont les avantages ou quelle est la valeur de l’utilisation de la recherche sur l’opinion publique dans le processus décisionnel ou de gouvernance du gouvernement? Avez-vous d’autres suggestions?

10. *Selon vous, quels sont les désavantages, s’il y a lieu, de l’utilisation de la recherche sur l’opinion publique dans le processus décisionnel ou de gouvernance du gouvernement? Avez-vous d’autres suggestions?

11. Pensez-vous que l’utilisation de la recherche sur l’opinion publique par le gouvernement du Canada a changé au cours des dix dernières années? Dans l’affirmative, pourquoi et quelles ont été les répercussions?

12. Pensez-vous que le gouvernement fédéral (fonctionnaires et politiciens) dispose des outils nécessaires pour prendre des décisions éclairées relativement aux politiques et aux programmes?


14. Dans quelle mesure avez-vous confiance en la recherche sur l’opinion publique? Pourquoi?


16. Avez-vous des exemples où la recherche sur l’opinion publique a été un facteur important qui a permis de prendre une décision plus éclairée? POUR LA PRÉSENTE QUESTION ET LES QUESTIONS SUIVANTES, PRENEZ NOTE DES EXEMPLES DONNÉES, QUI POURRONT ÊTRE UTILISÉS DANS LES ÉTUDES DE CAS.

Plus précisément :

17. Avez-vous des exemples où la recherche sur l’opinion publique a mené à des économies et une valeur ajoutée pour les contribuables? Autrement dit, des exemples où la recherche sur l’opinion publique a permis de prendre des décisions plus éclairées et par conséquent de rendre un programme, une politique ou un service plus efficace?

18. Avez-vous des exemples où une décision a été prise sans recherche sur l’opinion publique, et qui selon vous aurait eu de meilleurs résultats grâce à la recherche sur l’opinion publique?

19. Avez-vous des exemples où un programme, une politique ou un service a été mis(e) en œuvre sans l’appui d’une recherche sur l’opinion publique et qui s’est révélé(e) une erreur ou un gaspillage de l’argent des contribuables?

20. *Savez-vous comment les autres organismes utilisent la recherche sur l’opinion publique afin de prendre des décisions éclairées?
Posez les questions nécessaires sur :
- Le secteur privé, les gouvernements à l’extérieur du Canada.


22. *Avez-vous des exemples où un ministère a choisi d’effectuer une recherche sur l’opinion publique à l’interne plutôt que de faire appel aux services d’un organisme de recherche professionnel, pour éviter les retards en matière d’approbation ou attribuables aux réductions budgétaires? Dans l’affirmative, ce choix a-t-il été utile? A-t-il permis d’obtenir des données pertinentes?

L’AVENIR
En ce qui concerne l’avenir :

23. Proposerez-vous des changements aux pratiques décisionnelles actuelles du gouvernement? Proposerez-vous des changements à la disponibilité, la qualité et l’utilisation de la recherche sur l’opinion publique dans le processus décisionnel du gouvernement?

CONCLUSION
24. Avez-vous tout autre commentaire ou toute autre idée à nous faire part avant de terminer l’entrevue?

NOUS VOUS REMERCIIONS D’AVOIR PRIS LE TEMPS DE RÉPONDRE À NOS QUESTIONS ET DE FORMULER DES COMMENTAIRES CONSTRUCTIFS. VOTRE RÉTROACTION NOUS SERA TRÈS UTILE.
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