

What We Heard: Public Consultation on the 2026-2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy



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Introduction

From January to May 2026, Environment and Climate Change Canada consulted Canadians on the draft 2026–2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS). The consultation gave citizens, stakeholders, and communities the opportunity to help shape the FSDS and federal organizations' Departmental Sustainable Development Strategies (DSDSs).

We received input from a wide range of participants, including:

- individuals
- businesses
- labour representatives
- non-governmental organizations
- Indigenous governments and organizations
- provincial, territorial, and municipal governments

We also received input from:

- the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources (ENEV)
- the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD)
- the Sustainable Development Advisory Council (SDAC)

Over 1,400 participants from across Canada shared their views. Voluntary demographic information showed that participants reflected diverse geographic locations, age groups, and identities. Their input reflected a wide range of sectors, regions, and lived experiences.

We received over 4,000 comments from a mix of meetings, in-person events, webinars, and an online questionnaire, as well as more than 200 written submissions by email. In addition, engagement sessions were held at six universities (University of Victoria, University of Northern British Columbia, University of Calgary, University of Saskatchewan, Brock University, and Université Laval) and the SDG Idea Factory in Kitchener. They brought together youth, students, academics, and local stakeholders to share their perspectives on sustainable development priorities, regional challenges, and the draft Strategy.

To support the processing of responses, we used a large language model (LLM) to classify responses and generate summaries of comments. Expert review at several stages ensured accuracy, completeness, and alignment with the [Guide on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence](#).

Respondents shared both positive feedback on the draft Strategy and suggestions for how it could be strengthened. These are summarized in the sections that follow.

What You Liked

Respondents across sectors and regions expressed strong support for the overall direction of the draft Strategy. Many noted that it provides a comprehensive framework that brings together environmental, social, and economic priorities, and reflects key issues facing Canada today in a clear and accessible way.

Participants also welcomed the three-pillar structure and the inclusion of a dedicated focus on building an inclusive and resilient society, alongside clean growth and environmental protection.

Across groups—including governments, Indigenous organizations, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and individuals—there was broad agreement that the Strategy sets out a strong foundation to advance sustainable development and aligns with widely recognized principles and frameworks.

What We Heard

At the same time, respondents identified several areas where we could strengthen the Strategy. The feedback below is organized by key themes that emerged across respondent groups and perspectives.

Clearer Implementation and Delivery

A dominant theme across submissions was the need for clearer implementation. Many respondents indicated that while the Strategy sets out important goals, it does not clearly explain how these will be achieved in practice.

Participants across sectors—including municipalities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations—pointed to insufficient detail on how goals will be delivered, including limited information on roles, responsibilities, timelines, and resources. Municipal and regional governments emphasized practical delivery challenges and funding needs. Business respondents highlighted the importance of clarity and predictability to support investment and implementation decisions. Youth participants emphasized the urgency of action and the need for more ambitious, system-level change, including stronger focus on long-term sustainability outcomes.

Stronger Accountability, Targets, and Measurement

Respondents consistently called for clearer targets, measurable indicators, and improved tracking of progress. Many noted that existing targets are too broad or not supported by clear data, making it difficult to assess results.

Labour organizations and non-governmental organizations emphasized the importance of robust indicators to track outcomes, including equity and environmental performance. Provincial and territorial governments highlighted the need for clearer reporting and alignment across jurisdictions. The CESD also stressed the importance of stronger accountability frameworks and consistent measurement and tracking of targets over time.

Improved Structure, Clarity, and Prioritization

Respondents found the overall structure of the Strategy clear and aligned with sustainable development principles. However, many indicated that connections between goals are not always clear, and that the number of goals and targets can make the Strategy difficult to navigate. Some respondents also raised

concerns about the sequencing of goals and sections. They noted that the placement of environmental goals could better reflect their importance.

Across respondent types, there were calls for clearer prioritization, more accessible language, and a more user-friendly presentation. Civil society organizations and individuals emphasized usability and clarity. Provinces and territories highlighted the importance of aligning structure with implementation realities and existing frameworks.

More Integrated, Systems-Based Approaches

Respondents emphasized that environmental, social, and economic issues are interconnected and should be addressed in a more coordinated and holistic way.

Non-governmental organizations and academic participants emphasized the need for systems-based approaches. Business and provincial respondents highlighted the importance of aligning economic, environmental, and infrastructure systems. Across groups, there was broad agreement that key areas—such as energy, health, housing, agriculture, biodiversity, and transportation—should be better integrated within the Strategy.

More Consideration of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, And Accessibility

Respondents emphasized that equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility should be more clearly reflected throughout the Strategy and translated into concrete actions.

Participants from equity-deserving groups—including persons with disabilities, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, newcomers, and official language minority communities—highlighted that while disparities are recognized, they are not always matched with targeted measures or measurable outcomes. There were consistent calls for disaggregated data, more inclusive indicators, and stronger action to address systemic barriers, including environmental justice and access to services.

Across submissions, there was a shared view that achieving inclusive outcomes requires moving beyond high-level commitments to embed equity considerations across goals, targets, and implementation strategies.

More Recognition of Indigenous Leadership and Self-Determination

Indigenous respondents—including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and organizations—emphasized the importance of Indigenous leadership, self-determination, and distinctions-based approaches throughout the Strategy.

Participants highlighted that Indigenous perspectives are recognized in principle but not consistently reflected in governance, decision-making, or implementation. There were strong calls for:

- co-development of targets and actions

- greater recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems
- clearer mechanisms to support Indigenous-led implementation

Respondents also emphasized the need for sustained funding, capacity support, and improved data that reflects Indigenous realities, as well as better alignment with treaty relationships and regional priorities.

Better Alignment with Regional and Local Realities

Respondents noted that national goals and targets do not always reflect the realities of different regions and communities.

Municipal governments emphasized infrastructure and service delivery challenges, particularly in urban contexts, while rural and northern respondents highlighted access, capacity, and cost constraints. Provincial and territorial governments underscored jurisdictional considerations and the need for flexibility, with a shared emphasis across groups on place-based approaches that translate national objectives into meaningful local outcomes.

Strengthen Content to Address Gaps

Respondents identified areas where we could strengthen the Strategy's content, including:

- energy systems
- housing
- infrastructure
- agriculture
- biodiversity
- water
- transportation
- the circular economy

These gaps were raised across stakeholder groups, with municipalities focusing on housing and infrastructure, businesses highlighting industrial and energy systems, and non-governmental organizations emphasizing biodiversity and climate action.

Input From Advisory and Oversight Bodies

Input from advisory and oversight bodies reinforced many of the themes identified in other submissions. The CESD, ENEV, and the SDAC all emphasized the need for a more coherent, results-driven Strategy with stronger coordination, clearer targets, and improved accountability. All highlighted the importance of Indigenous inclusion. The CESD and the SDAC also recommended better alignment with existing frameworks, and stronger connections between goals, indicators, and implementation.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, consultation participants expressed strong support for the direction of the FSDS, while emphasizing the importance of clarifying how it will be implemented in practice.

Feedback highlighted the need to translate the Strategy's objectives into clear and coordinated actions, supported by measurable targets and effective collaboration across governments and partners.

Input from the consultation will inform the finalization of the 2026–2029 FSDS, including updates to strengthen implementation through DSDSs, improve alignment across priorities, and ensure the Strategy reflects regional realities and diverse perspectives.

The final Strategy will be tabled in Parliament in November 2026. Federal organizations will then develop their DSDSs, outlining how they contribute to the FSDS through their mandates, policies, and programs.

Engagement Overview

We received input from a broad range of participants across Canada, representing diverse sectors, regions, and lived experiences.

Most respondents indicated they were providing input as individuals (33%), followed by representatives of non-governmental organizations (31%), business organizations (19%), provincial, territorial and municipal organizations (9%), Indigenous governments and organizations (5%), and labour organizations (1%).

Additional demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis from respondents who submitted input through email or the online questionnaire, including respondents' location, age group, gender identity, Indigenous identity, and membership equity-deserving groups. The following results reflect only those who chose to provide this information:

- Responses were received from all provinces and territories:
 - Ontario (33%)
 - British Columbia (22%)
 - Quebec (16%)
 - Alberta (9%)
 - Saskatchewan (6%)
 - Nova Scotia (5%)
 - Manitoba (3%)
 - New Brunswick (2%)
 - Newfoundland and Labrador (0.8%)
 - Prince Edward Island (0.8%)
 - Yukon (0.8%)
 - Northwest Territories (0.6%)
 - Nunavut (0.3%)
- 70% of respondents reside in urban areas, 25% in rural areas and 5% in remote or northern areas.
- Most respondents were aged 25–44 (47%), followed by those aged 45–64 (35%), 65 and over (11%), and 24 or under (7%).

- Of the 199 respondents who provided this information, 62% identified as female, 36% as male, and 2% as non-binary.
- Nineteen respondents identified as Indigenous:
 - 58% First Nations
 - 37% Métis
 - 5% Inuit
- Among 108 respondents who identified as belonging to one or more groups:
 - 31% identified as members of a racialized group
 - 24% as persons with a disability
 - 23% as 2SLGBTQI+
 - 16% as members of an official language minority community
 - 6% as newcomers to Canada