

The RESEARCH CORNER

**A Newsletter about Custom Public Opinion Research (POR)
in the Government of Canada**

ADVISORY PANEL ON TELEPHONE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY QUALITY – WHAT’S NEXT?

The overall purpose of establishing an Advisory Panel on Telephone Public Opinion Survey Quality in 2006 was to provide advice and guidance to the Public Opinion Research Directorate (PORD) on quality standards and benchmarks appropriate to public opinion telephone survey research conducted for the Government of Canada. The knowledge gained from this Panel would be used in several areas, including the 2007 renewal of the POR contracting tools. It would also provide departments and agencies commissioning telephone survey research with proposed standards and guidelines that they could incorporate as requirements in contracts with public opinion research (POR) suppliers.

During the Summer and Fall of 2006, the eight-member Advisory Panel, composed of highly knowledgeable researchers in government, business and the academic community, reviewed and discussed current Canadian and international standards, benchmarks, and practices related to telephone survey quality, with particular focus on response rates and population coverage. The Panel's advice, finalized in December 2006, sets out a series of proposed standards and guidelines for possible use in Government of Canada public opinion telephone surveys.

PORD, in consultation with the Communications Procurement Directorate of PWGSC, is now considering how best to implement the Panel's major recommendations. The upcoming 2007 renewal of the national POR contracting tools will be a primary vehicle for doing so. In addition, the standards and guidelines will be promoted as best practices. Training sessions, new guides, annotative reports and checklists will be developed and disseminated in the coming months to government POR practitioners.

BEST PRACTICES IN GOVERNMENT OF CANADA PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Why should you be concerned about positive response bias? How does non-response bias affect your results? What kind of scale should you use? To answer these and other questions, the Public Opinion Research Directorate (PORD) will be developing, in the coming months, over a dozen reports on best practices for Government of Canada public opinion research. The series will outline critical, timely and important research issues of interest to GoC public opinion research practitioners, some of which were covered by the Advisory Panel on Telephone Public Opinion Survey Quality. We will review current issues and suggest guidelines for each. This will be done with a view to building on the knowledge and capacity of PORD's advisors and of the POR coordinators in departments and agencies. The best practices reports will be succinct and straight forward, of approximately two to three pages in length.

The first reports will cover issues that researchers always have to face, including positive response bias, non-response bias and scale construction, followed by perspectives on research on social values, psychographics and methods of assessing the perspectives of visible and ethnic minorities. Six more reports will follow in the coming months.

THE RESEARCH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – 2ND ANNIVERSARY

Manage and find public opinion research

It has been two years since the Research Information Management System (RIMS) was launched to departments and agencies across government. Since that time, this on-line public opinion research (POR) database and project management tool has become a valuable resource for POR practitioners. The number of registered users has more than doubled and system enhancements, with clients' needs first and foremost, have included new reports, the Partnering Billboard, access to final reports on-line, and on-line instructions.

RIMS, the repository of detailed information on all contracted POR projects underway or completed, allows users to become more familiar with what others are doing, helping them to effectively plan new projects and/or find possible partners. As a project management and reporting tool, the system helps departmental POR coordinators manage and report on their research activities. RIMS also offers them a simple way to submit new projects to the POR Advisors in PORD, and allows them to follow the progress of their projects in "My Project Portfolio".

RIMS has truly proven to be a useful addition to the toolbox available to public opinion researchers across government.

*To register as a RIMS user,
please contact **Stephanie Charette** at
stephanie.charette@pwgsc.gc.ca or
613-995-9837; for an orientation to RIMS,
please contact **Anne Mendel** at
anne.mendel@pwgsc.gc.ca or
613-943-2976.*



THE RESEARCH CORNER

The Research Corner is produced by the Public Opinion Research Directorate, Consulting, Information & Shared Services Branch of PWGSC for the public opinion research community in the Government of Canada. It provides information about custom research projects, offers ideas and information about research developments, and provides a forum for the exchange of experiences and best practices.

Submissions and correspondence should be addressed to the Editor at:

por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca
or (613) 943-2976

Produced by the Public Opinion Research Directorate, Consulting, Information & Shared Services Branch, PWGSC.

The Directorate has valuable resources available in either hard copy or on-line at <http://commnet.gc.ca>

- Public Opinion Research in the Government of Canada: An Orientation Guide
- Annual Reports
- Research Techniques: Guideposts to Value

To obtain copies of these publications, please call (613) 943-2976 or e-mail por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca.

EDITORIAL

Research Using An On-Line Panel?

Here's What The American Association For Public Opinion Research Says About Reporting Results From Many On-Line Panels

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) has issued an opinion regarding the reporting of the results of surveys that are based on self-selected samples, such as many on-line panels and mall intercepts. AAPOR states, "AAPOR considers it harmful to include statements about the theoretical calculation of sampling error in descriptions of such studies, especially when those statements mislead the reader into thinking that the survey is based on a probability sample of the full target population." (see *The Problem with Reporting Sampling Error in Surveys of Self-Selected Individuals* at www.aapor.org)

This is because, of course, self-selected samples are not based on probability sampling. Surveys whose results are described using margin of error and the confidence interval must be based on **probability sampling**. **Probability sampling**, as defined by Statistics Canada, "involves the selection of units from a population, based on the principle of randomization. It is further characterized by the fact that every unit of the population has a calculable probability of being selected in the sample" (see *Survey Sampling: A Non-Mathematical Guide*, Statistics Canada 1993). Most telephone surveys, which are based on random-digit dialing or a related technique, are considered to be probability based.

What's a researcher to do?

First, ascertain whether or not the sample in the on-line panel is based on a probability sample. The supplier firm will be able to inform you.

If the sample is NOT a probability sample, this is not necessarily a reason to reject the use of an Internet panel, a rapidly growing research medium that offers wide scope for imaginative research. You should, however, understand the limitations of these panels and ensure the supplier includes a disclaimer in the report.

AAPOR recommends the following disclaimer for reports from surveys conducted among self-selected individuals:

"Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have [volunteered to participate/registered to participate in (company name) online surveys and polls]. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of (target population). Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation [in the panel], no estimates of sampling error can be calculated. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to multiple sources of error, including, but not limited to sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments."

Please
send us your
comments to
por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca



PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The Government of Canada has produced more than 4,000 custom public opinion research reports since 1994. The reports can be reviewed on Library and Archives Canada's new Web site for these reports at www.porr-rrop.gc.ca, or they can be accessed using an inter-library loan through your departmental library. The Research Corner presents highlights from selected reports in each of its issues.

Healthy Living: Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Communications, A survey of Canadian Youth Health Canada, Ipsos Reid, May 2006

This quantitative study of Canadian youth between the ages of 12 and 17 explored what healthy living means to young people, in relation to healthy eating, physical activity, participation in sports and attitudes about healthy weight. It included their attitudes about life and the future, their beliefs in the desirability of having a healthy lifestyle, their behaviour patterns, including risky behaviours. The research sought to identify barriers that prevent healthy living (e.g. peer pressure, financial constraints); to provide insights into messaging to promote healthy living to this age group; to reveal differences across the provinces and territories; to map views on receptivity to information about healthy living; and to determine some strategies to encourage healthy living.

A national telephone survey of 1001 Canadian youth in both official languages took place from March 7-24, 2006. Prior to speaking with youth under 17, parental permission was obtained.

The vast majority of Canadian youth do not believe they have a health problem. Ninety-eight per cent say they are in somewhat or very good health, believe that they always or often eat healthy, nutritious foods (62%) and consider themselves somewhat or very physically fit (97%). Only 16% say they are overweight. "Age matters, both for lifestyle and receptivity": youth under 14 years still follow the lead of their parents and other adults, while older youth act more independently. Older males in particular, despite being physically active, engage in risky behaviours, while older females are less likely to engage in risky behaviours, but are also less likely to eat healthily or be as physically active as younger females. Canadian youth advocate a mix of increased personal responsibility for healthy eating with more opportunities for physical activity, such as greater access to nutritious foods at school and longer gym classes.

Consumer Perceptions: Honey Origin and Ingredient Claims Canada Food Inspection Agency, Decima Research, July 2006

The objectives of this qualitative study, carried out through four focus groups in Calgary and Montreal in June 2006, were to determine:

- Whether consumers were misled by the Canada Grade name with respect to country of origin of honey, particularly in relation to Canadian honey blended with imported honey packaged in Canada;
- Whether they were misled by honey representations in words, pictures, and graphics on the label, such as brand names, common names, flavour representations, and product packaging on product that contain little or no honey;
- The degree to which they were misled;
- The seriousness of the issue; and
- What labelling provides accurate and understandable representation of the food with respect of origin and ingredient claims, for consideration of possible solutions?

Findings suggest that consumers are misled in both the country of origin and ingredients claims for products claiming to contain honey. Product packaging, labelling, common name and brand name grades, legibility, predominance, presentation of information and even product colour have the potential to impact on the impression created, of a particular product.

Participants' degree of frustration with the misrepresentation varied. Participants were generally more upset with highlighted ingredients claims than about country of origin. Although most currently didn't make purchases based on country of origin, they indicated they would prefer the country of origin to be clearly marked beside the grade. There is a desire to support Canadian producers. With respect to misrepresentation of ingredients, some suggested adding the word "flavour", or "with honey", or referencing the specific honey content as a percentage on the ingredients list.



Final Reports, Please!

Hundreds of reports are deposited with Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and the Library of Parliament each year. This ensures that research findings are shared across departments and with the public. Please deposit your final reports using the LAC Web site www.porr-rrop.gc.ca, as soon as they are complete.

Immigrant Labour Market Information Needs and Satisfaction Focus Groups Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Sage Research Corporation, May 2006

The Labour Market Information (LMI) service provides information on local labour markets across Canada. One client group of LMI on-line products is immigrants to Canada and organizations providing services to immigrants. This qualitative study aimed to better understand the specific labour market information needs of the client group. Fifteen focus groups were conducted in March 2006: ten sessions with new immigrants; five sessions with immigrant-serving organizations; English sessions in Toronto, Kitchener/Waterloo, Calgary and Vancouver; French sessions in Sherbrooke and Montreal.

Immigrant serving providers were given information packages on issues to be covered, prior to attending their session, and were asked to review the LMI web site and fill in a brief questionnaire about their reaction to its content. Discussions with immigrants focused on identifying gaps in labour market information and preferred format/channel for information and getting feedback on the LMI products available on the Internet.

The two groups offered insights into improving the usefulness and understanding of the information LMI provides. They offered suggestions on format and layout, and provided opinions on the level of language of the existing LMI on-line products. Participants' feedback also provided useful input into the development of the Going to Canada Immigration Portal.



ON THE SHELVES

Library and Archives Canada is the repository for all custom research reports completed by the Government of Canada.

The reports can be accessed through the Library and Archives Canada Web site www.porr-rrop.gc.ca, or copies can be requested using an inter-library loan through your departmental library. These are useful resources for the Government of Canada research community. Below is a sample of the reports.

- *Survey of First Nations People Living Off-Reserve, Métis and Inuit* (Indian & Northern Affairs Canada, October 2006)
- *Survey of In-Study Canada Student Loan Borrowers* (Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, September 2006)
- *Management Review of Environment Canada's Youth Round Table on the Environment* (Environment Canada, September 2006)
- *Depository Services Program (DSP) 2006 Client Satisfaction Survey* (Public Works & Government Services Canada, November 2006)
- *Applying Social Science to Research in National Parks: Evaluation Visitor and Community Understanding towards Canada's National Park System* (Parks Canada, May 2006)
- *Canada Food Guide Consultation (Telephone and On-Line Surveys)* (Health Canada, June 2006)
- *Alcohol Use During Pregnancy and Awareness of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder* (Health Canada, May 2006)
- *Qualitative Research with Nurses around Roles and Responsibilities for the Surveillance of Waterborne Illnesses in First Nations Communities* (Health Canada, September 2006)
- *Qualitative Insights and Strategy Development: Student Loan Debt and Default Issues* (Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, June 2006)
- *Health Professionals' Information Needs: Air Quality Health Index 2006 Research* (Health Canada, August 2006)
- *Testing Interactive Game Concepts for a Tobacco Website (with Youth Aged 12-18)* (Health Canada, August 2006)
- *Illustration-Based Health Information Messages: Concept Testing* (Health Canada, August 2006)
- *Results of the Survey to Determine the Importance and Delivery of Needs as Expressed by Field Units* (Parks Canada, August 2006)
- *Findings from Focus Group Research: Views on Government Spending* (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, November 2006)



Questions or Suggestions

Do you have questions about public opinion research or suggestions about content for an upcoming issue? Contact the Editor at por-ror@pwgsc.gc.ca

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY PROCEDURES CHANGES AND FINAL REPORTS

The Procedures of the amended Communications Policy of the Government of Canada (August 2006) require departments to deposit final public opinion research reports directly with Library and Archives Canada and the Library of Parliament, with a copy also to Public Opinion Research Directorate (PORD) / PWGSC. Previously, institutions submitted the reports to PORD who, in turn, would deposit them with the libraries.

Institutions are fully responsible for the content and quality of their research reports. They must ensure that each report complies with the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures, and all applicable legislation, including the *Privacy Act*, the *Access to Information Act*, the *Official Languages Act*, and *PIPEDA*, among others.

If you have any questions about the quality aspects of final reports, please contact your **POR Advisor** at the PORD/ PWGSC.



REMINDER

The Web site for depositing reports to both libraries and PWGSC is

<http://porr-rrop.gc.ca/>

DID YOU KNOW?

The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association's annual conference, entitled *Our Changing Communities*, is coming soon:

June 13–15, 2007

the Village at Blue Mountain Conference Centre, Collingwood, Ontario.

For information, visit www.mria-arim.ca/Conference2007/NEWS/default.asp