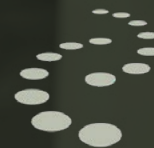


2023-24
ANNUAL REPORT
TO GOVERNMENTS

RESILIENCE & RENEWAL



Canadian
Intergovernmental
Conference
Secretariat

Secrétariat
des conférences
intergouvernementales
canadiennes

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Secretary's Message

I am pleased to present the 2023–24 Annual Report for the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS). Coming from a request for a supplementary budget, in the last year, our priority as an agency was to understand the reasons and causes for the negative budgetary variance and what steps could be taken to avoid a recurrence of this situation and build a resilient agency. We considered and worked with two themes, how to become resilient in an environment of tightening fiscal provisions, and how to renew the agency by ensuring that we incorporate and support emerging competitive conference models. We examined the way we do our work, including the effectiveness of our financial planning and human resources management systems and the extent to which we understand and manage external factors, including the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors that impact our results.

By asking tough questions of ourselves and consulting with Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments, we launched an independent program evaluation and the first conference planning exercise to guide us in building a pragmatic road map to institutional renewal. We also took baby steps, to find out future conferences and how we might plan for these. As at the date of writing this report, early findings indicate a need to implement a few changes to CICS business model, encourage virtual conferences, renew external communications, and integrate CICS more into government planning processes even as we remain neutral. On the plus side, early feedback indicates that CICS is a highly performing agency, which can do more if renewed proactively and consciously.

In this report, we will share remarkable results achieved, which are aligned with emerging findings of the program evaluation exercise. At the end of the report, we will share how we intend to finalise ongoing program evaluation and conference planning forward and most importantly, do so in a manner that engages all our stakeholders.

It is encouraging that CICS performance has been exceptional, balancing as we did operations and commencement of a major reorganisation initiative. CICS was able to reduce unserved conferences to 20 for the entire year as compared to 60 for the previous year and achieve a customer satisfaction rate of 95%. CICS also successfully onboarded and trained a significant number of new employees, creating a diverse and inclusive workforce capable of fulfilling the organization's full mandate.



Ruth Onyancha

Secretary

We have no doubt that in the coming year, our stakeholders will remain supportive, and together we will deliver a conference secretariat that is fully equipped to serve in the more innovative virtual and hybrid conference environment.

Who we are and what we offer

About

The Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS) is an impartial agency whose mandate is to provide administrative support and planning services for federal-provincial-territorial and provincial-territorial conferences of First Ministers, Ministers and Deputy Ministers, throughout Canada.

Conferencing

Our primary objective is to relieve client governments and departments of the numerous technical and administrative tasks associated with planning and conducting multilateral conferences, thereby enabling participants to concentrate on substantive intergovernmental policy issues.

The Secretariat's [services](#) are available to federal, provincial and territorial government departments that are called upon to organize and chair such meetings.

Being truly intergovernmental in nature, the agency is funded by the federal and provincial governments, and its staff is comprised of federal, provincial and territorial public servants.

Who we serve

- + First Ministers/Premiers
- + Ministers
- + Deputy Ministers

Most senior-level intergovernmental conferences are supported by our organization. A complete list of our client sectors is available in this report, under [Sectors Served](#).



Archiving

Any and all documents presented to participants at conferences served by CICS are carefully safeguarded and archived. This means agendas, list of delegates, 3 years' worth of conference recordings, presentations, reports, communiqués, summary of decisions, verbatims, etc. Even the last-minute documents that were table dropped on conference site are kept and treated according to their security classification. So, whether you're a current client needing access to that conference recording to draft minutes for the meeting, a new co-chair needing to see what has been done in the past, a conference delegate who has attended the meeting but no longer has access to an important presentation or a legislative library looking to fill in the gaps in their collection, the team responsible for the CICS archive can help. A simple email to info@scics.ca is all it takes. Should any doubt exist over whether access can be given, the team will liaise with the responsible authorities. Note that, while the public may also have access to documents emanating from the CICS collection, these are limited to public documents, most of which are already available on the CICS website.

Highlights

Key Accomplishments

Conference Services

- + Engaged provinces and territories to develop its Conference Policy, aiming for consistent service excellence and realistic expectations.
- + Enhanced event management by investing in staff training and leveraging their skills and experience for innovative solutions.
- + Explored new methods for secure and efficient archive access to better manage conference documentation.
- + Upgraded IT infrastructure and systems to enhance videoconferencing capabilities and address accessibility in its Conference Management System (CMS).

Internal Services

- + CICS continued to enhance internal controls over travel, acquisition cards, and procurement functions, while also evaluating its costing structure and gathering conference data to inform future budget proposals and align resources for upcoming multi-year conferences.
- + Focused on assessing long-term sustainability and developing a new governance structure for organizational success and sustainability.
- + Focused on innovative strategies to address barriers identified in the 2023–25 Accessibility Plan.



Innovations

- + Revamped our news release process to improve speed and HTML accessibility, driven by evidence, user feedback, performance metrics, and accessibility audits.
- + Upgraded IT infrastructure by replacing servers, laptops, and enhancing cloud security which led to improved performance, increased mobility, and strengthened security.

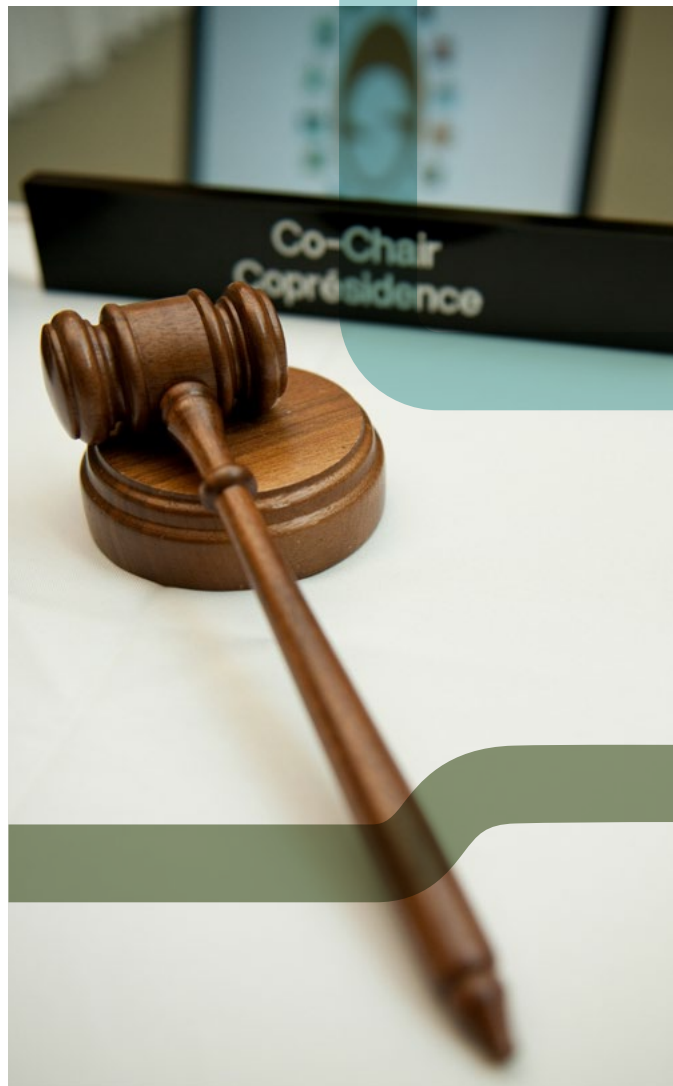
Overview

The fiscal year of 2023-24 was significant in many ways for the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS), with notable changes in conference activity. One of the key highlights was a 56% increase in Minister-level meetings and a remarkable 119% increase in Provincial-Territorial conferences compared to 2022-23. The conference formats also saw a near-perfect split between videoconferences and hybrid conferences, with final results of 49.2% and 50.8%, respectively. Interestingly, for the first time in the Secretariat's history, hybrid conferences almost equaled videoconferences in number, reflecting a slight preference for the hybrid approach. While CICS faced certain resource challenges, the organization demonstrated resilience and renewal, ultimately overcoming these difficulties and continuing to support intergovernmental collaboration successfully, as evidenced by 93% and 95% satisfaction rates of conference participants and organizers, respectively.

Background, Recovery, and Renewal

In 2022, CICS faced numerous challenges as the organization adapted to the evolving landscape shaped by the post-pandemic shift to hybrid conferences. The increased complexity and demand for resources associated with these events highlighted a critical insufficiency in CICS' existing infrastructure, ultimately leading to a necessity to decline more conference requests than ever before. The urgency of addressing these resource gaps was compounded by an aging infrastructure that required significant investments, which financial constraints made unfeasible at the time. In response to these challenges, CICS recognized the need for a swift improvement in data tracking and costing tools to provide concrete evidence supporting the necessity for additional resources.

Leadership changes introduced a fresh strategic direction, marked by efforts to strengthen stakeholder relationships and evaluate the organization holistically. As a result, CICS undertook extensive assessments of its resource allocation, governance structure, funding model, and organizational framework. These evaluations identified gaps and opportunities for enhanced efficiency. In light of these findings, CICS embarked on multiple innovative projects aiming for long-term sustainability, employing creative implementation strategies under resource constraints. Key initiatives included conducting an extensive program evaluation, developing a renewed communications process, bolstering IT services, and enforcing enhanced internal controls. A new governance structure and a comprehensive conference policy were also necessary to align with the organization's long-term service model viability.



Resilience

Reflecting on the previous year, CICS recognized that resilience was essential to navigate the complexities caused by COVID-19, rising operational costs, inflation, funding gaps, and staff turnover. This realization prompted immediate actions, including the successful request of a temporary supplemental budget to support essential operations. To support institutional resilience, CICS began to build a robust 36-month conference pipeline by engaging stakeholders, determining resource needs, and appropriately planning resource allocations.

Additionally, CICS focused on enhancing staff training and building a capable workforce, ensuring that the organization maintained its role as a hub for innovative event management solutions. Efforts in understanding and refining the agency's costing structure became paramount for future financial planning. CICS also prioritized replacing outdated infrastructure and completing critical IT system upgrades to accommodate both emerging virtual models and established hybrid formats. A key decision was made to evaluate the CICS program after 50 years of operation, aiming to lay a foundation for long-term operational sustainability and excellence.

Institutional Renewal: Steps Towards Operational Excellence and Sustainability

In pursuit of institutional renewal, CICS initiated strategic engagements with provinces and territories through their intergovernmental offices to solicit feedback and ideas. This engagement laid the groundwork for a new Conference Policy, designed to establish realistic expectations that the organization can consistently meet while ensuring service excellence. Another focal point was to enhance our understanding of conference cost components in the post-COVID era, leading to the development of new costing models.

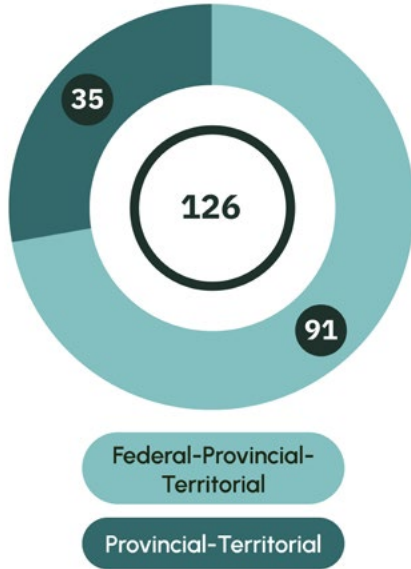
CICS also aimed to build a stronger agency capable of supporting conferencing needs for the next two years. This included initiating a review of the Provincial-Territorial framework, beginning a program evaluation process to inform a new governance structure, and examining how we use our archives, which included the study of innovative ways to introduce an interactive archival system to make intergovernmental conference documentation more accessible. A comprehensive review of existing policies, strategy, budget, and corporate priorities was conducted, with particular emphasis on analyzing the costing structure and collecting relevant data to guide future initiatives.



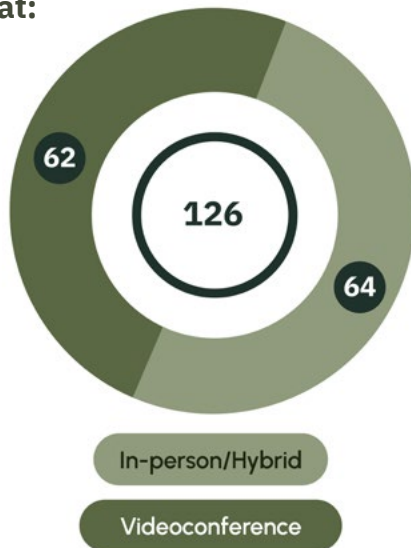
Overview of intergovernmental conference activity in 2023-24:

126 conferences

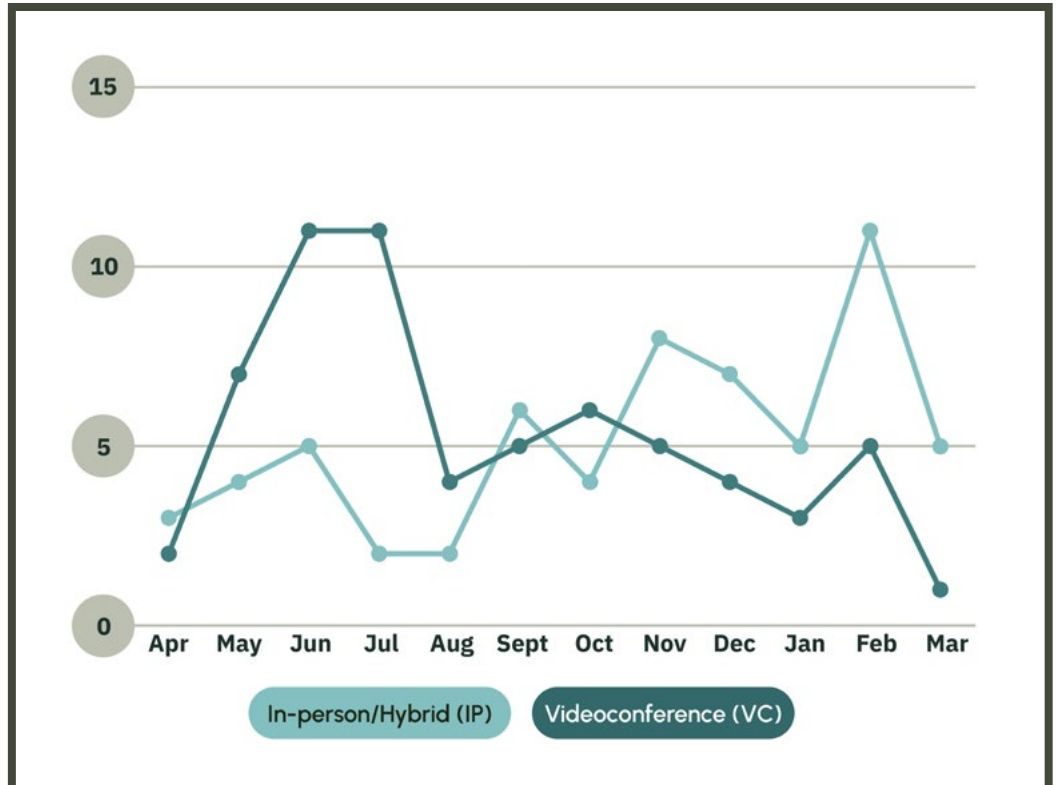
By Type:



By Format:



Conferences by Month

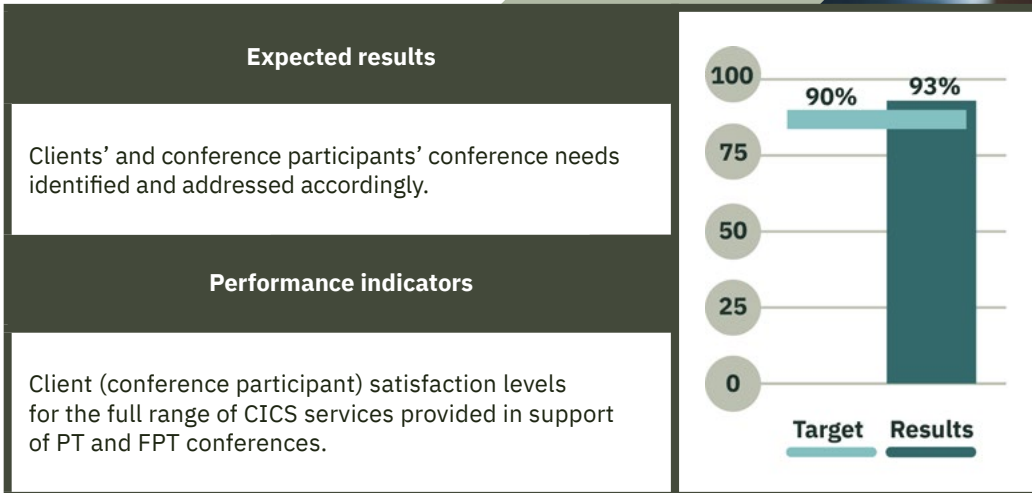
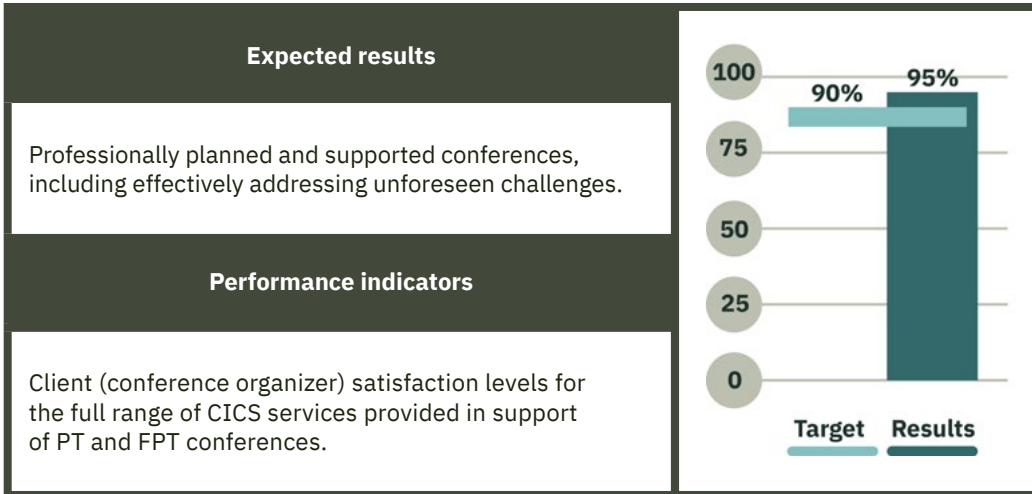


	Total	IP	VC
April	5	2	3
May	11	7	4
June	16	11	5
July	13	11	2
August	6	4	2
September	11	5	6

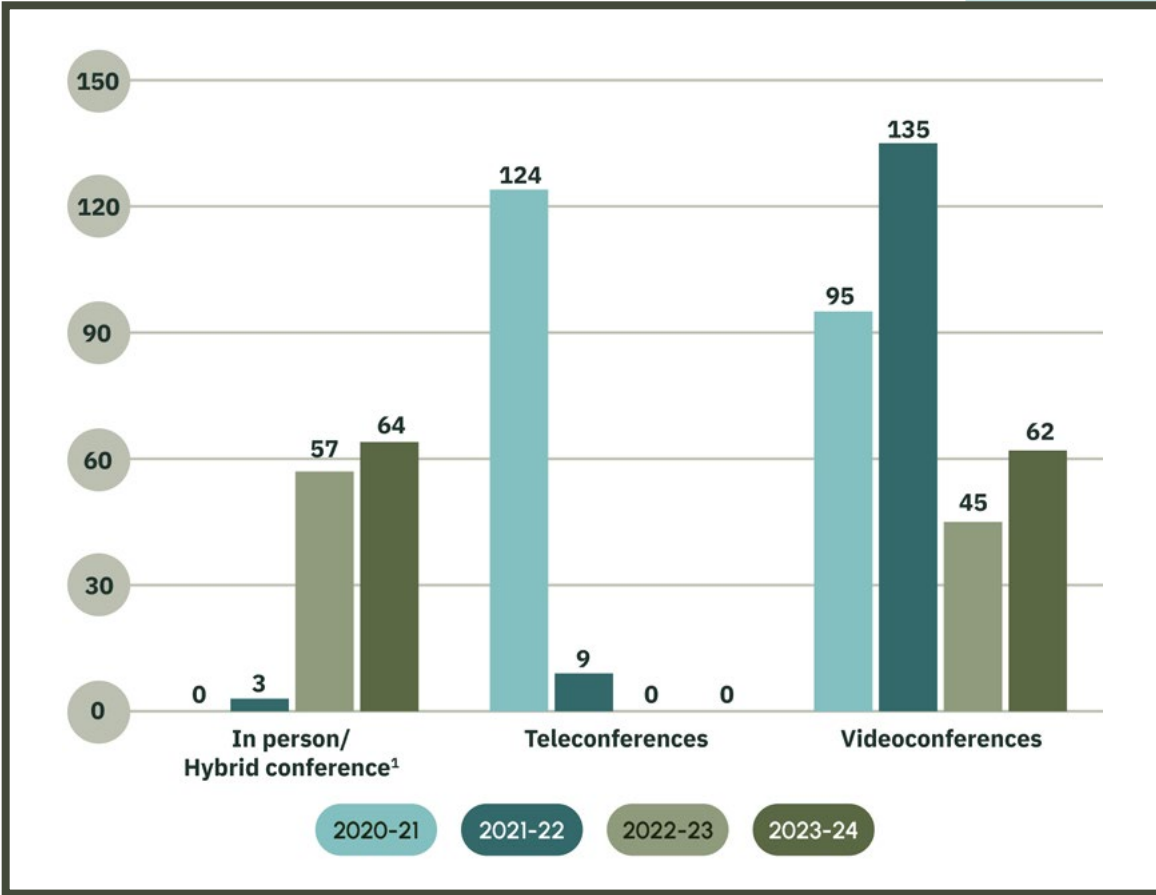
	Total	IP	VC
October	10	6	4
November	13	5	8
December	11	4	7
January	8	3	5
February	16	5	11
March	6	1	5

Client Satisfaction

Two surveys are used to assess client satisfaction, one being an annual sampling of conference organizers and the other one focusing on delegates’ perspective. Both provide valuable and very timely feedback on all aspects of the administrative and technical support CICS provides. In turn, this insight informs the Secretariat’s decisions about the alignment of its services and approaches with clients’ evolving needs and priorities. Both surveys conducted in 2023-24 showed a very high client satisfaction rate:



Conferences by Format

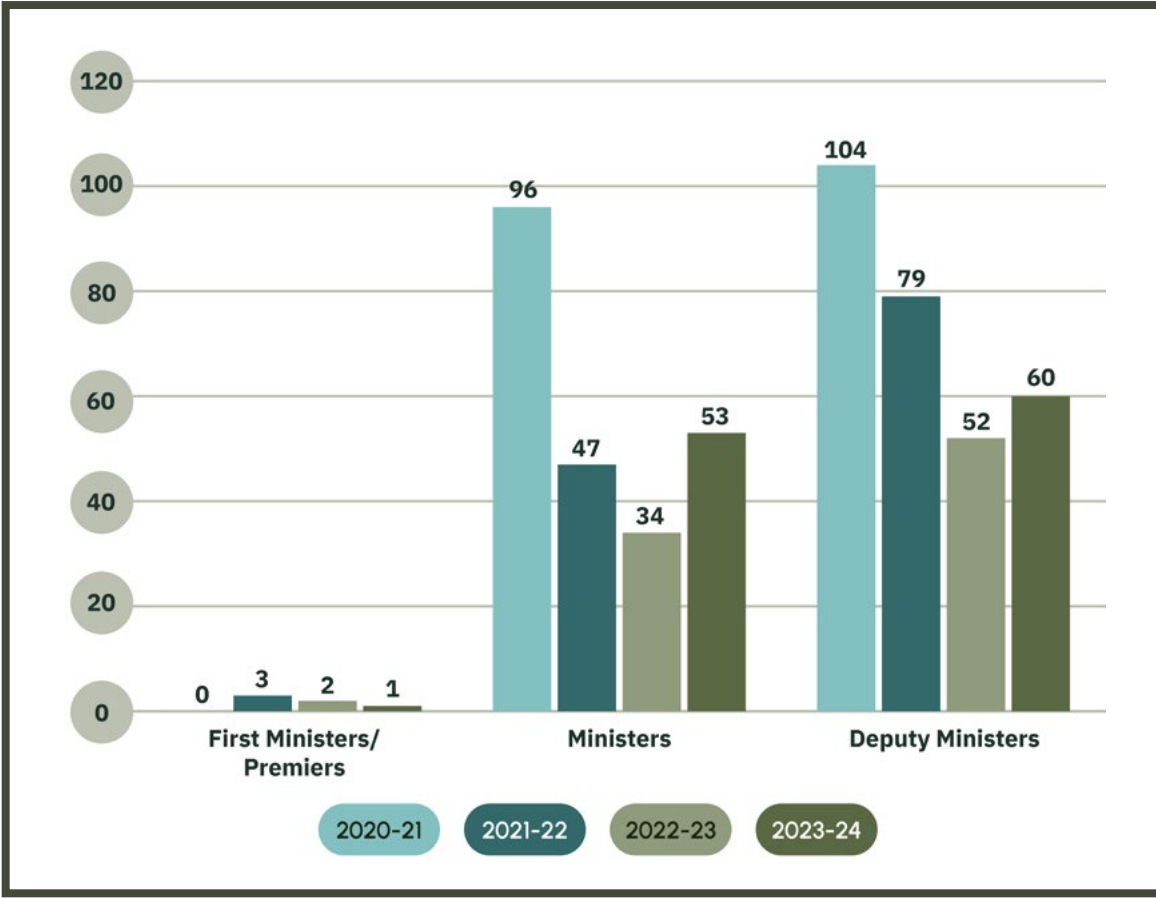


In 2023-24, the preference for in-person and hybrid conferences continued to rise, with 64 such events recorded, representing a 12% increase from 57 in the previous year. This shift reflects a strong return to traditional and mixed formats as clients increasingly favor these over fully virtual options.

Meanwhile, teleconferences remained at zero for the second consecutive year, solidifying the decline of this format. Videoconferences saw a 38% resurgence, increasing to 62 from 45 in 2022-23, indicating that while in-person meetings are on the rise, virtual platforms still play a significant role in the conferencing landscape.

1. Until 2021-22, these meetings were in-person only. However, in 2022-23 and beyond, a virtual component is now included at almost all in-person conferences, making them a hybrid of the two formats (videoconference and in-person).

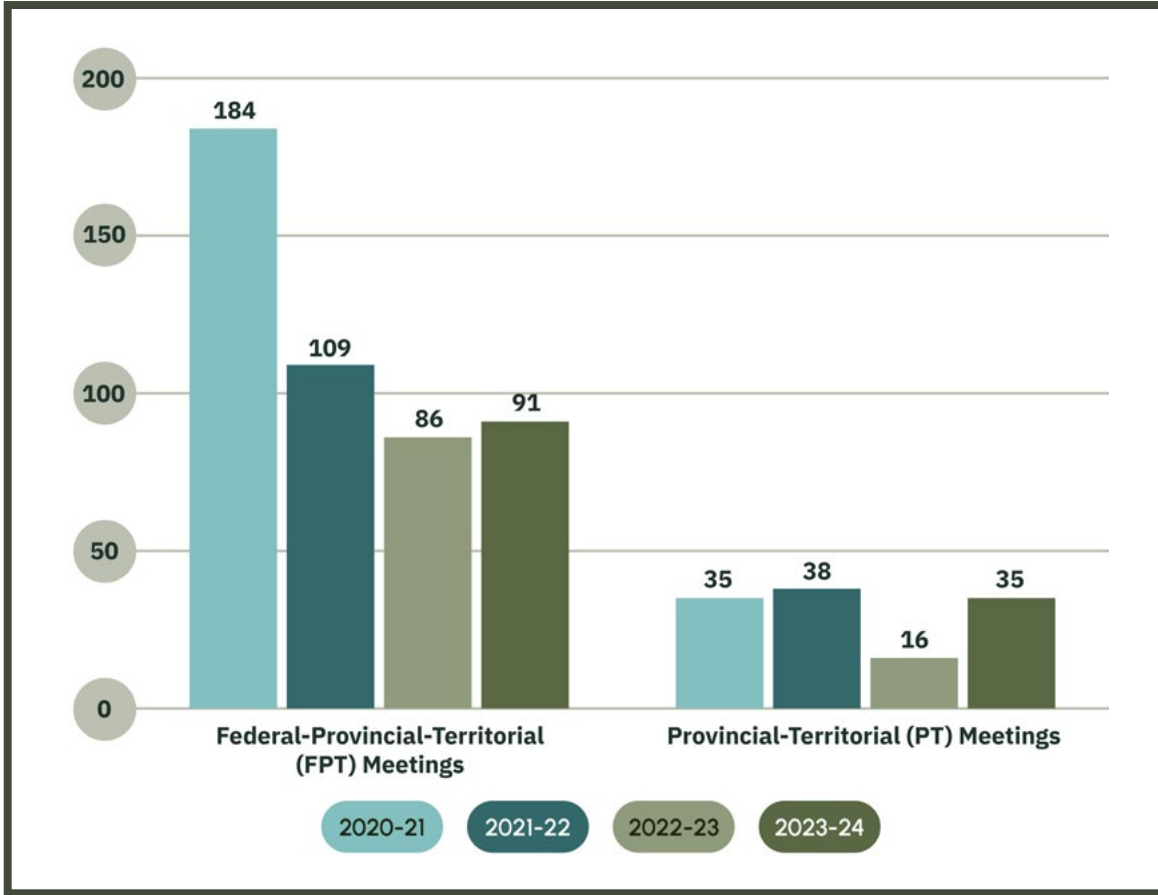
Conferences by Level²



In 2023-24, CICS observed a slight decrease in First Minister/Premier level meetings, down to just 1 from 2 in the previous year. Despite this decline, Minister level meetings saw a significant increase of 56%, rising to 53 compared to 34 in 2022-23. This resurgence brings the number of ministerial meetings closer to levels seen prior to the pandemic. Deputy Minister level meetings also experienced a notable recovery, increasing by 15% to 60, following the downward trend of the previous two years. These changes reflect the organization’s adjustment to new operational realities and resource availability. As the organization adapts to post-pandemic conditions, additional resources have enabled us to support an increased volume of meetings, allowing us to accommodate a growing number of conferences despite related constraints.

2. Figures do not include other levels of conferences.

Conferences by Type



CICS facilitated a total of 91 FPT meetings and 35 PT meetings in the 2023-24 fiscal year, compared to 86 FPT and 16 PT meetings in 2022-23. This represents a 5.8% increase in FPT meetings and a significant 119% increase in PT meetings. The heightened meeting frequency during the COVID-19 pandemic was necessary to address the global crisis and its effects. As the situation stabilizes, the number of FPT meetings is returning to pre-pandemic levels. The lower PT meeting numbers in 2022-23 were largely due to resource constraints within the organization. However, with a temporary budget increase, the organization was able to sufficiently staff and allocate resources in 2023-24, enabling it to meet the demand for requested meetings.

Sectors Served

Of the 36 sectors of intergovernmental activity served in 2023-24, the three that convened most often were Education, Justice and Public Safety, and Status of Women. Together, these sectors represented 23% of all meetings served by CICS.

Sector or Table	# of conferences
Agriculture	2
Atlantic Growth Strategy	1
CAALL (Canadian Association of Administrator of Labour Legislation)	1
Citizenship and Immigration	5
Construction Research	1
Early Learning and Childcare	4
Education	10
Emergency Preparedness	4
Environment	5
Finance	2
Fisheries	1
Forests	1
Francophonie	3
Governor General	1
Health	5
Heritage	4
Housing	8
Human Resources and Social Services	6

Sector or Table	# of conferences
Indigenous Affairs	1
Industry	1
Infrastructure	2
Justice and Public Safety	10
Labour Market	7
Natural Resources	7
NEGECP (New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers)	1
Northern Development	2
Presiding Officers	1
Public Works and Government Administration	5
Rural Economic Development	1
Seamless Canada	1
Seniors	1
Service Delivery Collaboration	1
Sports and Recreation	1
Status of Women	9
Tourism	5
Transport	6

What the future holds

Looking forward in the coming year, CICS will focus on four priority areas in addition to delivering an exemplary conference support service. The first priority will be to work with our stakeholders to review the findings of the program evaluation report; we will act on the findings of the CICS program evaluation report and build a suite of priority action plans to be implemented in the next three years. As of the date of writing this report, emerging results indicate a need to implement a few changes to CICS' business model, financial planning processes, internal operating policies, and external communications approaches to move towards operational excellence. These findings also indicate that changes will need to be made in consultation with clients governments. More importantly, findings so far indicate a highly performing agency, which requires support to transition to emerging conference models. Over the next 36 months, we will achieve institutional transformation and deliver a conference secretariat that provides an integrated service to all stakeholders, as defined and sustainably funded by our stakeholders.

Secondly, we will implement a practical system of annual conference governance, which focuses on planning. This approach will ensure that we reach as many clients as possible, through, among other approaches, using an innovative structure incorporating surge capacity and driving virtual conference models. In this way, we will progressively move towards leaving fewer and fewer conferences on the table.

Thirdly, discussions with clients, customer service surveys and feedback from conference planners indicates a strong need and appetite for more visible high-level communications, real-time problem solving and support, which encourages system ownership and real-time resolution of emerging issues and advisory services around conference management. During the year, we will build out an integrated conference marketing, planning, governance, evaluation and communications model. CICS' focus will progressively shift to implementing resilient frameworks and strategic initiatives, with special emphasis on stakeholder engagement to strengthen relationships. Senior management will continue to participate in in-person conferences to better understand client needs and identify areas where resources can be optimized. Additionally, CICS remains committed to enhancing accessibility in alignment with government objectives by using client surveys to gather feedback on conference accessibility and upgrading its internal Conference Management System to address barriers faced by individuals with disabilities.

Lastly, CICS plans to revitalize the Provincial-Territorial (PT) Program, which allows provincial and territorial government employees to work within the Secretariat on a temporary basis. This program offers career development opportunities, strengthens CICS' neutral and balanced approach, and enhances its capacity to support intergovernmental conferences. The PT program's structure will be reviewed to address gaps and implement a new model that better aligns with organizational needs.

Financials

Provincial Contributions

The Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS) is financed by both the Government of Canada through parliamentary appropriations and by the provinces through contributions under a shared cost agreement. Table 1 shows the provinces' shares for the 2023-24 budget, as well as the actual amounts received.

Distribution of Provincial Contribution towards CICS' 2023-24 Budget (\$ Thousands)

Table 1. Distribution of provincial contributions towards CICS' 2023-24 budget (\$ thousands)

Province	% Based on 2021 Population Census	Distribution of Provincial Share of CICS' 2023-24 Budget	2023-24 Requested Contribution	2023-24 Actual Contribution Received
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.4%	31.6	31.6	31.6
Nova Scotia	2.6%	58.8	58.8	58.8
New Brunswick	2.1%	47.5	47.5	47.5
Prince Edward Island	0.4%	9.0	9.0	9.0
Quebec	23.1%	522.2	522.2	131.3
Ontario	38.6%	872.6	872.6	265.0
Manitoba	3.6%	79.1	79.1	79.1
Saskatchewan	3.1%	70.1	70.1	23.0
Alberta	11.6%	262.2	262.2	262.2
British Columbia	13.6%	307.4	307.4	95.0
Total	100%	2,260.6	2,260.6	1,002.5

Financial Results

A summary of CICS’s financial results are presented in Table 2. The total funding is composed of the Main Estimates budget and adjustments. The Main Estimates are the voted appropriations at the beginning of the fiscal year, which started on April 1, 2023. The increase in CICS’ authorities in 2023-24 is primarily due to \$1.7 million in temporary additional funding allocated in Budget 2023. This three-year funding will extend through to 2025–26.

Table 2. 2023-24 Financial Results (\$ thousands)

CICS Budget	2023-24	2022-23
Main Estimates	6,091.1	6,056.6
Supplementary Estimates	1,602.8	0
Adjustments & Transfers	493.3	359.5
Total Funding	8,187.2	6,416.2
CICS Expenditures	2023-24	2022-23
Salaries & Wages	3,871.5	3,035.7
Employee Benefit Plans	576.0	429.1
Sub-total—Personnel Costs	4,447.5	3,464.8
Other Operating Costs	3,475.1	2,835.0
Capital Costs	0	0
Sub-total—Other Operating & Capital Costs	3,475.1	2,835.0
Total Expenditures	7,922.6	6,299.8
Lapsed (over expended)	264.6	116.5

The total expenditure for 2023-24 increased significantly compared with the previous year, mainly attributable to the increased in salaries & wages following the staffing of new positions and directly attributable to the increased for in-person conferences and hybrid meetings. The increase in these two types of conference has required additional human and technical resources, resulting in higher expenses as well as the general cost of certain acquisitions such as furniture, equipment and machinery. The variance between the total expenditures of 2023-24 and 2022-23 amounts to approximately \$1.6 million, marking a substantial increase of 26%.

It is important to note that CICS does not convene intergovernmental meetings. It is called upon to respond to decisions taken by governments to meet on key national or specific issues. Decisions concerning the location and format of such meetings, their number in a given fiscal year, their timing and duration, are all factors beyond the control of the Secretariat. The level of CICS expenditures for each fiscal year is, however, directly affected by these factors. CICS does exercise due care and probity in the expenditure of its funds to meet its mandate, planning for variances in conference volume, support level, and format to ensure continued operation within its available budget.

As illustrated in this report, fiscal year 2023-24 has seen a significant influx of requests for in person conferences and videoconferences. CICS provided its services to 126 senior-level intergovernmental conferences versus 102 in 2022-23, 64 in-person/hybrids versus 57, and 62 videoconferences versus 45. The in-person hybrid conferences are more expensive than videoconferences and teleconferences due to travel, overtime, and audio-visual requirements.

Requesting CICS' services

CICS services are available to any federal, provincial or territorial government department that organizes an intergovernmental meeting of First Ministers, Ministers or Deputy Ministers.

For in-person meetings, the host government is responsible for arrangements and the costs of conference rooms and hospitality; CICS covers the cost of most other conference services. For virtual meetings, most costs are assumed by CICS.

To make your conference as successful as possible, we encourage you to contact us as soon as you start planning it. We recommend a lead time of at least 8-12 weeks for in-person/hybrid meetings, and 4-6 weeks for videoconferences.

We look forward to working with you on your next event!

- + Complete and submit our [online request form](#); or
- + Contact our Director of Conference Services at 613-222-6411/613-995-4328 or services@scics.ca.

