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## **FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF GIVING, VOLUNTEERING AND PARTICIPATING: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PILOT TEST**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In October 2000, Statistics Canada conducted the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. It was conducted as a supplement to the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey and was the primary source of information about giving and volunteering activities in Canada. A recent government initiative led to the creation of the Follow-up Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (FSGVP). The main goals of the FSGVP are to examine changes in volunteering and giving behaviours and to identify the motivations for change, by re-interviewing respondents three years after their initial interview.

Using a sample of 1,400 respondents from the 2000 survey, Statistics Canada conducted a pilot test of the FSGVP in April 2003 to evaluate the new survey instrument in preparation for the main survey in October 2003. Specifically, the test objectives were to evaluate the quality of the questionnaire, the tracing and response rates, collection procedures, interview times, and the survey documentation and training.

The pilot test was well received by both the interviewers and the respondents. Feedback from the interviewers provided useful suggestions for improvement to the questionnaire. The average interview time was as expected; however, the combined tracing and response rates were lower than expected. Possible reasons for these outcomes will be discussed. Other findings that will be discussed in more detail relate to the respondents' perception of changes in their contributory behaviours since the initial interview.

The pilot test identified areas for improvement for subsequent cycles. Lessons learned will be identified and a summary of recommendations to improve the survey will be presented.

KEY WORDS: Interview Time; Pilot Test; Questionnaire Quality; Response Rate; Trace Rate.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

In December 2001, the Government of Canada approved a new survey program that consists of two distinct surveys: the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP) and the Follow-up Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (FSGVP). These surveys will be conducted concurrently every three years beginning in October 2003.<sup>2</sup>

The FSGVP is a new survey that will re-contact CSGVP respondents three years after their initial interview. For the first cycle, we will re-contact respondents from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP). That survey was conducted as a supplement to Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey in October 2000.

Because the CSGVP and FSGVP are new surveys, pilot tests were conducted for evaluation purposes. This paper will focus on the pilot test results of the follow-up survey.

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, a decision was made to delay collection to the fall of 2004.

## 1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of the FSGVP are to examine the flows in and out of “volunteering”<sup>3</sup>; to examine the flows in and out of “giving”<sup>4</sup>; to estimate changes in the contributions of core supporters<sup>5</sup>; and to help understand the differences in the cross-sectional estimates of giving and volunteering produced by the CSGVP every three years.

The objectives of the pilot test were to evaluate the survey questions; to determine the average interview time; and to evaluate the survey procedures and training.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Sample

The target population consisted of respondents who participated in the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

The sample for the pilot test was selected based on the following criteria:

1. All regions in Canada were represented/included
2. There was a sufficient number of volunteers, non-volunteers, givers and non-givers from the 2000 NSGVP to meaningfully analyze the results of the pilot test
3. None of the respondents would be selected for *both* the pilot test and the main survey in order to eliminate response burden of participating in two interviews

The sample design for the pilot test was similar to the sample design for the main survey with two exceptions:

1. We did not select core supporters for the pilot test since these respondents were reserved for the main survey.
2. In order to ensure sufficient sample for both the main survey in October 2003 and the pilot test, respondents who partially completed the survey questions in 2000 were also included in the pilot test. This group answered the volunteer questions in the 2000 NSGVP; however, their giving status for the 2000 NSGVP was imputed because they did not answer the giving questions.

Table 1 provides a summary distribution of the sample and the expected targets.

**Table 1: Distribution of Sample and Targets for Canada**

Respondents who completed the 2000 NGSVP	890	63.6%
Respondents who partially completed the 2000 NSGVP	510	36.4%
Total sample	1,400	100%
Target of respondents to be contacted for 2003 FSGVP	1,260	90%
Target of complete interviews for 2003 FSGVP	1,008	80% of contacted respondents

<sup>3</sup> The FSGVP is interested in unpaid volunteer activities on behalf of a group or organization. Other forms of volunteering, such as directly helping relatives or neighbors, are excluded.

<sup>4</sup> The FSGVP is interested in financial giving to a charitable or non-profit organization. Other forms of giving, such as directly giving money to someone on a street corner or giving food to a food bank are excluded.

<sup>5</sup> These core supporters are defined as Canadians who are in the top 25% of donors and who also volunteer (M. Hall, L. McKeown and K. Roberts, 2001).

## 2.2 Data Collection

The pilot test was conducted in April 2003 – about 2 ½ years after the initial 2000 NSGVP interview. In preparation for the follow-up survey, we mailed a package to all respondents about one year after the initial interview. The package included a thank you letter, a summary publication with results of the NSGVP, and a change of address card inviting respondents to notify us about a move to a new dwelling.

We developed a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) application consisting of three distinct components: the Entry component that included the contact questions, the household roster and demographic questions, and access to the trace function; the FSGVP Questionnaire component; and the Exit component that included a data sharing agreement.

Information from the original interview plus any subsequent change of address information were included on the sample file and used by the application. This included basic information about the selected FSGVP respondent (name, address, telephone number, date of birth, sex, and education level), his or her volunteering and giving status, plus any tracing information (up to two contacts and a work telephone number).

We conducted the interviews at the same time as the pilot test for the CSGVP in four CATI sites across Canada. A sub-set of interviewers who worked on the CSGVP were assigned to work on the FSGVP. In preparation for collection, interviewers participated in a combination of self-study and classroom training.

## 3. PILOT TEST RESULTS

### 3.1 Trace Rate

Cases were sent to the application's tracing function if respondents could not be reached at the telephone number they had given at the time of the previous interview.<sup>6</sup> Once in the tracing function, the Interviewer had information for up to three tracing sources from the previous interview (i.e., the name, address and telephone number of two contacts, and the respondent's work telephone number) and any information gleaned from the previous household during the current collection period. While in the tracing function, interviewers also recorded other sources they used to trace a respondent.

The Call History<sup>7</sup> file revealed that 249 cases (17.8%) went to the tracing function. However, the short 3-week collection period did not permit interviewers to resolve all of these cases. We therefore calculated the trace rate based on the number of "resolved" tracing cases (167) minus the "unable to trace" cases (31), divided by the number of "resolved" tracing cases.

We successfully traced 81.4% of the respondents. This rate compares favorably to other longitudinal surveys with a shorter survey pattern. For example, the trace rates for the 2000 National Longitudinal Survey of Children (D. Garriguet, 2003) and the 2002 National Population Health Survey, which follow a panel of respondents every two years, were 84.6% and 86.9%, respectively.

It is important to note that while the trace rate seems acceptable, there was a high rate of non-response. In addition to a short collection period that did not permit us to effectively resolve all cases, our application allowed interviewers to select outcome codes for situations that should have gone to tracing (for example, incorrect phone number, phone number not in service, and fast busy/strange noise). Had these 20 cases been sent to the tracing function, it is likely that efforts to trace them would have yielded a lower trace rate.

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<sup>6</sup> It is possible that cases were not sent to tracing because a telephone recording would provide a new telephone number, and result in contacting the respondent.

<sup>7</sup> The Call History file contained the date, time and outcome of each call made to reach the respondent.

### 3.2 Response Rate

Our goal was to contact at least 90% of the 2000 NSGVP respondents and interview 80% of them. This meant that we needed complete interviews from 72% of the selected respondents. The rate of completed interviews from the test was 64.9% as noted in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Summary of Response for Total Sample**

Total Sample		
Total respondents	1,400	100.0%
Out-of-scope <sup>8</sup>	34	2.4%
In-scope <sup>9</sup>	1,366	97.6%
Response <sup>10</sup>	887	64.9%
Non-response	479	35.1%

However, if we include only those respondents who fully participated in the 2000 NSGVP, the rate of completed interviews was 72.9% as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Summary of Response for 2000 NSGVP Participants**

Sample of 2000 NSGVP Participants		
Total respondents	890	100.0%
Out-of-scope	12	1.3%
In-scope	878	98.7%
Response	640	72.9%
Non-response	238	27.1%

### 3.3 Respondents

We had usable<sup>11</sup> records for 890 respondents. These were not the same 890 respondents who fully responded to the 2000 survey. Of the 890 respondents who provided full information in 2000, 72.9% also responded to the FSGVP pilot test. Of the 510 respondents who partially responded to the 2000 NSGVP, we successfully interviewed 49% of them in the pilot test. A “cleaner” sample, consisting of only respondents who fully completed the 2000 NSGVP – including the core supporters – and a longer collection period, should improve our ability to meet or exceed the target number of complete interviews for the main survey.

<sup>8</sup> Out-of-scope included respondents who moved outside of Canada, were institutionalized or were deceased.

<sup>9</sup> In-scope includes respondents who did not respond to the survey, including those we could not trace.

<sup>10</sup> This refers to the number of completed cases identified during data collection. In fact, we received sufficient information for 890 cases.

<sup>11</sup> A usable record contained all answers to the Entry component, and the Formal Volunteering module of the FSGVP Questionnaire.

In total, 935 respondents answered the mailing address question. This permitted us to estimate the amount of tracing that would potentially be required for the main survey. Of the entire sample, 54.3% were residing at the same address, 12.5% had moved, and no information was collected for the remaining 33.2%. Of the 925 respondents who answered the telephone number question, 59% were reached at their original phone number, 7.2% had a different phone number, and no information was collected for the remaining 33.8%. Analysis of the Call History file revealed that interviewers used the tracing function for 17.8% of the sample and were successful in completing an interview for 1/3 of the respondents. The move rate for the main survey is expected to be 30% (roughly 10% each year) and we expect to complete an interview for 2/3 of the respondents. With a longer collection cycle, we are optimistic that we can achieve this goal.

### 3.4 Non-respondents

We examined the following characteristics of non-respondents to determine if they differed from those who responded: sex, age group, marital status, highest level of education, household size, household income group, personal income group, labour force status, formal volunteer status and formal giving status. We found that:

- more women than men were inclined to answer the follow-up interview
- respondents who were currently working, had earnings between \$40,000 and \$60,000, or were part of a large household, were more likely to respond
- the rate of completed questionnaires was lowest among respondents who were 65 years and over, had a lower education level, or a lower household income
- more volunteers responded to the survey than non-volunteers<sup>12</sup>
- there was no significant difference for marital status or giver status

This analysis allowed us to focus on strengthening both our public relations material and interviewer training materials to encourage all respondents, especially non-volunteers, to participate in the follow-up survey.

### 3.5 Average and Median Interview Times

We estimated the unit time to complete a case would take an average of 30 minutes. According to operational reports produced during the collection period, the average interview took 29.9 minutes and the median time was 24.8 minutes. These times included all calls and tracing attempts for the completed cases.

In an effort to reduce the interview time and respondent burden, we streamlined the questionnaire for the main survey. In particular, we considered comments provided to us by the interviewers and implemented many of their suggestions.

### 3.6 Interviewer Feedback to the Survey Questions

According to interviewers, although the pilot test interviews went well overall, there was still a need to improve the application. Their suggestions focused on the introduction to the “Changes in Volunteering” and “Changes in Giving” modules – the two most important modules of the questionnaire. Those who were non-volunteers or non-givers in both reference years found the introductory statements to be negative and offensive. For example, the introduction for non-givers was, “We are interested in looking at changes in financial donations. During the fall of 2000, you indicated that you did not make any financial donations to a charitable or non-profit organization in the 12-month period prior to the interview, and you did not make any financial donations in the past 12 months. Please tell me whether any of the following statements are reasons why you did not make a financial donation in the past 12 months, nor in the 12 months before our last interview.” Based on their feedback, the introduction has been reworded to, “We are interested in looking at patterns of financial donations to charitable or non-profit organizations. Please tell me if the following statements are reasons why you did not make a financial donation in the past 12 months.”

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<sup>12</sup> This can partially be explained by the number of partial NSGVP respondents in our sample, the majority of who were non-volunteers.

Interviewers also felt questions would be improved by removing repetition from a list of motivation statements. For example, the answers to “There is a need in the community” and “To make a contribution to the community” did not differentiate among respondents, and the former statement was removed from the questionnaire.

### **3.7 Item Non-response**

Since most of the volunteering and giving questions relied on the respondent’s perception, we experienced little or no item non-response except for questions that probed the reasons for “not giving” and to a much lesser extent, the reasons for “not volunteering.” This supported the sentiments expressed by interviewers about the sensitivity of these questions among non-givers and non-volunteers.

Non-response was highest for the two income questions (17.7% for household income and 12.6% for personal income) and the total dollar amount of financial donations (9.5%). These rates are in line with non-response rates for these types of questions in other surveys.

### **3.8 Low frequencies**

There were no questions or answer categories that needed to be dropped from the questionnaire due to low frequencies.

### **3.9 Quality of Feedback Data**

We wanted to determine the quality of two key pieces of information fed into the questionnaire from the previous interview: volunteering status and giving status. These items were important in that they framed the introduction to the “Changes in Volunteering” and “Changes in Giving” modules and determined the flow of questions within these modules. We were concerned that respondents might be confused by the questions because they did not view their previous status in the same way<sup>13</sup> or experienced changes in the intervening three-year period and might not recall their status three years ago. In addition, keying errors made during the initial interview would have contributed to incorrect feedback information. Interviewers were instructed to enter a “don’t know” response for any questions the respondent felt were inappropriate.

It was very difficult to assess the quality of this feedback data because we relied on remarks entered in the questionnaire, and comments from interviewers based on two questions in a debriefing questionnaire. Only one remark was entered in the application indicating disagreement with the feedback data. The answers to the debriefing questions indicated that the feedback data was incorrect for some respondents; however, accompanying comments suggested the interviewers were referring to question wording rather than the quality of the feedback data.

### **3.10 Changes in Volunteering and Giving Status**

As noted earlier, one of the main goals of the FSGVP is to estimate changes in giving and volunteering after a three-year period.

We examined the data to determine if the questionnaire accomplished the task of identifying change. We found that most volunteers remained volunteers and most non-volunteers remained non-volunteers. The rate of change was slightly higher for those who had stopped volunteering than for those who became volunteers.<sup>14</sup>

To calculate the rate of change for giving, we excluded records where the giving variable was imputed in the initial interview. Analysis of the unweighted data revealed that most givers remained givers. A greater number of respondents became givers than those who stopped giving. This raises a potential problem in estimating the rate of

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<sup>13</sup> We were only interested in collecting information about volunteering on behalf of a group or organization and giving to a charitable or non-profit organization, although it is possible the respondent may have volunteered or given money in other ways (i.e., directly to an individual).

<sup>14</sup> These statements are from unweighted data and may not be true of the entire population.

change from giver to non-giver. It may not be possible to produce this estimate due to a small sample size and a small proportion of non-givers. Initial rates of change in both giving and volunteering are still being investigated.

Another goal of the FSGVP is to look at factors that influence volunteering and giving behaviors. In addition to a list of factors, an open-ended question sought to identify other important factors affecting behavioral change. Many of the responses given by respondents in the “other, specify” text could have been included in the preceding questions. Some additional factors did emerge; however, their frequencies were too small to warrant adding them to the lists.<sup>15</sup> We will continue to ask respondents to specify other reasons that influenced a change in behavior in the main survey.

We looked more closely at respondents who continued to volunteer and make financial donations three years after the initial interview. These respondents were asked to identify if the number of hours volunteered and the amount of money donated had increased, decreased or stayed the same. Those who responded “the same” were not probed for the factors that prompted this behavior. When we compared the respondents’ current perception of “volunteered same amount of hours” with actual data from the previous survey, we found that 7% had perceptions that were consistent within plus or minus 10%, while 48% tended to overestimate and 45% tended to underestimate. Among those who perceived their financial donations were the same, we found that 4% had perceptions that were consistent, 19% tended to overestimate and 77% tended to underestimate. This discovery revealed a weakness in the questionnaire: we were missing factors that influence volunteering and giving behavior among those who did not perceive a change in their behavior. Although it was too late to make a change to the questionnaire for the main survey, it will be changed in future survey cycles.

#### 4. LESSONS LEARNED

1. Allow more time in the schedule to program and test the survey application prior to collection

The development and testing of the FSGVP application required more resources than were planned. This in part was due to the phased approach we used to develop the survey application. The first phase involved screen display with no logic. The second phase involved the addition of logic within each module and the final phase involved the integration of logic among the all of the modules combined. We used a new on-line ticket system to manage correction to the text, logic, or specifications. The ticket system accomplished this goal, but was not very user-friendly, especially since many tickets were needed to correct the application. Due to time constraints, we learned to limit the number of changes, reduce expectations, and work around the flaws in the application. These compromises likely had an impact on the quality of the pilot test.

2. Response rates for a test can be evaluated if conditions are the same as the main survey

In a collection environment, it is understandable that regular production surveys rate a much higher priority than a test survey. Furthermore, unless the conditions for the test are exactly what they will be for the main survey, we cannot expect the same response outcome. The pilot test lasted three weeks; the main survey will last 12 weeks. A longer collection period will allow us to trace more respondents, make repeated callbacks, follow-up non-respondents, and fully resolve all of the cases.

3. Listen to interviewers and respondents

The pilot test provided an opportunity to listen to the interviews and conduct a debriefing session with interviewers. These were invaluable to us. One of the most important things we learned was to be more attentive to the choice of words when designing questions. Some of the questions offended or upset people who could not or did not volunteer their time or give financial donations. Fortunately, we were able to revise these questions for the main survey.

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of “other” factors related to volunteering were pleasure to give/enjoyed giving; no opportunities to volunteer (referring to smaller communities); taking care of family; and, no interest. There was only one example relevant to giving more: now have more money.

Providing more feedback data from the initial interview could serve to improve the quality of the data, reduce interviewer and respondent burden, and reduce the interview time. For example, interviewers were required to ask for the date of birth, sex and marital status of the selected respondent. They were also required to list the names of all other household members and collect their demographic information. Interviewers requested that this information be confirmed rather than re-asked. Confirming information, at least for the selected respondent, would have reduced the interview time and burden on the respondent.

4. Allow more time between the test and the main survey

We needed to allocate more time between the test and the main survey to thoroughly analyze the information and implement all of the desired changes. Some processes require more time than expected. We allowed two months to analyze the survey data, seek approval from our partners<sup>16</sup> and prepare final specifications for the programmers. Another 8 weeks were allotted to program and test the changes. The short time period meant that we were unable to analyze the information as thoroughly as we would have liked and subsequently implement all of the desired changes. Had we allocated more time in the schedule for implementation and thorough testing, we might have been able to refine the application for the main survey.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The pilot test experience was an invaluable one in that we were able to accomplish most of our objectives and implement some important changes from the lessons we learned. As mentioned earlier, the opportunity to receive feedback from interviewers provided useful suggestions for improvements to the questionnaire. Although we were not able to make all of the changes we would have liked to the survey instrument for the upcoming cycle due to time constraints, we will be able to improve future iterations. The pilot test was a success in that it identified areas for improvement for the current and subsequent cycles.

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<sup>16</sup> The FSGVP is managed by a Steering Committee composed of representatives from four external organizations. Any changes to the questionnaire required approval by the Steering Committee.