



Employment and Social Development Canada Emploi et Développement social Canada

National Skilled Trades Advertising Campaign Youth Research – Executive Summary

Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada

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For more information on this executive summary, please contact Employment and Social Development Canada at: nc-por-rop-gd@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

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March 2021

This executive summary presents the results of focus groups conducted by Earnscliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Employment and Social Development Canada. The research was conducted in March 2021.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this executive summary to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) summarizing the results of online focus group research with youth to inform the development of the National Skilled Trades Campaign.

In Budget 2019, the Government of Canada committed to providing the Skills Canada program with an investment of \$10 million per year, starting in 2020-2021, to encourage more young people to consider training and working in the skilled trades.

As part of this commitment, a national campaign was proposed to promote skilled trades as a first-choice career for young people. The Campaign will work to change the perception around careers in the skilled trades, promoting their merits, including high demand, high wages, and continual professional development. In addition to encouraging more young people to consider training and working in the skilled trades, the Campaign will also address a potential labour shortage in the Red Seal Trades.

The Public Affairs and Stakeholder Relations Branch at Employment and Social Development Canada is planning a marketing and advertising campaign in support of this broader National Campaign. Prior to the Campaign launch, research was required to explore attitudes towards skilled trades, pre-test campaign language and explore audience media habits.

The objectives of the research were to explore attitudes and awareness of skilled trades as a career path, pre-test potential language for the campaign and explore audience media habits. The contract value for this project was \$49,291.11 including HST.

To meet these objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a comprehensive wave of qualitative research. The research included a series of six online focus groups which all took place on March 19, 2021. The groups were conducted with two target audiences: youth ages 16 to 18 and young adults ages 19 to 24. We conducted a focus group with each audience from each of the following regions: Eastern Canada (Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador), Quebec, and Western Canada (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia), for a total of two per region. The sessions with residents of Quebec were conducted in French; all other sessions were conducted in English. The sessions were approximately ninety minutes in length and participants received an honourarium of \$100.

It is important to note that qualitative research is a form of scientific, social, policy, and public opinion research. Focus group research is not designed to help a group reach a consensus or to make decisions, but rather to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions of a selected sample of participants on a defined topic. Because of the small numbers involved, the participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly representative in a statistical sense of the larger population from which they are drawn and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond their number. As such, results are directional only.

The key findings from the research are presented below.

Understanding and Impressions of Skilled Trades

- Unaided understanding of the term ‘skilled trades’/‘métiers spécialisés’ varied significantly by language.
 - English-speaking participants understood the term and noted that skilled trades refers to careers that require technical training/schooling, apprenticeship and hands-on learning.
 - French-speaking participants did not universally understand the term. For some, it implied careers that required extensive post-secondary (university) education, like a doctor or astronaut. That said, older participants did seem to have a broader understanding of the term.
- Unaided impressions of skilled trades leaned positive, though this should be considered within the context of the misunderstanding of the term in French.
 - Those who knew someone working in the skilled trades had mixed views. Those with positive impressions explained that their friends or family in skilled trades had a job they liked and earned a solid living. Those with neutral or negative impressions referenced re-certification, physically difficult work and job instability.
- When presented with a list of examples of careers in the skilled trades, English-speaking participants were not all that surprised although some examples such as hairstylist, cook, and horticulturalist did challenge their perceptions. French-speaking participants were definitely more surprised, especially youth (16 to 18) who explained that most of these professions were not in line with their interpretation of the term.
- Many participants displayed attaching at least an implicit, and some an explicit, stigma to working in skilled trades. Some seemed aware of their biases and attempted to adjust their comments accordingly, but they did describe skilled trades as a “fall-back”, “second chance”, and “basic” at different points throughout the groups.
- Interestingly, the majority of participants were not hard-pressed to identify a variety of advantages of working in the skilled trades. They included: good salary/well-paid; necessary/essential; lifelong career; in demand; self-employed; flexible (make your own schedule); not an office job; hands-on; highly-skilled; continuous learning; and, a rapid career (can start right out of high school and learn on the job).
- The disadvantages tended to revolve around: highly specialized (and not as easily transferable); seasonal (in some cases); vulnerable to economic fluctuations; requirement to upgrade/re-certify regularly; physical labour (that can be demanding on the body long-term); dangerous (in some cases); the potential to get bored of the work; traditionally male; and, not as respected.

Language Testing

Participants were presented with five statements that could be used to talk about the skilled trades and were asked to describe their interpretation of the different words and phrases used.

- **The skilled trades are a viable career choice:** Reactions were generally mixed (more neutral to negative). The overall tone was not terribly inspiring or motivational and for some was slightly pejorative. Those who liked this statement suggested the term viable implied that the skilled trades were a good choice and it was a new path that they had not considered before.
- **The skilled trades offer sustainable careers:** Overall reaction was slightly more favourable. Participants felt that it fit with their understanding of the skilled trades and with the advantages they perceived of a lifelong career. The overall tone was slightly more inspiring, and most felt that it would be particularly interesting for anyone who was looking for stability. Participants interpreted sustainable to mean security, longevity, lifelong, always needed, and, comfortable.
- **The skilled trades offer an exciting career:** Reactions were mixed. While the tone was more inspiring and motivational, some participants pointed out that “excitement” about any career choice was dependent on the person and their interests. Those who reacted positively felt that for those who want to pursue a career in the skilled trades, this statement implied you would have the opportunity to do something you like, and faster. However, many questioned whether everyone was necessarily interested in a skilled trade.
- **The skilled trades offer continuous learning opportunities.** Overall reactions were generally positive. Participants particularly liked the term “continuous learning”. It implied that those working in the skilled trades would have the opportunity to continue learning new techniques and approaches, to better themselves, become more efficient and more proficient. It also seemed to challenge the perception that those in the skilled trades are limited by their specialization/area of expertise.
- **The skilled trades are a first-choice career.** Most participants struggled with this statement. Many wanted to like it but it seemed to reinforce the biases some held about skilled trades. No one felt it was inappropriate to use “first-choice career” but some felt it was a bit misleading or tried too hard to dispel preconceptions about the skilled trades.

Communications and Marketing

- **Social media was clearly the predominant communication and information channel**, whether communicating with friends (and sometimes family) or getting news. The social media platforms that are used most often included:
 - For news/information: Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Clubhouse, Apple News App.
 - To communicate with their friends: Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, Tik Tok, Signal, WhatsApp.
 - To communicate with their parents: Facebook Messenger for some but mainly text or phone.

- Many suggested that social media would be the best way for them to receive information from the Government of Canada. They mentioned YouTube, for its captive audience potential, while others suggested various other social media tactics from promotion through SnapChat filters to linking Instagram posts to articles or sites with more information.
- Participants were receptive to a variety of different approaches to receive information about postsecondary education. Many said they would visit the institution’s website, and particularly among the young adults ages 19 to 24, would visit the institution’s open house.
 - The suggestion of workshops with experts in skilled trade fields was of interest to many participants as an interesting way to gain first-hand knowledge.
 - Reaction to the suggestion of receiving information from online influencers was mixed. Some were skeptical of influencers’ authenticity, though influencers who were viewed as experts in their field, like Mike Holmes, would be more trustworthy.

Research Firm:

Earnscliffe Strategy Group Inc. (Earnscliffe)
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I hereby certify as a Representative of Earnscliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. 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:

Date: March 29, 2021



Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe