



Regional discussion report: Review of First Nations, Métis and Inuit questions on the census

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Acknowledgements

Statistics Canada would like to thank all participants who provided feedback at the regional discussions to support content development for the 2021 Census, as well as those who took the time to send in written comments. We appreciate that in many cases participants traveled considerable distances to participate in the meetings.

Many of the contributors to the regional discussions indicated that they were glad to have had the opportunity to discuss these questions, and that they have a better understanding of Statistics Canada data as a result. The employees of Statistics Canada who attended these meetings are also grateful to have had the opportunity to understand the complexity of the data issues concerning First Nation people, Métis and Inuit.

Regional discussion report: Review of First Nations, Métis and Inuit questions on the census

Introduction

From September 2017 to February 2018, Statistics Canada undertook a series of discussions across the country. The purpose of these discussions was to obtain feedback on the questions that are used to produce data about First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations. The last major review of these questions was done in 2007 prior to the 2011 National Household Survey.

During these discussions Statistics Canada's Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division (SASD) with the [Aboriginal Liaison Advisor](#) (ALA) program visited over 30 locations across the country, conducted about 60 sessions and spoke with over 400 people. Contributors to the discussions included leadership and data users from local, provincial, territorial and national Indigenous organizations, such as friendship centers, health organizations and communities. Statistics Canada also met with representatives of provincial and territorial governments, federal departments, academics and researchers.

In facilitated discussions, contributors were asked to provide their thoughts and opinions on four census questions used to produce data about First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations, as well as on specific terminology such as "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous".

The goal of this report is to summarize the feedback raised in the regional discussions. The report will outline the process and format of the discussions and will summarize what we heard from the discussion contributors. This report will also outline some of the more general feedback Statistics Canada received on terminology, data collection, and outreach products.

Background

Statistics Canada regularly reviews the questions used on the census and other surveys. Such reviews are carried out to ensure that questions, instructions, concepts and response categories remain clear and meaningful to respondents and that the data collected are relevant. Changes in the social, political and legal environment of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit in Canada may have implications on the way that terminology and concepts are understood. Statistics Canada recognizes the importance of having face-to-face discussions, where possible, with First Nations people, Métis and Inuit, and to this end, we set out to hear how they understood and felt about the questions and terminology used at Statistics Canada, and to get their opinions on how to improve them.

Census questions

The census is a primary source of demographic data in Canada. Most census data are collected using the census short-form or the census long-form. The 2016 Census short-form went to all households in Canada and collected the following information:

- date of birth and age
- sex
- relationships of household members (including marital or common-law status)
- knowledge of official languages
- language spoken most often at home
- other language spoken regularly at home
- first language learned.

Income data were collected using records from the with Canada Revenue Agency, alleviating response burden and improving data quality.

Complementing the data collected by the short-form census questionnaire, the long-form questionnaire is designed to provide information about people in Canada based on their demographic, social and economic characteristics. In 2016, a sample of one in four of Canadian households received a long-form questionnaire. In addition to the short-form information, the 2016 long-form collected the following information:

- activities of daily living
- sociocultural information (including Aboriginal identity, Registered Indian Status, and membership in a First Nation or Indian Band)
- mobility
- place of birth, citizenship and immigration
- education
- labour market activities
- language used at work
- place of work and journey to work
- housing

There was also a version of the long-form (2AR) used in early enumeration, canvasser and reserve areas only, and used to survey all households in these areas, through personal interviews. It contained the census long-form questions with examples adapted for reserves and settlements, and an additional question on band housing.

Overview of the regional discussion process

Regional discussions were coordinated, organized and conducted by Statistics Canada's Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division (SASD) with the Aboriginal Liaison Advisors (ALAs).

The ALA program is a national program with 11 Advisors located across Canada. Their role is to build partnerships with Indigenous (political, advocacy or service) organizations, municipalities, and provincial/territorial governments. These partnerships are important to increase awareness and facilitate access to Statistics Canada's data products and services, but also to help Statistics Canada respond to the information needs of Indigenous people.

Furthermore, Statistics Canada is currently working on an Indigenous Statistical Capacity Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to work in partnership with Indigenous people to foster a culturally-based approach to identify and address the statistical needs of Indigenous communities, organizations, and leadership by supporting them to build data and research capacities for their own needs.

Members of National Indigenous Organizations (NIOs) were invited to contribute to the regional discussions. In some cases the organizations requested that discussions be conducted at their offices with their staff. Discussions were also conducted in the National Capital Region with other federal government departments. Contributors were invited through the Network for Sharing Indigenous Information and Research (NSIIR). The NSIIR consists of representatives of federal, provincial and territorial departments and agencies, representatives of Indigenous organizations, and the research community.

The ALAs maintain an electronic-network of roughly 6,000 people. This e-network has been developed with contacts they have made over many years at numerous events. Contacts include, for example, Chief and Council members, Band Managers, Funding Services Officers, Community Navigators, Economic Development Advisors, First Nation and Métis Government Relations, academics, Elders, Executive Directors of Indigenous Organizations, Indigenous service providers, and members of all levels of government. Through this network, the ALAs informed potential contributors about the discussions and where the sessions would be taking place to gauge interest.

Regional discussions were held in approximately 30 locations. For a full list of locations see Appendix A. Contributors who were unable to attend an in-person session were able to provide feedback using an electronic format.

In the discussions, feedback was solicited regarding the census questions currently being used to produce data about First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations, probing specifically for feedback on the terms “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal”. Contributors were also asked for feedback regarding Statistics Canada’s data products for Aboriginal people.

What we heard

A summary of the most frequently heard comments, issues and suggestions raised in the discussions are presented in this report.

Aboriginal identity question

Question 18 on the long-form census is known as the Aboriginal identity question. The purpose of this question is to determine the number of people who self-identify as being Aboriginal in Canada; that is, as belonging to one or more of the three constitutionally recognized groups including, First Nations people (North American Indian), Métis and Inuit.

<p>18 Is this person an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?</p> <p><i>Note: First Nations (North American Indian) includes Status and Non-Status Indians.</i></p> <p><i>If “Yes”, mark “(X)” the circle(s) that best describe(s) this person now.</i></p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> No, not an Aboriginal person </div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> Yes, First Nations (North American Indian) </div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;"> <input type="radio"/> Yes, Métis </div> <div> <input type="radio"/> Yes, Inuk (Inuit) </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Continue with the next question</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Go to Question 20</p> </div> </div>
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General impressions of the question

In general, the question was well understood. Contributors noted that this question is the one most often used for data analyses; therefore, it is important that First Nations people, Inuit and Métis feel that they can identify with the categories presented.

Question wording and terminology

The use of the term “Aboriginal” in question 18 generated significant discussion in the sessions. There was not a clear consensus on the use of the term “Aboriginal” or “Indigenous”. Generally, three opinions emerged. First, many people felt that the term “Indigenous” was the most appropriate term and the most relevant today. It was felt that Statistics Canada should adopt the use of the term “Indigenous” as the rest of the Government of Canada has done to be consistent with the Canada’s acceptance and adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons (UNDRIP).

The second opinion was that the term “Aboriginal” should remain. The main argument for keeping the term “Aboriginal” was that it is a legal term recognized by the Canadian constitution and is therefore the most appropriate term to be used in the Census of Population.

Finally, many contributors felt that neither term was appropriate. These contributors would prefer a distinction-based approach that does not use an all-encompassing term (such as Aboriginal or Indigenous) but instead names only the specific groups, that is First Nations, Métis or Inuit.

Further, some contributors expressed interest in being able to identify with their specific Nation or group with which they belong (i.e. Anishnabe, Nehiyaw, or Inuvialuit). In many cases, Inuit expressed that neither “Indigenous” nor “Aboriginal” apply to them.

First Nations (North American Indian) answer category

Many contributors suggested removing the “North American Indian” as it is considered to be outdated and no longer relevant. It was felt that First Nations was the more commonly used and understood term.

However, there were some contributors who felt that the term “Indian” was still important to include. It was felt that people of an older generation would better understand this term. Contributors in some locations indicated that the term was necessary given that it is the term used in the *Indian Act* and that there are legal implications that could potentially arise if the term was to be abandoned.

Another commonly heard suggestion was that an answer category for “Non-Status Indians” be added either as a category on its own or as a sub-category under the “First Nations (North American Indian)” category. Other feedback was that adding in these categories could affect comparability and that it would be preferable to put “Status and Non-Status” in brackets after “First Nation”.

Métis answer category

There was significant discussion around how Métis would identify on the census. It was suggested that a clear definition of what Statistics Canada means by “Métis” should be included.

Other contributors suggested that adding a question that would allow Métis to provide more information about their identity would be useful. The additional question would allow Métis to further identify with the particular government or organization with which they are affiliated. It was felt that this would help bring clarity to the data.

Inuk (Inuit) response category

Overall, it was felt that using “Inuk” and “Inuit” was clearly understood by the majority of people. Some Inuit felt that they would prefer to be able to further specify their identity; that is, they would like to be able to say they are “Inuvialuit” or “Nunavut Inuit” for example. It was recommended that an additional question should be added for Inuit to allow them to further identify with the Land Claims Agreement that they are beneficiaries of or enrolled under.

Registered or Treaty Indian status question

The purpose of this question is to get an estimate of the number of people who are Registered or Treaty Indians. This question is also used to derive the total Aboriginal population count from the census. That is, those who are registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada or those who are Treaty Indians who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown. Registered or Treaty Indians are sometimes referred to as Status Indians.

<p>20 Is this person a Status Indian (Registered or Treaty Indian as defined by the <i>Indian Act</i> of Canada)?</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, Status Indian (Registered or Treaty)</p>
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General impressions

In general, the Registered or Treaty Indian Status question was well understood. It was raised that the census has multiple questions that are relevant to the First Nations population, but not as much content for Métis and Inuit. This was a theme that was expressed in all regions.

Question wording and terminology

While the question was well understood, some did not like the reference to the *Indian Act*. Some contributors felt that it was unnecessary to use the term “status” and “registered” because if one has status they are registered. There were similar comments around the use of the term “treaty”. Despite the possible redundancy, it was clear that all three terms, “registered,” “status” and “treaty” are commonly used across the country, but vary in relevance depending on the region of the country.

Membership in an Indian Band or First Nation

The purpose of this question is to provide an estimate for the number of people who are members of a First Nation or Indian Band. This question is also used to derive the total Aboriginal population count from the census.

21 Is this person a member of a First Nation/Indian band?

If “Yes”, which First Nation/Indian band?

For example, Musqueam Indian Band, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Atikamekw of Manawan.

☐ No

☐ Yes, member of a First Nation/Indian band

Specify name of First Nation/Indian band.

[Input boxes for name specification]

General impressions

In general, this question was well understood. As with the Registered Indian question, there were many comments about the census not having a balanced amount of content for all three Indigenous groups, specifically Métis and Inuit.

Question wording and terminology

It was noted that the use of the word “band” was more prevalent in British Columbia and Quebec as opposed to the term First Nation.

A number of contributors felt that there might be some confusion around Bill C31 (the *Bill to Amend the Indian Act*) and band membership. It was suggested during the discussions that individuals reinstated as Status Indians under Bill C31 might be confused or uncertain as to whether having status was the same as being a band member.

There was discussion around how individuals who were citizens or members of a self-governing First Nation or modern land claims agreement would answer this question. It was suggested that the question be modified to reflect this concern, perhaps by including examples of self-governing First Nations or with instructions that they are also to be included.

Feedback was given about the number of spaces provided to answer this question. It was noted that some people would want to report more than one First Nation and that traditional names of First Nations can be lengthy.

It was noted that this question needed examples that are relevant to the Yukon.

Ethnic origin / Aboriginal ancestry question

Question 17 on the census long-form is referred to as the ethnic origin question. The purpose of this question is to gain insight into the composition of Canada's diverse population. This question provides a source of data on the number of people who report having Aboriginal ancestry. It is important to note, that some people may report having Aboriginal ancestry, but may not self-identify as an Aboriginal person on the census. Examples of possible responses are included on the census questionnaire to encourage First Nations respondents to indicate their nation(s) of ancestry; Métis and Inuit are also included in the examples. Two versions of this question exist. The first is used on the long-form questionnaire received by one in four Canadian households. The second is used on the long-form questionnaire received by all households in early enumeration, canvasser and reserve areas only.

<p>This question collects information on the ancestral origins of the population and provides information about the composition of Canada's diverse population.</p> <p>17 What were the ethnic or cultural origins of this person's ancestors?</p> <p>An ancestor is usually more distant than a grandparent.</p> <p>For example, Canadian, English, Chinese, French, East Indian, Italian, German, Scottish, Cree, Mi'kmaq, Salish, Métis, Inuit, Filipino, Irish, Dutch, Ukrainian, Polish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Korean, Jamaican, Greek, Iranian, Lebanese, Mexican, Somali, Colombian, etc.</p>	<p>Specify as many origins as applicable using capital letters.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>
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<p>This question collects information on the ancestral origins of the population and provides information about the composition of Canada's diverse population.</p> <p>17 What were the ethnic or cultural origins of this person's ancestors?</p> <p>An ancestor is usually more distant than a grandparent.</p> <p>For example, Cree, Ojibway, Mi'kmaq, Salish, Dene, Blackfoot, Inuit, Métis, Canadian, French, English, German, etc.</p>	<p>Specify as many origins as applicable using capital letters.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>
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Question wording and terminology

Some suggested that the two different concepts of “ethnic origins” and “cultural origins” might be better asked as individual questions.

Contributors felt that more space should be provided to include all possible ancestral links that might exist.

It was suggested that a “Don’t Know” category be added for those who do not know who their ancestors were. Some contributors raised concerns about how the legacy of policies such as the residential school system and the 60’s scoop would impact upon people’s ability to answer this question.

Some suggested that the note defining an ancestor should be included within the question text itself. Contributors also suggested that grandparents be included as part of the definition of ancestor.

There was little consensus on the number and types of examples that should be included in this question. It was suggested that examples represent all geographic regions, include more traditional names, list all First Nations, and include sub-categories of Métis. In contrast, others felt that there were too many examples. A number of people also suggested that “Canadian” be the last example given.

In the territories, it was noted that more examples were needed from the Philippines or from other immigrant populations on the rise in the territories. It was suggested to add these examples to the version of the questionnaire collected in the North.

Other feedback

Many of the contributors recognized the importance of the census and survey data to get information that is needed for funding proposals and planning. While recognizing that some questions may need to be updated, some contributors cautioned against major changes, stressing the importance of continuity in data and being able to make comparisons over time.

Contributors felt that the Aboriginal population may be undercounted, particularly in urban areas. Contributors expressed that they felt that specific sub-groups could be undercounted: transient populations and youth, the homeless population, long-term residents of collective dwellings and adopted/foster children. Some suggested that the Aboriginal identity questions be included on the short-form questionnaire.

Outreach products

Contributors gave feedback on three main products: *Aboriginal Insights*, *Aboriginal Data Wheels*, and *Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance*. In general, there was a lot of positive feedback about the outreach products.

Aboriginal Insights

Aboriginal Insights is a quarterly newsletter that is developed and distributed by the ALAs. The newsletter is used to notify the ALAs electronic network about Statistics Canada releases of data for Indigenous people, upcoming data collection, seminars and workshops and other information of interest to Indigenous people and data users. The newsletter was very well received. Contributors really appreciated the information that is provided, especially the links to articles and data tables. Some feedback was that it may be a bit lengthy and it could be streamlined.

Aboriginal Data Wheels

The Aboriginal Data Wheels are the most well received data product for Indigenous people and data users, according to the discussions. In 2011, Data Wheels provided quick summary statistics for the Aboriginal population for Canada, the Atlantic Provinces, Quebec, Ontario and the Western Provinces. In 2016, additional wheels were

added for the Northern Territories and for Inuit Nunangat. Some contributors said they used them on a daily basis in their work. It was suggested that a paper product such as this could be developed into a mobile application to reduce paper waste.

Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance

Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance provides users with a thematic guide to Aboriginal data at Statistics Canada. Each theme is illustrated with a chart or table presenting key indicators as well as a plain language description of the indicator. This product is available electronically on Statistics Canada's website or as a paper version. This product was also well received, and it was suggested that it should be produced at the regional level. Many contributors felt it would be more useful to have data for their province or city.

Conclusions and next steps

The regional discussions were the first step toward ensuring that the Aboriginal identification questions remain reflective and relevant to First Nations people, Métis and Inuit in the 2021 Census. With relevant questions Statistics Canada hopes to provide the most accurate data possible to Canadians.

Based on the feedback from the regional discussions, Statistics Canada has worked to develop new questions and to modify existing census questions so that they remain relevant. The new and modified questions were qualitatively tested in the summer of 2018. This means that individuals were asked to respond to the question as it would appear on the census form. Then they were asked a series of in-depth probing questions to ensure that the questions were well understood and also to obtain feedback and overall impressions of the questions.

Based on the results of qualitative testing, the questions were further revised to be tested quantitatively, with 250,000 households, in the 2019 Census Test. Statistics Canada will make recommendations to the Government of Canada on the final content of the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Recommendations will also be made for changes to questions used on Statistics Canada household surveys for people to identify as First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

2021 Census of Population public content consultation

Careful and thorough planning helps ensure the ongoing success of the Census of Population. The 2021 Census' content determination process ensures the Census Program's continued relevance by reflecting societal changes in the development of questionnaire content, gathering quality data for small areas and populations groups, and responding to legislative and priority policy needs.

Public consultation for the 2021 Census gathered information on census data uses and requirements by undertaking a nationwide online consultation inviting users and interested parties to convey their data needs and share their views and suggestions for the content of 2021 Census. In-person meetings with stakeholders were also held in order to confirm and expand upon responses to the online consultation. The report documenting findings from these consultations titled *2021 Census of Population Consultation Results: What we heard from Canadians* was released April 8th 2019.

Appendix A

Regional discussions took place in the following locations:

Newfoundland and Labrador

Happy Valley-Goose Bay

New Brunswick

Fredericton

Nova Scotia

Halifax

Quebec

Val d'Or

Montréal

La Tuque

Québec City

Wendake

Sept-Îles

Ontario

Toronto

Sudbury

Thunder Bay

Kenora

Fort Frances

Red Lake

Dryden

Sioux Lookout

Ottawa

Sault Ste-Marie

Manitoba

Winnipeg

Saskatchewan

Regina

Saskatoon

Alberta

Calgary

Edmonton

Lethbridge

British Columbia

Vancouver

Victoria

Yukon

Whitehorse

Northwest Territories

Yellowknife

Inuvik

Nunavut

Iqaluit