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**DISSEMINATING CENSUS RESULTS TO SPECIFIC POTENTIAL USERS – A
STATISTICS CANADA PERSPECTIVE**

Submitted by Statistics Canada¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Statistics Canada, like most national statistical agencies, has a mandate to disseminate information to a wide variety of publics – from sophisticated data users through to the general public. As the annual report to Parliament on plans and priorities states:
2. “The Government of Canada has established Statistics Canada to ensure that Canadians have access to a trusted source of statistics on Canadian society and its economy. This is of fundamental importance to an open, democratic society as it provides objective information to Canadians and their elected representatives to support their decision making and participation in the democratic process, markets and in their personal lives”.
3. Canada conducts a census every 5 years. There are significant advantages to a five year census cycle. The census database is refreshed mid-decade and societal trends can be tracked more closely. In Canada, we are able to provide custom tabulation services from the census database on a cost recovery basis. Data users are able to obtain data for their own non-standard geographic areas and can also combine standard census variables to create new derived variables of interest. Many sophisticated users order the same custom tabulations Census after Census to meet their data needs.
4. Operationally, there are also some important advantages to a 5 year cycle. There is more continuity in terms of corporate memory, less staff turnover and we even have groups of people who return to Statistics Canada to work on data collection census after census (census “junkies”). There are also a number of challenges from an operational perspective. The organization is always working on two or three censuses at the same time since each census has a 7 or 8 year cycle. Significant change to a census has significant risk due to the constrained time frame to develop and test new approaches. Finally, the communications support for census collection and the dissemination of census results follow very closely upon each other: there is almost no break between them.

**II. STATISTICS CANADA’S APPROACH TO CENSUS COMMUNICATIONS AND
DISSEMINATION**

5. Statistics Canada has developed a very operationally based approach to communications and dissemination. In order to provide data users with quality census data, it is absolutely essential to ensure that the data collected are complete and accurate. As well, the census is collected within an

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increasingly stringent budgetary environment. Quality data collection must be carried out at the lowest possible cost. Cost over runs at the collection stage will result in less money being available for the dissemination stage. Data quality and timeliness have to be based in the collection process.

6. To deal with the realities of taking a census every five years, Statistics Canada takes the approach that communications support for data collection and the dissemination of census results are simply two parts of one continuous cycle. The role of public communications in support of census collection is:

- to encourage timely, complete and accurate response by all Canadians
- To maintain staff morale during the collection activity to enable collection to be successfully completed.
- to interest various publics in the up-coming results from the census

6. The role of census dissemination is to:

- encourage various publics to access and use census data in their decision making
- Make Canadians aware of the results from the Census and the stories the data tell about our country. This is part of saying “thank you” for their participation in the Census.
- Interest various populations in ensuring the most complete count for the next census. This is building the Statistics Canada brand.

7. This continuous cycle approach places an emphasis on the support of collection objectives, the targeting of specific hard to enumerate groups and the recognition that simply making a significant amount of census information available to people is insufficient to turn them into committed supporters of the census. They must be informed about what the data mean and shown how to access and interpret it.

III. Third Language Media

A. Background

8. There are two official languages in Canada: French and English. Statistics Canada is required by law to offer all services to the public in both “official languages” as they are called. Statistics Canada, like most national statistical agencies, has developed a strong and very successful media relations program with the traditional, mainstream media. The metrics for this program have tended to be related to coverage or the advertising value equivalent of the coverage. The program had always been almost exclusively directed to French and English language media and is seen as central to our overall dissemination program.

9. In addition, Canada is a very open and diverse society. In a country of about 31 million, we take in about 250,000 immigrants each year. According to the 2006 Census, 20% of the population were born outside the country, 21% have a mother tongue other than English or French and one in six identify themselves as “visible minorities” (up 27% from 2001). In major metropolitan areas like Toronto and Vancouver just fewer than half the population was born outside of Canada.

10. Many of the recent immigrants do not really understand the role of Statistics Canada and in fact, are very nervous about the government asking them a lot of questions. Our studies have shown that census undercoverage is higher among those with a non-official language mother tongue. It is an operational reality that the census takes longer and costs more in areas that have concentrations of recent newcomers. Response rates of non-census surveys tend to be lower in those areas as well. Language barriers also make it difficult for newcomers to participate in other Statistics Canada surveys.

11. During census collection, we have always done a lot of outreach work with multi-cultural groups and media in order to support the collection activity. However, there were always a lot of complaints that we did not take these groups seriously: we never spent significant advertising dollars with them and they only heard from us every five years when we needed something from them. The number of third language media outlets in Canada has mushroomed in recent years into the hundreds. They deal in dozens of languages and some have very significant readership/viewership/listenership numbers.

B. The Program

12. Based on our continuous cycle approach, it was decided to mount an on-going program for third language media to mirror our success with main stream media.

In order to gain funding for a new program, the metrics were set much higher than for the on-going program. In addition to measuring coverage, we have been asked to estimate impacts on response rates in on-going surveys. This is proving to be very challenging but we continue to work at it. Of course, nobody ever asked us to justify our regular media relations program based on improved response rates.

13. The program objectives are:

- To increase the coverage of Statistics Canada data releases in third language media. Our strategy has been to start with Census releases but to work on non-census releases as well.
- To increase the knowledge and understanding of Statistics Canada among multi-cultural communities (brand recognition).
- To build support for the collection of the 2011 Census. This will include editorial support for the census and help in hiring staff with multiple language skills.

14. There was no need to develop special tools or data products to support the program. It was felt that the wide range of electronic products available from the 2006 census were sufficient. What **was** required were training, education and personal contact. Our target audience did not really know how to access information and understand the data story. The key program elements were:

- Hiring multi-lingual staff to maintain on-going contact. Initial targeted languages were Chinese, Spanish, south-east Asian languages and eastern European languages. The staff were located across the country and worked as a national team. The program is managed from the Regional office in Toronto.
- Developing one on one relationships with key media/community leaders. The program is a form of relationship marketing.
- Providing interviews in the third languages. This involved not only the communications staff hired for this program but also a significant number of analysts and data specialists in the organization who speak a third language. The staff were very pleased to have these opportunities.
- The provision of a lot of up-front training on things like navigating the website, a course on “how to turn statistics into stories” and workshops on census concepts and geographies.

C. Initial lessons learned

15. Building on-going relationships with third language media quickly leads into relationships with ethno-cultural communities. In Canada, third language media is very integrated with the communities they serve. This is a very good thing from our perspective as it gives us increased reach from the activity.

16. All programs that consume scarce resources must include reasonable metrics to evaluate them. This is particularly true of outreach programs. However, it is imperative to get general agreement on the metrics at the front end. Metrics must be practical and reasonable.

17. Although third language capacity is very important among the staff, it is not an absolute imperative for a successful program. We need to show sensitivity to language issues and good faith by hiring in the communities. However, most third language media outlets are quite used to doing interviews in an official language and taking appropriate steps to translate or summarize.

18. There is a real need to focus the activities in a labour intensive program. There are simply too many possible clients and the resources allocated could be swamped by the demand. We have learned to plan carefully and strategically. Despite the fact that we are developing individual relationships, we still need to practice triage – we seek “bang for the buck”. This can be achieved through working with associations, presenting at conventions and providing training in a group setting.

19. It is relatively easy to interest these media in Census releases, particularly those that deal with language, immigration, ethnic origin etc. In fact, the release of 2006 Census data on immigration was launched simultaneously in Toronto and Vancouver, as well as in the capital. In Toronto we had representatives from over 200 media outlets (mostly third language). However, the program has really moved forward when we can obtain significant media coverage for non-Census releases. This is a sign that we are becoming part of their regular news programming system and we have been able to achieve this on a consistent basis.

20. We have been looking for ways to meet requests by third language media outlets for custom tabulations that would normally be done on a cost recovery basis. We can handle a small number of such requests but not large volumes of them without charging. The most promising approach seems to be in forming consortia where individual media outlets can share the cost of a custom job (e.g. the same tabulation but for a variety of sub-populations).

IV. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A. Background

21. In Canada, we have three tiers of government: national, provincial/territorial and municipal. In some parts of the country, there are even regional governments between municipalities and the provinces. Statistics Canada has the legal right to enter into data sharing agreements with the provinces under certain conditions and we have many such agreements. However, we do not have such agreements with municipal governments. Municipal governments are often significant users of Census data due to the information available for small geographic areas.

22. It was traditionally felt that municipal governments were relatively sophisticated users of Census data. Towards the end of the 2001 dissemination program, we began to recognize that this was not really the case. The planners in larger cities were very knowledgeable but many other potential users were not necessarily. Likewise, the degree of knowledge and sophistication was not nearly as high in smaller cities – even in the planning departments.

23. A small pilot project was undertaken to see what Statistics Canada could do to increase both use and knowledge of Census data at the municipal level. The first thing that became apparent was that we had to revise our view of what we meant by “municipal”. In Canada, the municipal sector has grown in scope to include not only, the city government and bureaucracy but also an extended

network of social agencies, community groups and even academics. Some in these extended networks were very sophisticated in regards to Census data while others were much less so. We began to talk about the “community level” not the “municipal level”.

B. Program Description

24. The program seeks to increase and improve the use of census data at the community level. We want to help local governments and community organizations make the best possible use of census data in social planning, policy development and research applications. We plan to meet these high level objectives by:

- Increasing the ease of access to census data
- Building relationships with local partners
- Creating learning opportunities for the target audience
- Encouraging the sharing of statistical expertise
- Demonstrating how census data can be used to improve decision making

25. Based on our continuous cycle of communication and dissemination, we would also expect that this program will generate additional support from the municipal and community groups for the 2011 Census. We will be looking for promotion of the importance of the Census, help in the recruitment of staff and the development of community Census help centres.

26. The project began with the selection of four medium and small cities as pilot sites. We selected them based on geography and our perceptions of their use of census data. The first step was to meet with civic officials and key community groups to explain the program and to conduct a needs assessment. It became clear that a major requirement was to do some capacity building. Just as with the third language media program, the key issue was not a lack of access but rather the capacity to understand and use the data. At the front end, there was no need to develop additional data tools.

27. We quickly moved to provide training in these communities. In most cases we were able to use existing training programs with some modifications. The three training programs that were most often given were: using the Internet site, how to understand and use Census data and how to work with a specific software that we use to manipulate census data (Beyond 20/20). Over a 100 community based organizations have participated in the training to date. The training plan for each community was slightly different and customized to meet particular needs.

28. The metrics for measuring the program are still very basic. We are measuring activities (e.g. number of training sessions, the number of people trained) but have not been able to come up with any solid measures of outcomes for the program so far.

C. Initial Lessons Learned

29. Even though the majority of community based groups need census data to study the area they serve and to plan and deliver services effectively, the key impediment for them is the lack of knowledge about what information is available and how to use it.

30. Regardless of location and size, communities seem to have a very similar set of core needs. Further investigation indicates that these core needs also exist in large cities and even rural areas.

31. There is a major issue regarding the need for and sharing of custom tabulations produced on a cost recovery basis. Normally, there are limitations on the number of users that can share custom tabulations but we have had to come up with different ways to create and handle consortia. If the

community groups and municipal officials can come up with some consistency in their requirements for custom tabulations, we can reduce our development costs and they can share the charges.

32. Resources are always limited and in order to expand this work into other communities, we need to establish a process to initiate and organize the work in each community. We have found that the establishment of a community focal point works well. The focal point is usually in the municipal government and is responsible for organizing and administering the consortium, organizing training sessions and often actually holds data that can be used by others. This project can be very labour intensive and without such active community support, we would be very limited in the work that we could do. The focal points can also expand the networks in their communities by helping new members get training and assistance very quickly. At some point managing several focal points could become an issue but is a useful way to get moving quickly.

33. Early indications are that we should expect some significant support from these communities for the 2011 Census in Canada. This may be the most useful metric of all for the program.

V. CONCLUSION

34. Recent Canadian experience would indicate that there are some key elements in helping new data users become regular census users. Our approaches are all based on the continuous cycle of communication and dissemination that we have adopted with our five year census cycle.

- The need for metrics to justify and measure the programs in a time of tight resources. It is not easy to develop meaningful outcome metrics.
- The problem is not the need for specific new data products. The existing Internet based and electronic products meet the needs in most cases.
- Issues related to lack of knowledge on how to find and understand the data are more important impediments to increased use.
- Demand can easily outstrip the resources available in outreach programs. We need to try to leverage the willingness of key groups to partner with us to help reach wider audiences.
- We need to continue to increase the amount of information that is available without charge on the Internet. Once we educate potential users about the web site, we need to ensure that there are lots of data available for them.
