

# The RESEARCH CORNER

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

## DOING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN CANADA'S NORTH

### What You Should Know about the Differences

By Donna Larsen, Partner,  
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Over the past 10 years, DataPath has conducted many research projects within Canada's North. These have included different kinds of surveys from online to telephone to intercepts – the standard fare, but each with their own challenges. This article attempts to show why the North is different and why applying standard research methods might create misleading results.

If you truly want to understand public opinion across the North, the first thing you need to understand is that there is no "North". It is like trying to say "across Canada" and thinking that the average represents everyone. The North has four distinct regions: the Yukon (and yes, contrary to what the government promotes, 75% of all Yukoners want the word 'the' used before the word 'Yukon'), the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Nunavik. The demographics are significantly different in each one (for example, in Nunavik 91%, describe themselves as Aboriginal, compared to only 23% in the Yukon). Comparing "the North" to the rest of Canada also shows that residents of the North are younger, less educated with larger households.

So how do these impact methodologies?

- 1 Language** An aboriginal language is the main language spoken at home by 89% of those in Nunavik, 57% in Nunavut, 20% in NWT and 2% in the Yukon. (average = 29% across the North). On one survey we needed to use eight different languages.
- 2 Multiple family households** Watch your sampling plan and be aware that on average there are 2.5 adults per household – representing two or more different family units!
- 3 Telephone** Eleven percent of households do not have phones, and it is as high as 20% in Nunavut. And be aware of community activities (Friday night bingo can really kill the flow rate), too many interviewers calling will use up the available phone lines, and there are more out of service phone numbers than you would expect. The time of day and season you can call are also extremely important. Surveys in October or before 2:00PM in the winter will lead to frustration and incomplete samples.

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## NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT LOOKS AT CELL PHONE ONLY HOUSEHOLDS

The innovative and exciting New Technologies and Government of Canada Communications project has extended its mandate to survey the opinions of persons who live in cell phone only households. As the proportion of cell phone only households increases and that of landline households decreases, an understanding of the demographic characteristics and the survey response behaviour of this fast-growing segment will be a significant addition to our stock of knowledge of current survey methodology here in Canada. The results, expected to be available by March 1, 2008, will enable us to understand how the usage of the new technologies and the demographic characteristics of cell phone only households compares with landline households and net users. For information on this project, contact Nat Stone of the Public Opinion Research Directorate at [nat.stone@pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:nat.stone@pwgsc.gc.ca)



## 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:

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or (613) 992-6904

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 [www.pwgsc.gc.ca/por/text/index-e.html](http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/por/text/index-e.html)

- Public Opinion Research in the Government of Canada: An Orientation Guide
- Annual Reports
- Research Techniques: Guideposts to Value
- The advisory Panel on Telephone Public Opinion Survey Quality
- Improving Respondent Cooperation for Telephone Surveys

To obtain copies of these publications, please call (613) 992-6904 or e-mail [por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca).

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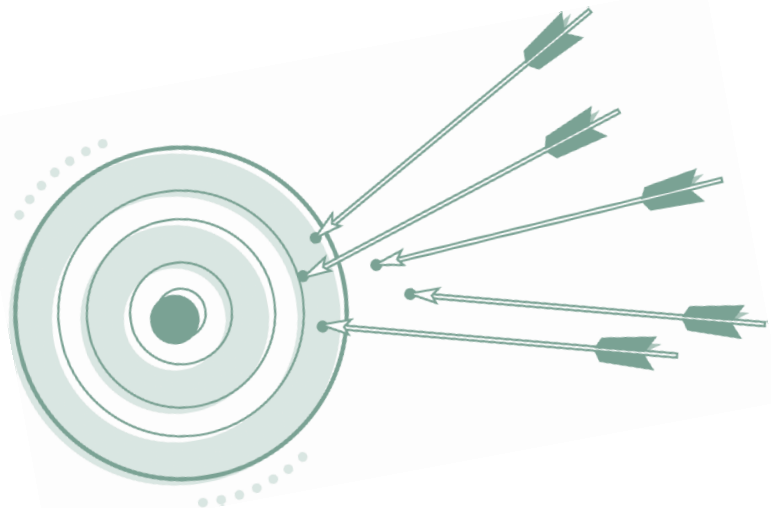
## EDITORIAL

# Nonresponse Bias Affects the Quality of Our Surveys

Nonresponse bias is a problem that affects all surveys to varying degrees. Nonresponse bias is the systematic differences between the actual data for a population and the results from a survey that are caused because some segments of the population respond more to surveys than others.

An example of nonresponse bias would be a conventional telephone survey (with no cell phone interviews)

The phenomenon of low response rates has generated a lot of attention in recent years. But many researchers believe that nonresponse bias is actually a more serious problem for surveys than low response rates. This is owing to a considerable amount of research on the topic, well summed up by Dr. Bob Groves in *Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Bias*, where he concludes, "There is little empirical support for the



that includes a relatively low proportion of younger age groups (the 18-to-24 age group in particular) in its sample because a large proportion of this age group live in households where there are only cell phones and no landline telephone.

One of the recommendations of the 2006-2007 **Advisory Panel on Telephone Public Opinion Survey Quality** was the following: "*All survey reports must contain a discussion of the potential for nonresponse bias for the survey as a whole and for key survey variables.*"

notion that low response rate surveys de facto produce estimates with high nonresponse bias." \*1 He also affirms, "Despite low response rates, probability sampling retains the value of unbiased sampling procedures from well-defined sampling frames."

The Public Opinion Research Directorate has drafted a standard for nonresponse bias analysis that if approved, would become mandatory in all Government of Canada public opinion surveys. You may wish to review this standard and offer your comments on the standard itself.

To obtain your copy, please contact [nat.stone@pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:nat.stone@pwgsc.gc.ca)

\*1 Groves, Robert. 2006. "Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Bias" Public Opinion Quarterly 70: 646-675

## THE ADVISORY PANEL ON ONLINE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY QUALITY

The Public Opinion Research Directorate has launched a new panel to make recommendations on standards and guidelines for online research, the **Advisory Panel on Online Public Opinion Survey Quality**. The panel, composed of members from the Government of Canada, the private sector and universities, began its work on January 10. Sage Research is moderating the discussions of the Panel via an online bulletin board. The members of the Panel are:

Scott Bennett, *Carleton University*  
Doug Church, *Phase 5 Consulting Group*  
Cam Davis, *Social Data Research*  
Cathy Ladds, *Treasury Board Secretariat*  
Jackey Mayda, *Statistics Canada*  
Sylvain Sénécal, *HEC Montréal*  
Darryl Somers, *Service Canada*  
Frances van den Enden,  
*Royal Canadian Mounted Police*

The scope of the Panel's enquiry is the following:

- Limited to quantitative surveys, both probability-based and non-probability based; qualitative research is specifically excluded
- Online surveys of the public, business and other populations
- Online surveys conducted by the Government of Canada
- Issues related to the distinction between probability and non-probability based surveys and the acceptability of non-probability based surveys; this specifically includes issues related to statistical inference;
- Issues related to the reporting of results;
- Issues related to the assessment of data quality and the measures of success and response to online surveys;
- Guidelines related to accessibility and literacy-related issues;
- Specific standards and guidelines for statements of work, proposal documentation, questionnaire design and pre-testing as they relate to online research.

The work of the **Advisory Panel on Online Public Opinion Survey Quality** builds on the work of the 2006-2007 *Advisory Panel on Telephone Public Opinion Survey Quality*.

The final report is to be delivered by March 31, 2008.

## CANADIAN OPINION RESEARCH ARCHIVES IS CANADA'S COLLECTION OF SURVEY DATA

The Canadian Opinion Research Archives (CORA) is an online data base that serves the Canadian public opinion research community. Founded in 1992, CORA contains the data files from hundreds of surveys conducted by major Canadian research firms. The CORA is a rich source of public opinion research data, but it needs to keep its collection current. CORA encourages Government of Canada departments and agencies to submit their SPSS data files and questionnaires after studies are completed so that the survey data will be available to Canadians for all time. For more information, see [www.queensu.ca/cora/](http://www.queensu.ca/cora/).

## GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESEARCHER IS MRIA OTTAWA'S VICE PRESIDENT- INCOMING PRESIDENT

It is with great pride that we are able to announce that on January 10, 2008, Christine Gauthier of the Department of National Defence was chosen for the post of Vice President- Incoming President of the Ottawa Chapter of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association. Christine Gauthier will be assuming the title and duties of Chapter President in the near future.

*continued from page 1*

- 4 Internet** Internet access ranges from 78% in the Yukon to 59% in Nunavik.
- 5 Face-to-face** While expensive, this is the most representative. However, we have had to delay work due to bears, weather and flights. It is also never advisable to go into a community without permission. Use local representative and employees. Beware of hotel and other travel issues.
- 6 Mail** The majority of residents have P.O. boxes, and mail service is slow (especially since most only check it once a week or so).
- 7 Incentives** Prices are high (in Vancouver a liter of milk is \$2.55, in Nunavut it is \$7.09) incentives need to be in line with that, and useful.
- 8 Questionnaire wording** My best advice is to use Northerners with research experience to pre-test in all regions as local speech patterns and definitions of terms differ by region.

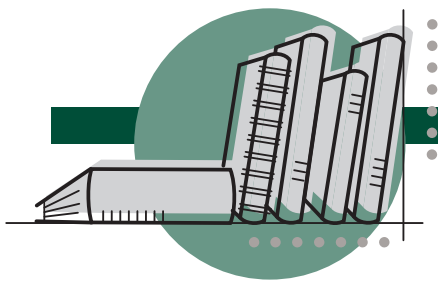
So, do include the North when doing national research, but don't just copy and paste a "southern" survey here – it may give you inaccurate results you might not even be aware of.

*\*Disclaimer: Donna Larsen gave a presentation entitled "Doing Public Opinion Research in the North" to the Community of Practice for Public Opinion Research on January 8th, 2008. The views and the data contained in this article are those of DataPath Systems and not necessarily those of Public Works and Government Services Canada.*

## 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-rrp.gc.ca](http://www.porr-rrp.gc.ca), as soon as they are complete.





## 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](http://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.

- *Canadian's Awareness of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games* (Canadian Heritage, November 2007)
- *Corporate Communications Survey Spring 2007* (Privy Council Office, June 2007)
- *Consumer Acceptance Study: Conventional Television Issues* (Canadian Radio Television & Telecommunications, April 2007)
- *Overfishing and International Fisheries and Oceans Governance* (Fisheries & Oceans Canada, July 2007)
- *ecoAction – ecoEnergy Home Retrofit Grant – ACET* (Environment Canada, July 2007)
- *Testing the French version of a STI pamphlet with 12-18* (Health Canada, August 2007)
- *Passenger Protect Branding – Radio Concept* (Transport Canada, June 2007)
- *Qualitative Research on NEXUS Advertising and Promotional Products* (Canada Border Services Agency, June 2007)
- *FNIHB Injury Prevention Material Testing: Journey to the Teachings* (Health Canada, October 2007)
- *Custom Questions: Factors Affecting Passport Demand/Passport Demand Forecasting* (Passport Office, November 2007)
- *Qualitative Research on the Use and Needs of INAC Website Users* (Indian & Northern Affairs Canada, July 2007)
- *Canada Day Noon Show 2007* (Canadian Heritage, July 2007)
- *Confidence in Imported Food Safety in Canada* (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, August 2007)
- *Centennial of Flight Logo Testing* (National Defence, September 2007)
- *Public Confidence in the Justice System – North of 60 and Remote Community Monitor 2007 (omnibus questions)* (Department of Justice, November 2007)

## 2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

The 2006-2007 Annual Report on Public Opinion Research in the Government of Canada was released in late November 2007. The report highlights trends in public opinion research across the Government of Canada and provides an overview of the variety of research conducted by departments and agencies, coordinated by PWGSC. Contracts worth \$31.4 million were awarded for 562 research projects, using the services of 66 research firms across Canada. The 422 custom research projects accounted for 88 percent of the total contract value, while the 140 syndicated studies represented 12 per cent, and a contract value of \$3.9 million. The value of custom research breaks down as follows:

Policy Development and Program Evaluation (40%)  
Advertising Initiatives (23%)  
Quality of Service (9%)  
Market Research (21%)  
Web Testing (5%)  
Other (2%)

Summaries of the research undertaken by the ten most active departments and agencies illustrate the breadth of research undertaken. The research firms that conducted custom and syndicated research are also listed.

The report and other valuable resources are available on-line. To obtain print copies of the report, please call the Public Opinion Research Directorate at 613-995-9837 or e-mail [por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca)

**DID  
YOU  
KNOW**

The MRIA National Conference "Open Skies, Open Minds" will take place from May 25-28, 2008 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. For more information please visit the MRIA Web site at [www.mria-arim.ca/Conference2008/NEWS/default.asp](http://www.mria-arim.ca/Conference2008/NEWS/default.asp)

The Annual Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, May 15-18, 2008, in New Orleans, Louisiana [www.aapor.org/2008annualaaporconference](http://www.aapor.org/2008annualaaporconference)

**Questions  
or Suggestions**

Do you have questions about public opinion research or suggestions about content for an upcoming issue? Contact the Editor at [por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:por-rop@pwgsc.gc.ca)