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Contract Award Date: November 26, 2018  
Delivery Date: April 24, 2019  
Contracted Cost: \$218,920 (excluding taxes)

# National Focus Groups – Winter 2019 Third Cycle

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## Executive Summary

Prepared by:  
**Corporate Research Associates Inc.**

Prepared for:  
**The Privy Council Office**

*Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.*

For more information on this report, please email:  
[por-rop@pco-bcp.ca](mailto:por-rop@pco-bcp.ca)



Suite 5001, 7071 Bayers Road  
Halifax NS B3L 2C2  
[www.cra.ca](http://www.cra.ca)  
1-888-414-1336

Canada 

## Executive Summary

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### Background and Objectives

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned Corporate Research Associates Inc. (CRA) to conduct public opinion research using qualitative approaches, to explore the perceptions of Canadian adults on the state of current events that relate to the federal government. Findings from the research will be used to develop effective communications strategies and products, to ensure that communications with the Canadian public on important issues remain clear and easy to understand. The study entailed three cycles of focus groups, one for each of January, February, and March 2019. This report presents the findings from the third and final cycle of focus groups. More specifically, objectives of this third cycle of focus groups aimed to assess opinions and perceptions regarding Trade (Kingston, Winnipeg, Halifax and Laval), the Budget, (Kingston, Victoria, Laval and Halifax), the Environment (Winnipeg and Barrie), Tourism, (Winnipeg, Barrie and Joliette), Skills (Winnipeg, Barrie and Joliette), Stock Options (Kingston, Victoria and Halifax), Housing (Winnipeg, Barrie and Joliette), Energy Vision (Kingston, Victoria, Halifax and Laval), and Local Challenges (Victoria and Joliette).

The third cycle of the study consisted of a total of fourteen (14) in-person focus groups conducted from February 28 to March 25, 2019. Two French sessions were conducted in each of Joliette (QC) and Laval (QC), while two English groups were held in each of Barrie (ON), Winnipeg (MB), Kingston (ON), Victoria (BC) and Halifax (NS). Focus group participants included Canadian residents between the ages of 18 and 74 years old, and were segmented by gender in Joliette and by financial situation in other locations. One group was categorized as “*financially struggling*” and another group was categorized as “*financially secure*”. In Joliette, one session was only females, the other session was only males. Across all groups, a total of 136 participants took part in this research cycle.

This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of confidence.



## Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Corporate Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the ***Policy on Communications and Federal Identity*** and the ***Directive on the Management of Communications***. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_



Margaret Brigley, CEO and Partner | Corporate Research Associates

Date: April 24, 2019

## Key Findings and Conclusions

The following presents a summary of key findings from the ***Focus Groups – Winter 2019 – Third Cycle*** for each topic discussed.

### Housing (Barrie; Winnipeg; and Joliette)

Concern was prominent when discussing housing, both in terms of affordability, securing a mortgage, and also about the government's involvement in supporting first-time home buyers. Desire to own a home was strong, primarily as a means to build personal equity. However the availability of affordable housing, and the ability to save for a down payment, were often cited as barriers to home ownership.

The idea of government supporting first-time homeownership through sharing a small part of home equity elicited mixed reactions and led to questions regarding the logistics and legalities of the proposition. The greatest concern related to the implication of shared equity on decisions related to the use of the property. Of the five proposed names discussed for this program, the preferred options were "First-Time Buyers Benefit" in English and "Hypothèque à mise de fonds partagée" in French.

### Skills (Barrie; Winnipeg; Kingston; Victoria; and Joliette)

Although the term "upskilling" is generally unfamiliar, there is strong agreement and understanding of the need for Canadians to continue their learning, in one form or another, after entering the workforce, due to the rapid advance of technology and the fast-changing job market. Despite this recognition, cost, family commitments and a general lack of time were chief among concerns and barriers, for those who might be interested in undertaking further training or skills upgrading.

Participants were supportive of a government funding program for skills enhancement, but were cautious about logistics and job security. The program idea entailed the provision of a lump sum benefit to Canadian workers to cover a portion of the cost of continuous training and living expenses, while guaranteeing them time off work to pursue education. Participants would be asked to cover some of the cost of training, while employers would be asked to provide time off to interested employees. Despite this type of initiative being seen as an important step to prepare the Canadian workforce for the future,



concerns were expressed regarding the impact of participation on small businesses, notably in terms of labour shortages or additional costs, and participants' financial ability to contribute to the cost of training. Of six options to name this program, the names, "Professional Development Leave" and "Crédit de soutien à la formation" were considered the most appropriate.

### **Budget (Kingston, Victoria, Halifax and Laval)**

Awareness of the recent federal budget varied, not only across locations but depending on participants' financial situation, with those who are more financially secure having greater awareness of the budget announcement. Despite limited knowledge of budget content, nearly all participants heard about the announcement of the federal budget through the news, with social media, newspapers and news radio being popular sources. General impressions of the budget were those of concern, with many questioning how the spending would impact the national debt. The first-time home buyers' initiative was most recalled of the budget's initiatives, and received positive initial response, as did items related to education. Less enthusiastic responses were related to a perceived lack of focus or direction in the budget, and overall concern about increasing the deficit.

Of 13 budget initiatives identified to participants, doubling the infrastructure money and investing in programs to support outcomes on First Nations reserves were considered the top priorities for government. A more in-depth discussion of the first-time home buyers' initiative yielded mixed responses, with many citing concerns about the logistics of the initiative. Similarly, there was skepticism about the Canada Training Benefit, and concern about how this program would impact employment practices and job security. Finally, there was moderate support for changing the stock options purchase benefit, with many uncertain how relevant these changes would be for them personally.

### **Trade (Winnipeg, Kingston, Halifax and Laval)**

Awareness of and concern about trade issues was high, with trade discussions between Canada and other nations being an area of interest to participants. That said, there was limited awareness of trade agreements Canada is involved in, with the new Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership, and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement being recalled.

Trade diversification was not a well-known term, but was considered to be an opportunity to trade with multiple countries and improve business opportunities for Canada. Greater economic independence was considered the greatest advantage of trade diversification, while increased competition for local businesses was seen as the main disadvantage. It was believed that the Government of Canada plays a role in assisting private sector businesses with exporting their products and services through trade missions, strengthening the country's profile abroad, and providing financial assistance, among other things.

### **The Environment (Barrie; Winnipeg)**

Top of mind issues relating to the environment most commonly included global warming and a price on pollution, as well as the Trans Mountain Pipeline. In terms government involvement, keeping plastic



pollution out of the waters and investing in public transit were mentioned as top priorities. There were also strong feelings that further efforts are needed to ban plastic bags, reduce garbage and increase recycling plastic bottles, potentially through an incentive program. By contrast, government was seen as not playing a key role in supporting or expanding the network for electric vehicles.

Awareness of the Climate Action Incentive was limited, and was met with skepticism when discussed. Awareness of the plan to put a price on pollution was slightly higher, but raised many questions about the administration of the program and whether the plan would contribute to long-term solutions to improve the climate change situation.

There was a strong desire for Canada to be a leader among other nations when it comes to protecting the environment, and fighting climate change. At the same time, the public recognizes that lifestyle changes must be made in order to have an effect on climate change. Media and family / friends were considered role models for many, when considering what types of changes to make in that regard.

### **Tourism (Barrie; Winnipeg; and Joliette)**

Awareness and general acceptance of vacation rental accommodations booked through online portals was fairly high, and most participants were pleased or at least neutral about their emergence onto the tourism scene. Competitive pricing, as well as a unique or different alternative to hotels when travelling, were cited as positives.

Concerns about vacation rental accommodations related to the impact on other businesses and communities, and what the intention of the builders and property owners would be in the long run. Participants felt that GST-HST should be applied to rentals, but with conditions that create fairness.

### **Energy Vision (Kingston, Victoria, Halifax and Laval)**

Participants were shown five concepts to communicate Canada's energy vision to the public. Response to all three proposed concepts that contained the words "energy" and "future" was positive and strong. More specifically, the **Canada's Energy Future Starts Now** concept garnered the strongest response, eliciting a sense of hopefulness and ownership. Likewise, the concept **My Energy is Powering Canada's Future**, was a close second choice for many.

Regardless of the concepts, specific words held appeal, including "reliable", "sustainable", "affordable", "clean", "renewable", and "my energy is powering". By contrast, some of the expressions caused confusion, including "electrifying the nation" and "full service oil and gas".

### **Local Challenges (Victoria; and Joliette)**

A wide range of issues were discussed as being important in both Victoria and Joliette. Bike lanes, affordable housing, and homelessness were considered the most important challenges in Victoria. In Joliette, an increased population was believed to have caused issues with road safety and traffic, as well as access to services. In general, specific actions of the federal government to support the local economies were not well known.



Among of list of pre-determined issues, major community concerns in both regions were about access to healthcare, an aging population, road and bridge infrastructure, traffic congestion, and poverty. In Joliette, public transit was also listed as a concern, while in Victoria, a shrinking middle class, retirement security, the cost of housing, homelessness, drug overdoses, and preserving a clean environment were additional issues selected by participants. Of note, the availability of healthcare services was the top ranked issue in terms of priorities in both locations.

**Service Canada Pull-Up Screen (Joliette)**

Among the three concepts tested for potential designs for a Service Canada banner, the one featuring a white and red colour scheme without symbols emerged as most eye catching, as well as being most closely aligned with Service Canada. The concept that featured colourful symbols and the concept that featured symbols, but with a white a red colour scheme each elicited mixed reactions, as the symbols and intention of icons were not easily understood.

In terms of preferred expression for the banner sign, there was a preference for “Au service des gens” as a warm, welcoming statement. In terms of the URL to be included on the sign, “Canada.ca” was preferred over “Canada.ca/servicecanada”, for its brevity and memorability.

