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Experiences with census users: who they are, what they need, how they are involved**Users' requirements: Planning for content of the 2016
Canadian Census Program¹****Note by Statistics Canada²***Summary*

User consultation is the first step in the framework developed by Statistics Canada to determine 2016 Census Program content. The other steps are concerned with response burden and privacy, as well as with operational considerations, costs and data quality and efficiency safeguards.

To assess users' requirements for relevant and quality data, Statistics Canada conducted the consultations in 2011 and 2012, using different approach than in the past. Rather than to solicit comments on the content questions of the previous Census (2011), the objectives of the 2016 Census Program content consultation were to: 1. confirm information needs within the broad topics and identify new data requirements; 2. establish data priorities, and 3. understand how the Census Programme data are used.

This paper provides an overview of the consultation strategy and communication, an analysis of a profile of consultation participants and their submissions as well as the discussion of the consultation major findings.

¹ This paper is based on a document prepared by Statistics Canada entitled *the Census Program Content Consultation Report, Census year 2016*, released September 10, 2014 (catalogue no. 92-137-X).

² Drafted by Johanne Denis (Director General, Census Subject Matter, Social and Demography Statistics Branch) and Margaret Michalowski (Assistant Director, Census Subject Matter Secretariat).

I. Overview of the approach used for the 2016 Canadian Census Program content consultation

1. User consultation is the first step in the framework developed by Statistics Canada to determine 2016 Census Program content. Planning began in 2011 with the 2016 Census Strategy Project³. During the course of this project, Statistics Canada reviewed methodological options, formulated a detailed content determination framework and gathered information on data uses and requirements from a limited number of data users.
2. A more exhaustive 2016 Census Program content consultation was conducted from September to November 2012.
3. The objectives of the consultation were to:
 - confirm information needs and identify new data requirements
 - establish data priorities
 - understand how the Census Program data are used.
4. The consultation focused on 14 content topics. Overall, 293 organizations and 119 individuals participated in the 2016 Census Strategy Project and the 2016 Census Program content consultation, for a total of over 400 participants.
5. The communication with data users about the consultation was initiated in early September 2012, with an email sent to more than 3,000 stakeholders from various sectors. It presented consultation objectives and included a link to the online Discussion points questionnaire. Moreover, senior representatives from various federal, provincial/territorial, local government and non-government organizations received an invitation to complete an online Data Uses and Requirements questionnaire on behalf of their organization.
6. Statistics Canada organized information sessions on the consultation process and included details about the 2016 Census Program content consultation on the Consulting Canadians website. The 2016 Census Program Content Consultation Guide was also posted in the census web module of Statistics Canada's website.
7. Statistics Canada adopted two strategies to solicit views and opinions on the 2016 Census Program content and collect information on data uses:
 - (a) Discussion points: Promoted widely, the 2016 Census Program Content Consultation Guide contained seven questions about the importance of Census Program topics, possible new data requirements and modifications to the 2011 content (Appendix). Two geography-specific questions were also included: one on levels of geography used and another on geometric convergence. Feedback was collected primarily via an online questionnaire.
 - (b) Data uses and requirements: Building on the 2016 Census Strategy Project⁴, Statistics Canada invited a broader sample of data users and stakeholders to report on

³ Statistics Canada launched the 2016 Census Strategy Project as part of its customary statistical program review. This project conducted a review of the approaches for population censuses that exist around the world and evaluated their applicability to the Canadian context as well as their adherence to Statistics Canada's mandate and business model. Consult the *2016 Census Strategy Project: Data Uses and Requirements Report* for more information.

⁴ During the 2016 Census Strategy Project information gathering exercise in 2011, there was no direct contact with data users at the local level. Rather, organizations representing municipalities were approached. These

priority Census Program data uses via the online version of the Data Uses and Requirements questionnaire (Appendix). Organizational representatives from federal, provincial and territorial governments and other participating non-government organizations could also provide details on new data uses not reported during the information gathering exercise held in 2011.

8. Respondents were invited to elaborate on the characteristics of each key use reported and to specify the requirements needed to support it. More specifically, the respondents were asked to provide information on related activities (e.g., policy development), applicable Census Program topics, levels of geographical detail, population groups of interest, as well as the need for comparability across geographies, continuity over time and possible alternative data holdings.

II. A profile of consultation participants

9. More than 500 submissions from data users and stakeholders from various sectors, including federal, provincial and territorial governments, municipalities and regions, non-profit organizations, umbrella organizations or national associations representing the non-profit or business sectors, Aboriginal organizations, organizations representing official language minority communities, organizations representing or providing services to Canadians with disabilities and the immigrant community, as well as business, academia and the general public were received during the 2016 consultations, yielding over 2,300 uses⁵.

Table 1

Number of submissions⁶ and reported data uses by sector

Sector	Number of submissions received	Number of reported uses
Total	521	2,351
Federal government	103	482
Provincial/territorial government	83	801
Local government	131	597
Other (includes not elsewhere specified)	204	471

Source: Statistics Canada, Census Operations Division, 2016 Census Program content consultation.

organizations include the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Council on Social Development and the Regional Information Systems Working Group. Municipalities and regions with various population sizes from across the country were invited to participate in the 2016 Census Program content consultation in 2012.

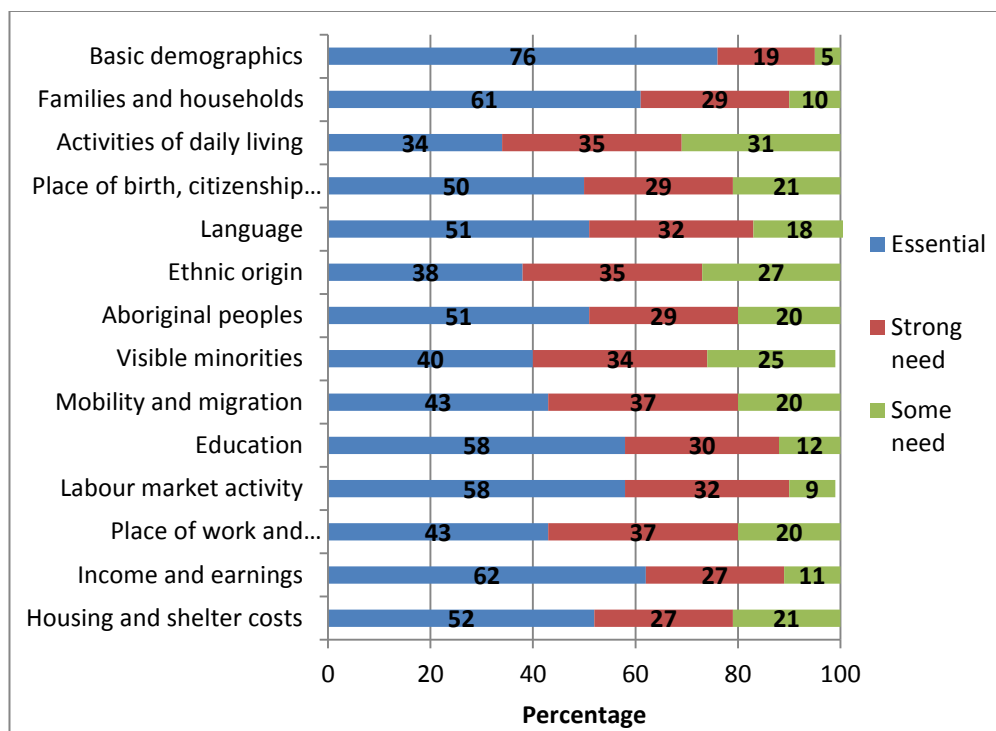
⁵ Includes multiple incidences of the same use reported by different organizations.

⁶ The total number of participants does not equal the total number of submissions received as an organization may have contributed input multiple times during the 2016 Census Program content consultation.

III. Findings

10. The 2016 Census Program Content Consultation Guide asked participants to rank Census Program topics by level of importance. The following chart presents the percentage distribution of each theme according to essential, strong need and some need, as reported by consultation participants. Overall, those who responded to this question consider basic demographics, income and earnings as well as families and households more essential than other topics. In addition, when responses are analyzed by jurisdictions, Basic demographics was the topic most frequently reported essential by all, with the varying order of the other (Table 2).

Chart 1
Distribution of Census Program topics by level of importance as reported by consultation participants



Source: Statistics Canada, Census Operations Division, 2016 Census Program content consultation.

Table 2
Order of essential Census Program topics as reported by consultation participants by sector

Order	Federal government	Provincial / territorial government	Local government	Other sectors ⁷
1	Basic demographics	Basic demographics	Basic demographics	Basic demographics
2	Aboriginal peoples	Labour	Families and households	Education
3	Income and earnings	Education	Income and earnings	Income and earnings
4	Language	Income and earnings	Housing and shelter costs	Labour
5	Visible minorities	Families and households	Labour	Language
6	Education	Aboriginal peoples	Place of work and commuting to work	Families and households
7	Families and households	Housing and shelter costs	Education	Place of birth, citizenship and immigration
8	Labour	Place of birth, citizenship and immigration	Mobility and migration	Aboriginal peoples
9	Place of birth, citizenship and immigration	Place of work and commuting to work	Language	Housing and shelter costs
10	Ethnic origin	Activities of daily living	Place of birth, citizenship and immigration	Mobility and migration
11	Mobility and migration	Mobility and migration	Activities of daily living	Ethnic origin
12	Housing and shelter costs	Language	Ethnic origin	Visible minorities
13	Place of work and commuting to work	Visible minorities	Aboriginal peoples	Place of work and commuting to work
14	Activities of daily living	Ethnic origin	Visible minorities	Activities of daily living

Source: Statistics Canada, Census Operations Division, 2016 Census Program content consultation.

11. Overall, no major gap in the content of the Canadian Census Program was brought forth during consultation. One hundred and thirty one new data requirements for the Program, including unpaid work, gender identity, commute to school, secondary residence were reported, most of these by only one or two participants. In many cases, data on these topics are collected in other Statistics Canada programs, such as the General Social Survey or the Canadian Community Health Survey or national household surveys.

12. The consultation participants offered also some ideas for the content modifications. For example, it was suggested to eliminate the question on income and only use the Canada Revenue Agency administrative taxfiler data as the source for income variables.

⁷ "Other sectors" includes non-profit organizations, umbrella organizations, Aboriginal organizations, organizations representing official language minority communities, organizations representing or providing services to Canadians with disabilities and the immigrant community, as well as business, academia and respondents not elsewhere specified.

Other findings

(a) *Level of geography:* Census division/census subdivision (equivalent to counties/regions and municipalities) are the standard levels of geography most frequently cited.⁸ Consultation participants rely on Census Program data at levels of geography below census metropolitan area for two-thirds (66%) of all reported data uses.

(b) *Suitability of alternative data sources:* Participants indicated that there were no suitable alternative data sources within their organization for over 90% of reported data uses. While some possible administrative data sources were identified (such as, Canada Revenue Agency tax records, the Indian Register, Citizenship and Immigration Canada landing files and provincial administrative files), limitations such as conceptual differences, reduced sample and coverage, possible costs, lack of granularity (important for evidence-based policy research) and reduced socioeconomic detail that is only available from Census Program topics were mentioned.

(c) *Multivariate analysis:* A requirement was stated for multiple Census Program topics in approximately 80% of reported data uses, with basic demographics, labour market activity, income and earnings, education, and families and households characteristics cited in over 550 data uses, followed by topics on language, Aboriginal peoples, housing and shelter costs and visible minorities referred to in almost 500 data uses.

(d) *Comparability across Canada:* Overall, there is an essential/strong need for comparability across Canada in 77% of reported data uses. Non-government organizations and the federal government ranked this requirement as an essential/strong need in approximately 90% of reported data uses. The local government sector indicated an essential/strong need for the data to be comparable across Canada in 78% of reported data uses as compared to the provincial/territorial government sector in about 66% of reported data uses.

(e) *Continuity over time:* Having access to data over time is considered an essential/strong need in approximately 84% of reported data uses. Non-government and local government sectors submitted the highest percentage of data uses requiring trend analysis capability (more than 90%), compared to the federal and provincial/territorial government sectors in approximately 80% of reported data uses.

IV. Conclusions

13. The 2016 Census Program content consultation used a different approach than in the past: it focussed on the identification of essential topics and collected requirements on key data uses as a way of confirming information needs and priorities.

14. The consultations conducted in 2011 and 2012 yielded a wealth of information on Census Program data applications. The feedback received attest to the need for all Census Program topics, to varying degrees. The uses collected confirm the importance of data for small areas and population groups, as well as a requirement for multivariate/multidimensional characteristics, comparability across Canada and continuity over time. A number of new data requirements and modifications were also brought forth. As with all consultation results, these suggestions will be studied carefully and shared with Statistics Canada socioeconomic statistical program areas.

⁸ The Census Program, in most instances, is the only source of socioeconomic data at detailed levels of geography (i.e., census division/census subdivision, census tract and dissemination area). Household surveys typically do not have a large enough sample size to produce small area data.

15. The findings of the 2016 Census Program content consultation summarized in this paper are shaped by the diversity of participants, the varying specificity of the input received, the good representation from the regions in Canada and within organizations, as well as the consultation instruments. Nevertheless, we need to be aware that the conclusions results might not extend to the entire user community.

References

2016 Census Program Content Consultation Guide:
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/consultation/index-eng.cfm>

2016 Census Strategy Project: Data Uses and Requirements Report:
http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/fc-rf/reports-rapports/R1_Part1-Partie1-eng.cfm

For information about **2011 Census of Population**, including questionnaires:
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/ref/index-eng.cfm>

For information about **2011 National Household Survey**, including questionnaires:
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/NHS-ENM/2011/ref/index-eng.cfm>
