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# Regional Discussion Report: Review of First Nations, Métis and Inuit questions for the 2026 Census of Population

by Marianne Snider and Julia Sterparn

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## Introduction

From November 2022 to March 2023, Statistics Canada undertook a series of discussions to obtain feedback on the questions used to produce data for First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations. These discussions, held virtually and in person, brought together members of Indigenous communities from across the country, representing individual data users, as well as local, provincial, territorial and national Indigenous organizations. Represented organizations included friendship centres; health organizations; and individual First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

In facilitated discussions, contributors were asked to share their thoughts and opinions on five census questions used to identify First Nations people, Métis and Inuit, as well as provide feedback on specific terminology used in the census.

The goal of this report is to summarize the feedback received in the regional discussions. The report will outline the process and format of the discussions and will recap major discussion topics.

## Background

Statistics Canada regularly reviews questions used on the census and other surveys. Such reviews are conducted 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. To this end, the Centre for Indigenous Statistics and Partnerships (CISP) set out to learn how participants understood and felt about the existing questions and terminology used in the census and gather opinions on how to improve them.

## Census questions

The census is the primary source of demographic data in Canada. Most census data are collected using the census short-form or long-form questionnaires. More information about the topics collected in the census and the various questionnaires can be found in Chapter 5 of the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#).

## Overview of the regional discussion process

Regional discussions were coordinated and organized by Statistics Canada's Centre for Indigenous Statistics and Partnerships (CISP). The CISP Census Team and the Indigenous Liaison Advisor (ILA) program facilitated and conducted a series of group discussions.

The ILA program is a national program, with 11 advisors located across Canada. Their role is to serve as a bridge between Statistics Canada and First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, as well as Indigenous organizations, and to build partnerships with Indigenous organizations, municipalities, and provincial or territorial governments. These partnerships are not only important to increase awareness of and facilitate access to Statistics Canada's data products and services, but also essential to help Statistics Canada respond to the data needs of Indigenous Peoples.

The ILAs maintain an electronic network of roughly 6,000 people. This e-network has been developed over many years. Contacts include Chiefs and Council members, band managers, funding services officers, community navigators, economic development advisors, First Nations 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 ILAs informed potential contributors about the discussions and identified where sessions would be taking place to gauge interest.

In the discussions, feedback was solicited regarding the current census questions from the 2021 Census of Population to produce data about First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations.

## What we heard

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

### 1 Indigenous group question

Question 24 on the long-form questionnaire is known as the Indigenous group question. It is used to determine the number of people who report being First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada. The question allows respondents to select one or more of the Indigenous groups to which they belong.

**24** Is this person First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?

**Note: First Nations (North American Indian) includes Status and Non-Status Indians.**

If “Yes”, mark “” the circle(s) that best describe(s) this person now.

No, not First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)

Continue with the next question

**OR**

Yes, First Nations (North American Indian)

Yes, Métis

Yes, Inuk (Inuit)

**Go to question 26**

### General impressions of the Indigenous group question

The Indigenous group question received consistent feedback across all discussions. The general sentiment from participants was that the question was well understood. The distinctions of the three major Indigenous groups were appropriate, and most participants understood the intent of the question for dissemination purposes.

### Indigenous group question: Wording and terminology

Overwhelmingly, feedback received for this question focused on the use of the term “North American Indian.” It was generally agreed that the term should be removed from the question as it could evoke negative sentiments from Indigenous groups. On a more practical level, most participants felt that the term did not add anything to the description of the First Nations category and, therefore, could be removed without affecting the understanding of the question. A few participants advocated keeping the current terminology. For some communities who have cross-border affiliations, the use of the term “Indian” is appropriate. It was also felt that removing the term “North American Indian” would open a possibility for confusion for older generations.

The categories of Métis and Inuk (Inuit) received limited commentary as participants were generally in agreement with the response options.

## 2 Registered or Treaty Indian status question

Question 26 asks respondents to identify whether they are a Status (Registered or Treaty) Indian as defined by the *Indian Act* of Canada. Statistics Canada asks this question to obtain an estimate of the number of people who report being Registered or Treaty Indians. The data from this question are also used to derive the total Indigenous population count. That is, these data are used in conjunction with answers from the questions on Indigenous group and membership in a First Nation or Indian Band to determine the Indigenous identity population from the census.

<b>26</b> Is this person a Status Indian (Registered or Treaty Indian as defined by the <i>Indian Act</i> of Canada)?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes, Status Indian (Registered or Treaty)
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### General impressions of the Registered or Treaty Indian status question

The Registered or Treaty Indian status question was well understood in all regional discussions. The feedback was generally consistent and positive. Most groups felt comfortable with the question and understood the language used. Although the term “Indian” is used in this question, it was discussed that in this context it is appropriate and normalized for the population.

### Registered or Treaty Indian status question: Wording and terminology

Some discussion surrounded the possibility of reorganizing the question wording to include people who do not yet have Status but are eligible for it. Other suggestions were to create additional criteria that would include individuals who are “eligible to be registered under the *Indian Act*.” The addition of a secondary reporting category for individuals who are in the process of registering on Census Day was suggested. It was felt that this information could better support Indigenous communities in the intercensal years.

The term “Status Indian” was understood by most participants to be a legal term, and they were accustomed to seeing it from government sources. Some participants had no objections to the terminology used in the question; however, others considered it outdated language that should be updated. A few participants suggested adding a note either on the question or at the beginning of the questionnaire explaining its use.

## 3 Question on membership in a First Nation or Indian band

Question 27 asks respondents to identify whether they are a member of a First Nation or Indian band and, if so, to specify the name of the First Nation or Indian band. The data from this question are used to provide an estimate of the number of people who report being members of a First Nation or an Indian band in Canada. The data are also used to derive the total Indigenous population count for the census.

<p><b>27</b> Is this person a member of a First Nation or Indian band?</p> <p>If “Yes”, which First Nation or Indian band?</p> <p>For example, Soowahlie Indian Band, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Atikamekw of Manawan.</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, member of a First Nation or Indian band</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Specify name of First Nation or Indian band:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 5px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td><td style="width: 12.5%;"></td> </tr> </table>																				

### General impressions of the question on membership in a First Nation or Indian band

Overwhelmingly, the question received positive feedback, with participants suggesting small changes such as adding more examples or having a space to capture a band-specific number. It was unanimous throughout discussions that this census question has an important role to play for Indigenous data users.

### Question on membership in a First Nation or Indian band: Wording and terminology

Most participants felt the question was clear and the examples were helpful for respondents. The expansion of the definition to include the term “sovereign nation” was an option offered. While most participants agreed that the current examples were appropriate, some felt adding an example of a self-governing First Nation would be prudent. For those representing the territories, the general opinion was to expand the definitions and examples to include more bands from the area. Some participants suggested reorganizing the examples for the next census.

Participants were asked about their thoughts on the term “Indian band.” Most participants did not think it was necessary to include it in the question as they prefer the term “First Nation” and did not think the removal of the term would lead to confusion. It was noted that while a few First Nations still use “Indian band” in their name, most have moved away from it.

Some participants were interested in seeing more clarification between the terms “status” and “membership.” Some noted that more distinction between the terms “registered member” and “affiliation” may be necessary.

The possibility of adding in a write-in field specifically for band numbers was discussed. It was felt this could remedy possible confusion for registered members who live within the geographies of a different band.

### 4 Question on membership in a Métis organization or Settlement

Question 28 is designed to provide estimates of the number of people who report being registered members of one of the listed signatories of the *Canada-Métis Nation Accord* and those who report having membership in organizations outside the accord. The question on membership in a Métis organization or Settlement first appeared in the 2021 Census of Population as a result of prior feedback that identified a need for this information.

**28** Is this person a registered member of a Métis organization or Settlement?

If “Yes”, which Métis organization or Settlement?

**Note:** Mark “” one of the listed signatories of the *Canada-Métis Nation Accord* or specify a Métis organization or Metis Settlement (for example, Kikino Metis Settlement).

No

Yes, registered member of a Métis organization or Settlement

Name of Métis organization or Settlement

- Métis Nation of Ontario
- Manitoba Metis Federation
- Métis Nation — Saskatchewan
- Métis Nation of Alberta
- Métis Nation British Columbia

Or specify organization or Settlement:

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### General impressions of the question on membership in a Métis organization or Settlement

Most participants felt that the wording of the question was clear and concise. Some participants felt the term “member” should be replaced with “citizen” and that the absence of the term “citizen” in the current question could lead to some confusion.

### Question on membership in a Métis organization or Settlement: Wording and terminology

Several comments were received about a possible multiple response option in the checkbox field. No consensus was reached as to how this would be reflected in the questionnaire. Participants acknowledged that there was a benefit to having a single response option for collection and data validation purposes. For organizations listed in the checkbox options, it was suggested that a dropdown option could be added to record a specific local related to the organization.

Like the Registered Indian question, some participants felt it would be helpful to expand the reporting timeframe given that obtaining membership can be a multiyear process.

### Additional information

After the regional discussions were completed, further information that could affect this question was brought forward. In September 2023, the Métis Nation of Alberta adopted the new name of Otipemisiwak Métis Government. Additionally, legislation moving self-government rights forward for some Métis governments has made the *Canada-Métis Nation Accord* less relevant for them than it was in 2021.

## 5 Question on enrollment under an Inuit land claims agreement

Question 29 is used to provide estimates of the number of people who report being currently enrolled under, or beneficiaries of, one of the listed Inuit land claims agreements. The question also provides a space for respondents to write in an Inuit land claims agreement that is not listed.



**29** Is this person enrolled under, or a beneficiary of, an Inuit land claims agreement?

No  
 Yes

Which Inuit land claims agreement?

Inuvialuit Final Agreement  
 Nunavut Agreement (Nunavut Land Claims Agreement)  
 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (Nunavik)  
 Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (Nunatsiavut)

Or specify agreement:

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### General impressions of the question on enrollment under an Inuit land claims agreement

The question on enrollment under an Inuit land claims agreement was well received as a new question for the 2021 Census of Population. Participants felt that the question was easily understood, clear and concise. For the Inuit population, the language used and answer categories were accurate and appropriate.

### Question on enrollment under an Inuit land claims agreement: Wording and terminology

Given the specificity of the question, discussions were somewhat limited in scope as there were fewer Inuit participants in the discussions than First Nations and Métis participants. Most participants understood the question; however, they could not comment on the appropriateness of the language or information presented as they did not have knowledge of land claims agreements. For those who were part of a land claims agreement, it was clear as to which one they belonged to.

Individuals who were not part of an agreement or did not know what a land claims agreement was felt that expanding the definition of “beneficiary” would be helpful.

For the Inuit population living in urban settings, it was discussed that it would be helpful to have a more extensive definition explaining who is included in Inuit land claims agreements for self-reporting.

## 6 Question on population groups

In addition to the Indigenous-specific questions, participants in the regional discussions were asked to provide their feedback on Question 25. It collects information in accordance with the *Employment Equity Act* about population groups referred to as “visible minorities” in the act. The data collected from this question are used to support equal opportunity programs for people in Canada.

Traditionally, this question is skipped by respondents who answer “yes” to the Indigenous group question. However, we sought feedback from the Indigenous community as to whether they felt Indigenous respondents should also respond to this question and, if so, whether the answer categories were inclusive for the population.

This question collects information in accordance with the *Employment Equity Act* and its Regulations and Guidelines to support programs that promote equal opportunity for everyone to share in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada.

**25** Is this person:

Mark “” more than one circle or specify, if applicable.

- White
- South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
- Chinese
- Black
- Filipino
- Arab
- Latin American
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai)
- West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan)
- Korean
- Japanese

Other group — specify:

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### General impressions of the question on population groups

There was a strong agreement throughout the discussions that individuals who identify as Indigenous in Question 24 should also be asked Question 25. Discussion related to the response categories was varied, yet the general suggestion was to expand the categories to better showcase Indigenous groups.

## Question on population groups: Wording and terminology

Participants were asked about the terminology that was used within the question—specifically whether “racialized group” should replace “visible minority.” While “visible minority” was not a preferred term, it received more positive feedback than the alternative “racialized group.” Several participants acknowledged that while the term “racialized group” may be most appropriate, without contextual knowledge it could be perceived in a less than desirable and possibly offensive way.

## 7 Terminology: Two-Spirit and Indian reserve

Participants were asked to provide their feedback on two terms related to the Indigenous population: “Two-Spirit” (related to the gender identity question) and “Indian reserve” (related to questions involving addresses).

### Two-Spirit

In the 2021 Census of Population, there was no question specifically on Two-Spirit individuals, although some respondents answered the gender question with a write-in response of Two-Spirit. Participants were asked whether this term is relevant in their community and whether they thought it would be beneficial or sensitive to collect these data.

Discussions surrounding the use of the term “Two-Spirit” were varied. There was no consensus on whether the term would benefit the Indigenous community if used on the gender identity question. Those who felt “Two-Spirit” would be more inclusive generally agreed that if used, the option should only be for individuals who identified as Indigenous. There were also some concerns about formal understanding of the term, as it might vary between Indigenous communities. Some, but not all, participants were familiar with the term. Participants often indicated that they did not feel qualified to speak on behalf of the Two-Spirit community and that further discussion should be held with the Two-Spirit community.

### Indian reserve

In the 2021 Census of Population, the term “Indian reserve” appeared in a few places on the questionnaire, including when asking about current residence and workplace addresses, as well as whether people have recently moved from a different address.

Discussions related to the term “Indian reserve” garnered mixed responses. For some participants, there was a general feeling that village, community or First Nation may be preferable terms. For other participants, the term “Indian reserve” was important to maintain as it is the language used in the *Indian Act*. For members of the Métis community, it was felt strongly that “Settlement” should be considered as a possible term. Overall, participants were accustomed to the term “Indian reserve,” but they were receptive to using “First Nations reserve” as an alternative. If additional terms were to be considered for data capture, they could be added alongside the existing terminology.

## Conclusion and next steps

Conducting regional discussions was the first step toward ensuring that the Indigenous identification questions in the 2026 Census of Population remain relevant and appropriate to First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. With relevant questions, Statistics Canada aims to provide the most accurate data possible to users. Based on feedback from the regional discussions, Statistics Canada has worked to modify existing census questions, and these modified questions were qualitatively tested in the summer of 2023. This means that individuals were asked to respond to the questions as they 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 to obtain feedback and overall impressions of the questions.

Based on the results of qualitative testing, the questions are being tested quantitatively during the 2024 Census Test. Statistics Canada will then analyze the 2024 Census Test results and will make recommendations to the Government of Canada on the final content of the 2026 Census questionnaire. Recommendations will also be made for changes to questions used on Statistics Canada surveys for people to identify as First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

## **2026 Census of Population public content consultation**

Careful and thorough planning helps ensure the ongoing success of the Census of Population. The 2026 Census of Population content determination process ensures the Census Program's continued relevance by reflecting societal changes when developing questionnaire content, gathering high-quality data for small areas and population groups, and responding to legislative and priority policy needs. Public consultation for the 2026 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 the 2026 Census. In-person meetings with stakeholders were also held to confirm and expand upon responses to the online consultation. The report documenting findings from the consultations, titled [2026 Census of Population Content Consultation Results: What we heard from Canadians](#), was released on April 17, 2024.