

# ***Survey of Official Agents following the 44<sup>th</sup> General Election***

## **Executive summary**

### **Prepared for Elections Canada**

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Executive summary**

Prepared for Elections Canada by Environics Research Group.

Delivery Date: April 26, 2023

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by Environics Research Group from February 16-March 26, 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre *Sondage auprès des agents officiels à la suite de la 44e élection générale – Rapport final*.

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## Executive summary

### Background and objectives

Elections Canada (EC) commissioned Environics Research to conduct a survey of Official Agents (OAs) following the 44<sup>th</sup> federal General Election (GE) that was held on September 20, 2021.

An official agent is the person responsible for administering the candidate's campaign financial transactions and for reporting those transactions to Elections Canada as required by the *Canada Elections Act*.

The survey aimed to assess official agents' views and experiences of the election and with Elections Canada with regards to fulfilling the financial reporting obligations of the candidate campaign in order to identify areas for improvement. The survey was conducted as part of the evaluation and development of EC's programs and services.

### Methodology

Environics conducted an online survey with Official Agents from February 16 to March 26, 2023. From a list of 1,486 unduplicated emails of OAs provided by Elections Canada, a total of 548 Official Agents completed an online interview, for a participation rate of 37%. The participating respondents had the following regional distribution:

Breakdown/Location	Total	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	MB/SK	Alberta	BC/Terr
Number of completed interviews	548	54	101	217	42	55	79
% of completed interviews	100%	10%	18%	40%	8%	10%	14%
Number of OA unduplicated contacts	1,486	130	331	553	110	160	202
% of total OA contacts	100%	9%	22%	37%	7%	11%	14%

This was an attempted census of the Official Agent population, and as such, there is no margin of sampling error for this study.

### Contract value

The contract value was \$68,478.00 (HST included).

### Report

This report begins with an executive summary outlining key findings and conclusions, followed by a detailed analysis of the survey data. Provided under a separate cover is a detailed set of "banner tables" presenting the results for all questions for the total and identified subgroups of interest. These tables are referenced by the survey question in the detailed analysis.

In this report, quantitative results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Net results cited in the text may not exactly match individual results shown in the tables due to rounding.

**Note on timing:** Although official agents are required to file campaign returns four months after election day, many campaigns requested extensions to submit the return, and some official agents were still completing their activities at the start of the survey. Nonetheless, those official agents who filed the campaign return within the prescribed timeframes may have experienced an 18-month gap between when they filed and the start of the survey, which could contribute to recall issues. As well, a few activities included in the survey (opening a campaign account, training materials and use of other services available during the campaign) occurred over 20 months prior and thus recall may be an issue for some.

**Use of research:** The information gained through this public opinion research will assist in the evaluation of EC's administration of the political financing regime. It will also assist in identifying areas where EC's various products and services may be improved.

## Key findings

### A. Information about Official Agents

- Six in ten (59%) OAs in the survey were first time agents, somewhat fewer than in the 43<sup>rd</sup> GE (68%).
- Almost all OAs (94%) supported a single candidate in the 44<sup>th</sup> GE.

### B. Getting the campaign underway

- Eight in ten OAs (80%) say the obligation to open a campaign account was very clear.
- The most difficult aspects of opening a campaign account were dealing with the bank and sorting out the required documentation.

### C. Completing and submitting the electoral campaign return

- Virtually all OAs (99%) were the official agent at the time the campaign return was submitted.
- About three-quarters (73%) submitted the electoral campaign return via the Political Entity Service Centre (PESC).
- Just over four in ten (44%) attended training regarding the electoral return, which is comparable to the percentage of OAs in the 43<sup>rd</sup> GE survey. Lack of awareness about the training and the timing not being convenient are the top reasons for not attending the training, with a higher percentage among first time OAs.

- Just under six in ten (55%) agree to some extent the campaign return was easy to complete, and six in ten (61%) say it was easy to submit.
- The most difficult aspects of dealing with the campaign return are the complexity of the form itself and the lack of clarity in the instructions for completing and submitting the form.

#### **D. Electronic Financial Return (EFR)**

- Just under nine in ten OAs (88%) used the EFR software to prepare the campaign return.
- Official agents who used the EFR software for their campaign return generally agree that the EFR software is accessible (77%), that the instructions on how to find the EFR software were clear (77%), and that it was easier to use the EFR software to file than the manual process (72%).
- Among the few who did not use the EFR software, this was mostly because the software could not be installed on their computer (30%), they preferred to prepare it manually (30%), or because they received help from a third party (accounting firm/auditor) to prepare the campaign return (21%).

#### **E. Political Entities Service Center (PESC)**

- Three-quarters (75%) of OAs used the PESC portal to upload and submit the candidate campaign return.
- Among the 25% of OAs who did not use the PESC, the top reasons for not using it are a preference for other ways to submit the campaign return (34%) and not being able to figure out how to use the portal to submit documents (22%).
- Seven in ten (70%) OAs who used the PESC portal report it was at least somewhat easy to use, with under one in five (17%) saying it was very easy.
- Under half (42%) of PESC portal users say they required support. Among these, over half (53%) needed help uploading documents, while just under three in ten (28%) needed assistance to apply digital consent.
- Seven in ten (70%) who needed assistance with PESC say it was at least somewhat easy to get the help they needed.

#### **F. Elections Canada products and services**

- Out of eight products and services that EC makes available to OAs, OAs most often reported using the Political Financing Handbook (87%), having correspondence with Elections Canada (73%) and the 1-800 number for the Political Entities Support Network (51%).
- The Political Financing Handbook, 1-800 number and having correspondence with EC are also the resources deemed helpful by the highest proportions of their users. The videos are

considered the least helpful resources, but still, at least half of their users say they were helpful.

- The main difficulties OAs had with finding or using Political Financing products and services available on the Elections Canada website were navigating the Elections Canada website (38%) and using the EFR software or PESC portal (31%). Other OAs feel that the products are not easy to find on the website (26%) and that the training on how to deal with the return could use improvement (24%).
- Among OAs who used the Political Entities Support Network, nine in ten agree to at least some extent with various positive statements about their experience. Most notably, seven in ten strongly agree that the EC employee they dealt with was courteous (72%) and that they were able to converse in their official language (71%).
- Similarly, among OAs who corresponded with EC by mail or email, nine in ten agree to some extent with various other positive statements about their contact with EC. Most notably, majorities strongly agree that the response they received by mail or email was courteous (57%) and that it was informative (50%).
- Around one-quarter of OAs for the 44<sup>th</sup> GE (23%) say they experienced difficulties with accessibility when using or interacting with EC products or services, although they appear to be interpreting “accessibility” broadly, as they refer to problems uploading files or difficulties with locating needed materials or logging in.
- As in the 43<sup>rd</sup> GE survey, the top product and service needs identified continue to be more flexible training options, software updates to make it function better and/or be compatible with all operating systems, and a simplified reporting process/elimination of duplication.

#### **G. Elections Canada audit**

- About six in ten (62%) OAs were contacted by EC after filing the campaign return, comparable with the 43<sup>rd</sup> GE, with almost all (96%) receiving an email.
- At least three-quarters of those contacted by EC agree to some extent with positive statements about their interactions with EC after their campaign return was submitted. OAs most often agreed that the EC employee was courteous (96%), and least often agreed that they gave clear information about required next steps (76%).

#### **H. Closing of the campaign and other comments**

- As was the case in the survey after the 43<sup>rd</sup> GE, the easiest aspects of closing the campaign are closing the bank account and disposing of any surplus.
- OAs suggested a number of improvements for EC to consider: these included improvements to the EFR software and PESC; simplifying the overall process, especially for smaller

campaigns; and recognition that OAs are volunteers, for example, by allowing more flexibility with deadlines, longer turnaround times to fulfill requests, etc.

### **Political neutrality statement and contact information**

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the 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.

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