

The Rethinking Science and Society 2006 Study

Context

Science policy is becoming increasingly important for Canada as decision-makers in the public, private and third sector strive to ensure that the country is prepared to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the knowledge economy. Unlike natural resources, the ideas which form the currency of the knowledge economy are inexhaustible. Yet in a competitive economic environment where human and financial resources are highly agile, knowledge must be constantly refined and fostered – science policy is now intimately entwined with Canada’s economic and social well-being.

Complicating science policy, however, is the fact that implications of new research and technologies are far more complex than in the past. Where citizens may once have been solely concerned with the safety and efficacy of a product or process, science is approaching a level where the moral acceptability of a discovery must also be weighed. Genetic testing and stem cell research, for example, bring implications that raise issues of justice, privacy and discrimination. It is clear that a better understanding of Canadians’ views on science and research will help guide public, private and third sector decision-makers in developing appropriate strategies to ensure that scientific research continues to contribute to Canadians’ economic and social well-being.

In 2004, EKOS Research Associates conducted a unique study aimed at better understanding public views on science and research (*Rethinking Science and Society*). Findings revealed that Canadians hold overwhelmingly positive views on science and research, and clearly see a connection between science and their overall quality of life. However, the study also found that Canadians have little understanding of Canada’s actual investment in science and research, and feel governments should be doing more in this area.

As a result of the expressed interest of several government departments, EKOS is conducting a second iteration of *Rethinking Science and Society*.

The study offers clients the opportunity to be part of a unique partnership. By pooling the resources of a number of different organizations with overlapping areas of interest, we can conduct a cost-effective, in-depth examination of perceptions regarding science and research in Canada.

Study Issues

Based on a review of last year’s study, we will select a number of tracking questions for inclusion in this year’s study. The study will also examine public views on emerging issues such as productivity and competitiveness, as well as the commercialization of university research. The study issues/ questions will be developed in close consultation with clients, however below we outline some proposed areas of examination for the study:

- Public understanding and knowledge of science/ public literacy index
- Concern about Canada’s science capacity
- Perceived performance of government in science and research
- Views on the commercialization of research
- Views on productivity, innovation and competitiveness
- Perceived role of science and research as a driver of the knowledge-based economy
- View on ethics, privacy and new technologies

- Perceived connection between science and quality of life (e.g., economic prosperity, social development, personal health, environmental sustainability)
- How to best increase participation in science and research among youth and women
- Concern about “brain drain” in Canada
- How to strengthen policies to enhance awareness and public understanding of science
- Views on transferring knowledge and technology to less developed countries
- Trust in science/scientists

Methodology

The methodology for this study would involve a nationally representative telephone survey of 2,000 Canadians. Survey results will be statistically reliable in all major regions of Canada. The questionnaire will be developed in close consultation with participating subscribers, and will be designed to gain insight into the public perspective regarding the study issues outlined above.

We will also conduct an on-line survey of 300 public and private sector decision-makers to examine their views on science and society. The decision-maker survey will include items replicated from the general public survey. This data will be analyzed to compare the views of decision-makers with those of the Canadian public, highlighting key similarities and differences.

We will cross-tabulate the general public survey results by a range of demographic and socio-economic variables (e.g., gender, income, age, education) to get a clearer understanding of the results obtained. In addition, we will conduct a segmentation of general public respondents using cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is a multivariate statistical procedure aimed at identifying relatively homogeneous groups or clusters. Forming clusters of individuals and studying the

characteristics that they share, as well as those in which they differ, provides valuable insights into the data collected.

Once analysis of the data is complete, we will submit a report containing detailed analysis of the survey results, as well as an executive summary of key findings and implications from the study.

Costs

The study is available to clients at two subscription levels: limited and privileged.

Limited subscriptions are available for \$15,000 (GST not included) and include the following deliverables:

- A full set of detailed cross-tabular tables (close-ended questions only) three days after fieldwork completion
- A full set of detailed cross-tabular tables (with open-ended data) five days after fieldwork completion
- A data file in SPSS format
- A full-length final report

Privileged subscriptions are available for \$25,000 (GST not included) and include all the deliverables listed above, plus the following:

- Input into the design of the core questionnaire
- Five client-specific closed questions designed in partnership with EKOS
- An oral presentation, in either official language, from senior research staff, in Ottawa

Additional (client-specific) questions will be charged at \$2,000 for each close-ended question, and \$3,000 for each open-ended question. Please note that a minimum of five partners will be needed to provide the “critical mass” to undertake the study. As well, we will limit the number of privileged subscriptions to seven.

For further information, please contact:

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