

# Government On-Line Research Panel - Results from the Online Focus Groups for Year 2006-2007 (March 2007)

## Executive Summary

### Background

The federal government has maintained an Internet Research Panel since 2001 in support of the Government of Canada (GC)'s service vision, which includes bringing its most frequently used services online and achieving citizen satisfaction targets related to government service delivery. The panel is used to consult with Canadian Internet users, including users and non-users of government Web sites, at periodic intervals on issues related to eGovernment as well as other policy and program related issues. Phase 5 has been engaged since June 2003 to refresh and maintain the panel.

This report presents findings from the five online focus groups conducted during the weeks of February 26<sup>th</sup> and March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007 with Government of Canada Internet Research Panel members in year 6 of the panel's history. The purpose of the online focus groups was to explore behaviours, perceptions, attitudes and preferences related to the following topics:

- The Canada WordMark
- Foreign Policy
- Stabilization and Reconstruction
- Common Look and Feel 2.0
- Authentication
- Service Canada's Promotional and Features Sections
- Job Search and Use of Labour Market Information (Service Canada)
- GetPrepared.ca
- A Pandemic Web site

### Key Findings

The online focus groups with Government of Canada Internet Research Panel members revealed the following:

#### Canada Wordmark

When shown an image of the Canada Wordmark, the vast majority of participants recognized the image and recalled seeing it on government Web sites, advertisements, posters, forms, and government correspondence such as letters, envelopes and cheques.

The majority of respondents considered the wordmark to be a positive and trustworthy symbol which creates a sense of patriotism and pride and reinforces that a document or Web site is official and secure.

While the majority of panellists indicated that they do not **actively** seek out the Canada wordmark on Government of Canada Web sites, they do notice it and the fact that it is there reassures them that it is an official Web site. However, for a few, the symbol itself did not

guarantee a site is official and they required some other form of recognition such as the Web site address or URL ending in “gc.ca”.

## **Foreign Policy**

Online focus group participants were first asked to define the term “foreign policy”. On the whole, respondents were very comfortable providing a definition of the term “foreign policy”. Only a couple indicated they were not familiar with the term. The key themes raised in their definitions were related to how Canada’s interacts with other countries, Canada’s position with respect to other international activities, and ensuring Canada’s is well positioned vis a vis other countries.

The majority of participants were at least somewhat interested in finding out more information about Canada’s foreign policy given the increasing shift towards a global economy. It was also noted that the prevalence of related topics in the news affected participants’ level of interest in foreign policy. Some participants were simply interested in finding out what Canada’s role was with respect to interacting with other countries. Others emphasized that a country’s foreign policy determines its domestic affairs as well.

The majority of respondents had consulted both online and offline sources for information on Canada’s foreign policy. The most commonly mentioned offline sources included newspapers, televised news broadcasts, radio news segments, and magazines. Foreign policy magazines and related university courses were also noted as sources of information for some. Online news sources were also frequently mentioned. Specific sites mentioned included CBC.ca, radio-canada.ca, ledevoir.ca, Reuters and Wikipedia. Some participants also indicated that they would access Government of Canada Web sites to find out more information about Canada’s foreign policy. A couple of respondents indicated that they had consulted the Department of Foreign Affairs Web site and Canada International.

While the majority of participants were unaware that details on Canada’s foreign policy were available on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Web site, many indicated that they would use the site as a future source of information.

## **Stabilization and Reconstruction**

Common words used among participants when describing “stabilization” included peace, balance, equilibrium and control. When describing the term “reconstruction” within the context of international affairs and global politics, participants typically defined it as the act of rebuilding a country’s infrastructure, economy and/or society, but not necessarily as it relates to war.

Following the definition exercises, participants were provided with information on Canada’s reconstruction and stabilization efforts. It is interesting to note that participants stressed the act of creating a peaceful existence when interpreting the term “stabilization”, as opposed to identifying security, as in the definition provided.

While the majority of participants were somewhat to very interested in accessing information on Canada’s reconstruction and stabilization efforts, rating their level of interest as 7 or above, some had very little interest, but noted that this information should still be available. Participants were interested in knowing more about the cost, progress, impact, our involvement, reception and justification.

## Common Look and Feel

Participants were asked to review two home pages, the National Defence home page (using the updated Common Look and Feel standard) and the Environment Canada home page (using the older Common look and Feel standard), and asked what they felt were the differences between these two home pages.

The most notable differences participants commented on were related to the colour scheme, use of graphics and layout. The colour scheme used on the National Defence home page was described as dark, somber and serious, while the colour scheme on the Environment Canada home page was described as bright, soft, and related to the subject matter (e.g. green = environment).

Panellists commented that the strong use of graphics on the National Defense home page made the site look more professional and the graphics also helped break up the text. In the end, the site appeared to be better organized and easier to use. The Environment Canada home page was considered text heavy given that there was no clear delineation of the sections. Some also felt that its design looked outdated and was indicative of an outdated government Web site.

The majority of participants indicated that the National Defence site appeared easier to use. This was due to a better use of graphics to break-up text, as well as clearly delineated sections, both facilitating navigation. They also liked the fact that the search function was more visible on the National Defence site.

While the Environment Canada home page was described as “simple and concise”, offering clear menus, easily accessible links and a consistent top menu with other Government of Canada Web sites, its visual appearance gave participants the impression that it would be more difficult to use than the National Defence site. It lacked the clear delineation of sections of the National Defence site and the use of graphics did not effectively break-up the text.

The difference between the top menu bars was also noted by participants. The National Defense top menu bar was considered non-standard as compared to other Government of Canada Web sites. The majority of participants preferred the top menu on the National Defence home page.

Most participants preferred the larger width used for the National Defence site. As previously noted, the majority of participants preferred the layout of the three information columns within the National Defense site and stated that it adds symmetry, definition, structure and organization to the site.

In terms of using different top navigational menus depending on where you are within the same GC Web site, participants clearly felt that it was important to maintain consistency in the use of the top menu within a given departmental Web site. They stated this avoids confusion and allows users to more readily identify which site they are on.

## Authentication

When asked to describe the term “identity”, common terms used included uniqueness, morals, principles and beliefs. While most described the term “identity” as an element of who they are as a person, some described it as a strong link or association with a particular thing or place.

Participants were also asked to describe the term “authorization”. Common words used to describe “authorization” included “permission”, “approval”, “verification”, “consent”, “right to use” and “confirmation”. This was typically in relation to doing something or accessing information.

Participants were also asked to describe the term “authentication”. It was typically described as the process of verifying or validating something.

The term “online privacy” was described as the protection of personal information and the assurance that the information will not be viewed or shared with unauthorized parties when conducting transactions online. Participants generally felt that the term “online security” was similar to “online privacy” in the sense that it ensured the protection of personal information over the Internet by preventing access to “hackers” or unauthorized parties.

Participants were then asked to comment on how they felt about the idea of using the same authentication process (username and password) across all levels of government. Generally, participants felt that this authentication process was a good idea given that it would simplify the process of dealing with the government. Having to remember one single password for all online transactions with the government was considered a positive feature. However, there were some concerns with privacy and security in the event that someone managed to access an individual’s username and password. For this reason, participants expected strong security measures to be in place if such a process was to become a reality. While only having to deal with one username and password was a positive feature, participants believed that it would make identity theft that much easier and with more serious implications.

Participants were asked if they would you like to be able to use their banking User ID and Password service to access government services. Generally, participants did not react favorably to this scenario. Many noted the importance of keeping banking identification separate from anything else for privacy and security reasons.

Participants reacted negatively to the idea of having their banks obtain personal information from the government on their behalf. Participants were also uncomfortable with the transfer of personal information electronically, unless strong security measures were in place. Some participants, who were opposed to the idea, noted the importance of a paper trail for consent issues. Some who were comfortable with the idea, would prefer to provide their consent each and every time a transaction was to take place rather than a general one-time consent.

Participants felt slightly more comfortable with the government obtaining information on their behalf. Many thought that the government could already access this type of information with or without their consent. However, several participants preferred to obtain the information themselves, either in-person or on the phone, and then pass it on to the government. As previously indicated, participants were also uncomfortable with the transfer of personal information electronically, unless strong security measures were in place.

Most participants did not like the scenario with shared authentication process between their Internet Service provider (ISP) and the government as many simply had no confidence in their

Internet Service Provider. Participants were concerned with ISP turnover, lack of security on shared networks (e.g. student residence, libraries), the use of multiple ISPs and a lack of security.

Generally, participants were comfortable using the same authentication process (username and password) across all levels of government, as long as strong security measures had been put in place to avoid identity theft. However, when involving third parties such as banks or ISPs, participants were more comfortable accessing government accounts and personal information directly, and then passing on the personal information themselves to the party involved.

Across all the authentication models involving third-parties, participants appeared to be most open to a scenario where the government obtained information electronically on their behalf with their prior consent. However, participants were concerned with the security of their personal information as it passed from one organization to another electronically. While personal consent was a favored approach to using one single password and username for government accounts and banking or IPS accounts, most interested participants want to be able to provide consent for each and every transaction.

### **Service Canada Web Site – Promotional and Features Section**

Participants were shown the Service Canada home page and asked what first catches their attention. Most stated their attention was first drawn to the top banner which was described as pretty, calming and happy. A couple of participants first noticed the “Tax Season is Here” due to its placement on the page and the bold font. Participants in the French group were more likely to have first noticed the “emploi d’été” as it was larger than the Tax Season section and the title was bigger and stood out more.

The majority of panellists in the English groups believed that Service Canada was trying to promote online services (i.e. referring to the top of the third column). A few participants thought that it might be the “Features” section on the right side of the home page, while others felt they were promoting services to certain segments of the population. Only a couple of respondents in the English groups felt that Service Canada was promoting taxes and tax season. However, it was clear to participants in the French group that the site was promoting summer employment.

In the English groups, the promotional section was not considered visually appealing because it does not stand out in any significant way from the rest of the page and contains too much text. Conversely, in the French group, participants felt that the promotional section did stand out primarily because of the use of contrasting colours.

Participants expected the information in the promotional section of the Web page to change weekly or monthly and focus on topical issues. Some felt that it should change as the need arises, dictated by what is relevant to the majority of Canadians.

When asked what kinds of information or services they would like to see promoted in this section of the Service Canada Web site, participants mentioned health, jobs, new government services, passport information, seniors programs, education, and elections.

The Feature section’s placement lower down on the page gave the impression that the section was less important. Participants suggested adding more colour to this section to attract attention. A couple of participants also suggested moving the “Features” section above the “Online Services” section to increase its visibility. Participants stated that they would use this

section provided it was featuring a service relevant to them and that they would not browse the section out of general curiosity.

Generally, the results within the Feature's section met participants' expectations, which were to either be directed to a new Web site pertaining to the selected topic, or to be directed to the actual service (e.g. food guide).

In order for Service Canada to inform Canadians about new services on its Web site, the majority of participants suggested an opt-in e-newsletter, while others suggested promoting new services directly on the Web site, "up front and center". The majority of participants were at least somewhat interested in receiving an e-mail from Service Canada with highlights of new features.

### **Service Canada – Job Search and use of Labour Market Information**

A large majority of young participants had conducted a job search or looked for information to make a career decision online and offline in the past 12 months. Offline tools tended to be used for career planning while online tools were primarily used for job searching.

While most participants accessed offline tools for career planning, they were not as widely used for job searching. Generally, these offline sources did not meet panellists' expectations with respect to job searching as they did not provide sufficient information on jobs, such as key tasks and job requirements. However, some participants felt that there was less competition with offline postings. Newspapers, in particular, were found to be difficult to use in job searches as they do not provide ample information on the job or hourly wages.

With respect to searching for information in order to make a career decision, participants were generally satisfied with the offline sources utilized. For example, local career centres were found to be useful as they have career counsellors on site to help with resume writing.

The majority of participants in the French youth group were unaware of GC online tools and were mostly familiar with provincial government tools. The majority of participants in the English youth group were familiar with the Government of Canada online tools; with many having used these or similar tools such as career quizzes and resume builders. Some had used the job alerts to advise them of relevant jobs in their field of interest. Participants were not overly satisfied with the results of the Career Quizzes as unrealistic career options were often recommended.

Participants were asked to describe the term "labour market information". Common terms mentioned when describing "labour market information" included information about the number of jobs available based on a certain career sector (e.g. nursing), unemployment rates, industry growth rates, job market information such as job availability, pay scales and overall career outlook across various sectors.

## **GetPrepared.ca**

When presented with the [getprepared.ca](http://getprepared.ca) home page, the majority of participants stated they were initially drawn to the image in the centre of the page, followed by the title “Is Your Family Prepared?” and the “72 hours” graphic on the lower right side of the page. A couple of participants were initially drawn to the top menu bar, the left menu bar and the “Prepare Your Emergency Kit” link.

The central image was considered colourful, emphasized family and appropriately illustrated the “Is Your Family Prepared?” link. While the information provided on the home page was considered useful, several participants commented that “Prepare Your Emergency Kit” created a sense of fear and seemed ominous.

The following topics were suggested as additional content for the site: emergency telephone numbers and contact information, hospital information, types of emergencies likely to occur in Canada, what to do once the 72 hours is up, and where to go in the case of an emergency.

The term “Essentials” was described as the basics one would need in the case of an emergency. They also thought that it referred to information and things one should know in the case of an emergency. Participants in the French groups defined the term “Mesures à Prendre” as how to prepare in the case of an emergency, as well as preventative measures to follow.

While most participants felt the term “Essentials” was appropriate, others suggested alternate terms including “Basic Needs”, “What you Need to Know”, “What you Must Have in the case of an Emergency”, “Public Safety”, “Necessities”, “First Steps”, “Steps to Survival”. The majority of French participants also felt the term “Mesures à Prendre” was appropriate. However, a couple suggested “Comment se préparer” and “Mesures de prévention” as alternate terms.

Focus group participants were asked whether they preferred the label “Prepare a Kit” or “Prepare an Emergency Kit” on the left menu bar. Reactions were mixed. Those who preferred the term “Prepare a Kit” indicated that it was already assumed that the kit would be an emergency kit given the nature of the Web site. A few participants felt that the word “emergency” was too alarming. Participants who preferred “Prepare an Emergency Kit” felt that this term was more precise. The use of the word “Emergency” also added a level of seriousness to the label.

## **Pandemic Web Site**

When asked to describe what role they expect the Government of Canada to play if Canada ever experiences a pandemic, participants felt that the Government of Canada should play a lead role in protecting Canadians. This would include informing Canadians about the pandemic and about preventative measures (i.e. vaccinations), creating an emergency plan, containing and controlling the spread of the disease, and providing treatment for those who have been affected.

However, many participants felt that, while the Government of Canada should be informing the public about the pandemic, they need to ensure they do so without creating panic. Participants also felt that an important role for the Government of Canada would be to fund research to develop vaccines, healing and to develop proactive ways in which to prevent and control the spread of the outbreak.

The large majority of participants were unaware that the Government of Canada had a Pandemic Influenza Web site. When the home page was shown, overall reactions to the Web site were positive. Focus group participants appreciated that the Government of Canada had a Pandemic Influenza Web site that provides one-stop access to information from Government of Canada departments and agencies on pandemic, avian and seasonal influenza.

Participants also liked the use of colours, the layout of the information within the three columns, the top banner and navigation menu and the inclusion of the 1-800 hotline information.

Participants found several links on the Web site to be of interest. Specifically, Planning and Response, Flu Detection and Surveillance, Travel Health Advisories, News, Key Topics, Health and Safety, Seasonal Flu (Key Topics), Pandemic Influenza (Key Topics).

While the majority of participants felt that the content presented on the site was complete, they suggested adding information related to the Government of Canada's Emergency Plan in case of an outbreak, Canada's progress in controlling the spread of diseases, location of clinics offering the flu shot, history on Canada's involvement in previous pandemic cases, and current status of the pandemic level within Canada.