

Government of Alberta

# Public Opinion Research Policy

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As approved by the Managing Director of Communications  
and Public Engagement on March 1, 2019

For more information on this policy, please contact the Government of Alberta's Communications and Public Engagement Office (CPE).

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# Government of Alberta

# Public Opinion Research Policy

## 1. Purpose

Public opinion research is the systematic collection of opinion-based information from the public through either qualitative or quantitative methods. Most commonly, this is done through surveys (polls), focus groups, in-depth interviews and online panels.

The Public Opinion Research Policy ensures that the Government of Alberta's approach to public opinion research is coordinated, ethical and rooted in established methodology and documented best practice. It also ensures that government employees are aware of their responsibilities and the processes that must be followed when collecting information from the public.

This policy and its standards apply to all departments, all employees and all contracted external service providers. They govern all public opinion research, including public feedback on programs and services, which could include performance measurement and evaluation.

As stated in the Government of Alberta Communications Policy, all public opinion research must be approved in advance by the Communications and Public Engagement office (CPE). Research must follow Alberta laws and legislation and other applicable government policies including Advertising Standards, Government Identity and the Voice, Tone and Style Guide.

## 2. General statement

The Government of Alberta is committed to a high-quality, consistent approach to research. All public opinion research carried out by the government must be:

### **Accessible**

Research projects are designed to ensure respondents are able to participate regardless of education, literacy, gender or physical ability. The government will take steps to eliminate economic barriers to participation in public opinion research projects.

### **Consistent**

Research design should be comparable across projects and over time for a long-term understanding of people's concerns, priorities and opinions.

### **Cost-effective**

Research projects must be economical and deliver high value for resources invested.

### **Ethical**

Research ethics apply to every aspect of all research projects. Participants must be kept safe from harm. Special care is taken with children and vulnerable people. Research shows integrity in design, analysis and reporting.

### **Purposeful**

All research must have clear goals, objectives and outcomes.

### **Transparent**

All research reports will describe the methodology, sample size, questions, participant selection, method or mode of data collection, estimates of sampling error (if applicable) and how data were weighted. When shared publicly, opinion research will be understandable and clear.

## 3. Division of responsibilities

### **CPE managing director**

- Creates, enforces and approves any changes to the Public Opinion Research Policy.

### **CPE public engagement**

- Under the direction of CPE's managing director, advises on and approves all public opinion research undertaken by the Government of Alberta.
- Develops and enforces the public opinion research standards listed in Schedule A.
- Provides public opinion research tools, products, advice and services to departments.
- Manages a master agreement of pre-qualified research vendors.
- In collaboration with CPE marketing services, is responsible for advertising creative testing.
- Ensures that the collection and storage of public opinion research is in line with government policies and legislation.
- Ensures a consistent and long-term approach to collection and analysis across individual public opinion research projects.
- Publishes, as appropriate, research reports on the government's open data portal.

### **CPE communications branches**

- Advise department clients on the public opinion research policy and standards.
- Act as the main point of contact for research occurring within their assigned department.
- Work with department clients to identify research priorities.
- Use research findings to inform and evaluate communications and outreach strategies.
- Identify department research needs or challenges and share with CPE public engagement.
- Coordinate sign-off and payment for public opinion research for their departments.
- Support dissemination and communication of research results.

### **Program areas within the government**

- Use research results to inform policy and engagement work.
- Provide content expertise to develop public opinion research.
- Support research management and quality.
- Ensure adherence to the Public Opinion Research Policy and standards.
- Pay for research costs for projects undertaken by a hired vendor.

## 4. Research services and reporting

### **Vendor procurement**

CPE public engagement manages and oversees a master agreement of pre-qualified public opinion research vendors. The list includes both qualitative and quantitative research firms. All departments must use this master agreement to procure public opinion research, unless the CPE managing director grants an exception.

### **Research tools**

CPE public engagement maintains research tools that departments can use at low or no cost when conducting surveys without a vendor. All departments must use this tool if appropriate, unless the CPE managing director grants an exception.

### **Vendor contracts and requirements**

All vendors must follow the Government of Alberta research policy and the standards listed in Schedule A.

### **Accessing research services**

Communications branches can get access to research tools and services, including procurement assistance, by emailing [CPEresearch@gov.ab.ca](mailto:CPEresearch@gov.ab.ca).

Departments that require research services should contact their communications branch.

### **Research project briefs**

Program areas within government must work with their communications branch and CPE public engagement to complete a research project brief before beginning public opinion research. This will ensure that the research is needed and that there is clarity of purpose and quality of research approach before public money is spent.

### **Data reporting and integrity**

All data that is shared internally or publicly must be accompanied by a description of key aspects of research design, data collection and analysis, as outlined in the Data Reporting standard.

### **Public release of research**

Unless otherwise required by law, the release of any public opinion research must be approved by CPE's managing director and the relevant deputy minister.

# Schedule A:

## Public opinion research standards

Government of Alberta research standards detail specific requirements for conducting public opinion research. These standards apply to all research projects authorized by the government and must be followed by both staff and external contractors. The standards cover both qualitative and quantitative public opinion research.

CPE's director of public engagement is responsible for developing and enforcing public opinion research standards. Government employees can get access to these standards at <https://myaps.sp.alberta.ca/Pages/My-Workplace/PublicEngagement.aspx>

### **Participants rights**

- Informed consent and ability to refuse participation
- Privacy and anonymity
- Identification standards

### **Participant recruitment**

- Sampling procedures including construction of representative samples
- Selection of participants
- Ethical considerations for compensation or incentives

### **Design and conduct of sessions**

- Participant compensation or incentives
- Research involving children, youth or vulnerable people
- Observing and recording

### **Design of surveys and questionnaires**

- Preferred phrasings of common questions and responses
- Coding of data
- Longitudinal research guidelines procedures and best practice



### **Analysis and methodological requirements**

- Standards of methodological approach
- Ethical considerations for thorough analysis
- Mean
- Standard deviation
- Regression
- Sample size determination
- Hypothesis testing

### **Data reporting**

- Project information that must accompany data
- Role of transparency in reporting
- Role of privacy in reporting
- Standards of accurate reporting

### **Retention of data and data security**

- Data security
- Data location
- Standards of expiry
- Standards of release
- Preventive measures in event of data sharing error

