
Census Content Consultation Guide

Census year 2026

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Introduction

Canadians require trustworthy statistics to meet an array of data needs.

The Census of Population is an important source of demographic and social information for decision making and analysis on a large geographical scale and for small areas. Under the *Statistics Act* (R.S.C. 1985, c. S-19), Statistics Canada is responsible for conducting the Census of Population every five years.

In preparation for the 2026 Census of Population, Statistics Canada is consulting with census data users to

- assess census data users' needs and identify data gaps
- understand how census data are used
- identify other data sources that could supplement or replace current census content.

The 2026 Census of Population consultation will be conducted from fall 2022 to spring 2023. Individuals and organizations known to be census data users and for whom Statistics Canada has contact information will be invited to participate by email.

Statistics Canada is seeking feedback on census content from

- representatives of federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders and community members
- academics
- non-governmental organizations
- private businesses.

Statistics Canada will also reach out to the general public through its website, social media accounts and regional offices. All participants in this public consultation will be asked to complete the same electronic questionnaire. To determine the 2026 Census of Population content, Statistics Canada will evaluate the feedback using the content determination framework explained in this guide.

You are invited to convey your data needs or those of the organization you represent, to provide examples of how you and your organization use census data, to suggest content changes or additions for the 2026 Census of Population, to provide details about other data sources that could be used to supplement or replace current census content, and to comment on the relevance of the current census content.

Thank you for your participation. Your feedback is important in determining the content of the 2026 Census of Population.

2026 Census of Population content consultation: What I need to know

This guide explains the 2026 Census of Population content consultation process and provides information to help you with your submission.

The consultation will be primarily conducted by means of an electronic questionnaire, accessible to the general public and all census data users through the Statistics Canada website starting on Monday, January 9, 2023. The questionnaire includes questions about 2021 Census of Population topics and questions requiring detailed answers. For information about the content of the 2021 Census of Population questionnaire, please see the [2021 Census of Population questions by topic in Appendix A](#).

Why user consultation is important

The information gathered during the consultation will help Statistics Canada ensure that priority data needs of Canadians are met and that key emerging social and economic issues are reflected in the census. The information you provide will be carefully reviewed using the content determination framework and will help determine the content of the 2026 Census of Population questionnaire.

Protecting your information

Statistics Canada is committed to respecting the privacy of its participants. All personal information collected by the agency is protected by the *Privacy Act*.

Comments collected during the consultation may be published anonymously in the 2026 Census of Population Content Consultation Report, which will be available on the Statistics Canada website in fall 2024.

How do I participate?

To have your comments considered for the 2026 Census of Population content, please respond to the consultation questionnaire made available on the [Statistics Canada Census content consultation website](#) starting on January 9, 2023. Collection dates and details will be posted to the web page.

Please note, Statistics Canada welcomes your valuable feedback about census content. You can provide your feedback at statcan.cpop2026consultation-consultationrpop2026.statcan@statcan.gc.ca.

How do I obtain more information?

If you need help with or further information about the 2026 Census of Population content consultation process, please email the census consultation team at statcan.cpop2026consultation-consultationrpop2026.statcan@statcan.gc.ca.

Completing the 2026 Census of Population content consultation questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire asks participants to provide informed feedback about their census data uses, data gaps and alternative data sources. For information about the 2021 Census of Population content and links to the 2021 Census questionnaires, please see [2021 Census of Population questions by topic in Appendix A](#). Dates for the 2021 Census of Population data releases are provided in [Appendix B](#).

The consultation questionnaire focuses on census data users, and collects feedback about

- how current census data content are used
- the population groups explored when analyzing census data
- the balance between needs for new information and comparability over time
- whether census data are combined with other data sources for analysis purposes (in which case further information about those other data sources is requested).

Participants are asked to identify if the purposes of their data usage are tied to

- statutory or regulatory uses by governments
- resource allocation for programs and policies
- service delivery for programs
- planning, development, monitoring, evaluation and performance reports related to programs and policies
- research
- any other purposes.

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The questionnaire also asks what level of geography is required, how frequently the census data are required, if comparability across Canada is important, and whether any known alternative data sources could be used to replace or supplement census data.

The consultation questionnaire asks participants to identify and prioritize any perceived data gaps, provide information on how new data would be used and identify whether any alternative data sources provide similar information for the proposed data gaps.

Participants can provide additional comments or feedback on the Census of Population in a comment box at the end of the questionnaire.

The time required to complete the consultation questionnaire will be different for each participant, depending on their selections. Once the questionnaire is started, a progress bar in the top right corner will provide an indication of the completion status.

Please note that there is no option to save the questionnaire and continue later. Participants are asked to complete and submit the questionnaire in a single session. Leaving the questionnaire inactive for more than two hours or closing the browser will end the session, and the information entered will be lost.

Your participation is important to Statistics Canada. A report summarizing the findings of the 2026 Census of Population content consultation will be published on the Statistics Canada website in 2024.

Census of Population content determination framework: Overview

In determining the content of the 2026 Census of Population questionnaire, Statistics Canada will employ the same framework used to determine the 2016 and 2021 Census questionnaire content. The framework was developed from a review of Statistics Canada's census collection and processing methods. The findings of the review are presented in the [Final Report on 2016 Census Options: Proposed Content Determination Framework and Methodology Options](#) and in the [2016 Census Strategy Project: Data Uses and Requirements Report](#), both of which are available on the Statistics Canada website.

The content determination framework includes three main steps that help prioritize Census of Population content: (1) census data users' needs, (2) Canadian context, and (3) Statistics Canada's operational considerations. Each step comprises specific dimensions according to which potential content is evaluated.

The steps and dimensions of the content determination framework are summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of the content determination framework steps and their dimensions

Steps	Dimensions
Step 1: Census data users' needs (relevance and quality requirements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strength of census data users' needs (e.g., legislative requirements; policy and program needs)• Size of population of interest (e.g., small area or domain data needs)• Suitability (and availability) of alternative sources• Comparability over time
Step 2: Canadian context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burden on Canadians• Privacy concerns• Sensitivity of questions and topics
Step 3: Statistics Canada's operational considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost• Ability to generate high-quality data• Operational feasibility

Census of Population content determination framework: Data needs

The extent to which census data users' needs are met is an important factor in the content determination framework, and thus, in determining the content of the 2026 Census of Population. Table 2 summarizes the dimensions of census data users' needs analyzed within the framework.

Table 2
Summary of the dimensions of census data users' needs

Dimensions	Description
Strength of census data users' needs (e.g., legislative requirements, and policy and program needs)	<p>In general, statutory and regulatory uses tied to a law and information needs that serve a purpose that is national in scope will be given the highest priority.</p> <p>Uses related to resource allocation and service delivery will also be given high priority, given the direct impact on government spending and financial decisions.</p> <p>Planning, development, monitoring, evaluation and performance reports related to programs or policies will be assigned medium priority, because they measure accountability and inform Canadians about the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs. The remaining uses, such as academic and policy research, will be considered lower priority uses.</p>
Size of the population of interest (e.g., regional data needs)	<p>A higher priority will be assigned to uses that require data for small geographic areas or small groups of interest. Needs for data by census subdivision or census tract will be assigned a higher priority than those at the census metropolitan area (CMA) level, and CMA-level needs will be prioritized higher than needs at the provincial or territorial level. Similarly, needs for smaller populations of interest, such as recent immigrants, will be assigned a higher priority than needs for larger groups, such as the employed population.</p>
Suitability (and availability) of alternative sources	<p>Topics for which no alternative sources exist will receive the highest priority, while those for which alternative sources are readily available will receive the lowest priority.</p>
Comparability over time and relevancy	<p>Trend analysis requires data to be comparable over time (continuity over time). However, comparability needs will be balanced with the need for new information. Highest priority will be assigned to uses for which comparability over time is essential and still relevant.</p>

Census of Population content determination framework: Canadian context and operational considerations

The process of determining the content for the 2026 Census of Population will include a careful examination and evaluation of many criteria, some of which are in competition with each other. Furthermore, before the final recommendations for the 2026 Census of Population questions are submitted to the Government of Canada for approval, Statistics Canada must assess several important factors related to the Canadian context and allow for operational considerations.

The burden on Canadians is an important consideration in determining census content. Statistics Canada is sensitive to the burden placed upon respondents; therefore, the length and complexity of questionnaires are both considered in this respect, as is the nature of the questions (e.g., sensitivity or saliency to respondents). Societal privacy concerns have an impact on content determination as well.

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Operational factors, such as cost, data quality and data collection feasibility, also play an important role in determining census content.

Lastly, Statistics Canada is dedicated to maintaining high standards of data quality. Qualitative and quantitative testing will help ensure that the results from the 2026 Census of Population are of the highest possible quality. The findings help determine which set of collection instruments best ensures quality.

Only once all these considerations are evaluated can Statistics Canada make an informed decision about the content recommendations to put forward for the 2026 Census of Population.

2026 Census of Population content determination process: Key activities

Careful and thorough planning helps ensure the ongoing success of the Census of Population. The following activities, which are customarily part of the content determination process, will take place before the 2026 Census of Population:

Table 3
2026 Census of Population content determination process: Schedule of activities

Activities	Description	Date
Census data user consultation	Statistics Canada will undertake a nationwide consultation, inviting census data users and interested parties to convey their data needs and share their suggestions for 2026 Census of Population content. In-person meetings and teleconferences may also be held with some key stakeholders.	Fall 2022 / winter 2023
Qualitative content testing	Qualitative testing is carried out through focus groups and in-depth one-on-one interviews. Through qualitative tests, Statistics Canada obtains feedback from respondents about proposed questions and questionnaires, and tests respondents' ability and willingness to answer the questions.	Spring / summer 2023
Census of Population content test (quantitative testing)	A larger, more extensive quantitative census content test takes place after qualitative testing. It provides Statistics Canada an opportunity to assess the impact of content changes on data quality.	Spring / summer 2024
Submission to Cabinet	After testing, Statistics Canada will submit recommendations for 2026 Census of Population content to Parliament for review. Cabinet approves the final content of the Census of Population through an Order in Council.	Fall 2024 / winter 2025

For more information on the census, see the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#).

Conclusion

This consultation guide is designed to help you communicate your or your organization's census data needs and suggestions for the 2026 Census of Population. It also presents the content determination framework that serves to assess census data users' priority data needs and helps determine the content for the next census cycle.

If you need any assistance or require further information about the 2026 Census of Population content consultation process, please email the census consultation team at statcan.cpop2026consultation-consultationrpop2026.statcan@statcan.gc.ca.

A report summarizing the content consultation findings will be posted on the Statistics Canada website in 2024.

Your ongoing support is appreciated. Thank you for your participation.

Appendix A - 2021 Census of Population questions by topic

The following are the 2021 Census of Population topics and related question themes.

For the detailed questions, consult the [2021 Census of Population questionnaires](#).

Demography

- Sex at birth
- Gender
- Date of birth, age
- Legal marital status
- Common-law status

Household composition

- Relationship to other persons in the household

Languages

- Knowledge of official languages
- Knowledge of non-official languages
- Languages spoken regularly at home
- Languages spoken most often at home
- First languages first learned at home in childhood and still understood
- Languages used regularly at work
- Languages used most often at work

Canadian military experience

- Canadian military experience

Language of instruction

- Primary or secondary schooling in an English-language school in Canada
- Primary or secondary schooling in a French immersion program in an English-language school in Canada
- Primary or secondary schooling in a regular French program in a French-language school in Canada

Activities of daily living

- Difficulties seeing
- Difficulties hearing
- Difficulties walking, using stairs, using hands or fingers, or doing other physical activities
- Difficulties learning, remembering or concentrating
- Emotional, psychological or mental health conditions
- Other health problem or long-term condition that has lasted or is expected to last for six months or more

Place of birth, citizenship and immigration

- Place of birth
- Place of birth of parents

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- Canadian citizenship (by birth or naturalization)
- Other countries of citizenship
- Immigration (from linked data)

Ethnic or cultural origin

- Ethnic or cultural origin

Population groups (visible minorities)

- Population groups (visible minorities¹)

Indigenous peoples

- Indigenous identity
- Registered or treaty Indian status
- Member of a First Nation or Indian band
- Membership in a Métis organization or settlement
- Enrolment under an Inuit land claims agreement

Religion

- Religion²

Mobility

- Place of residence one year ago
- Place of residence five years ago

Education

- High school (secondary school) diploma or equivalent
- Registered apprenticeship or other trades certificate or diploma
- College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma
- University certificate, diploma or degree
- Major field of study of highest certificate, diploma or degree
- Province, territory or country where highest certificate, diploma or degree was completed
- Recent school attendance
- Type of school attended

Labour market activities

- Hours worked for pay or in self-employment
- On temporary lay-off or absent from job or business
- New job to start within four weeks of reference week

1. Increasingly, the “visible minority population” is being referred to as the “racialized population” by media, academia and other groups. For the 2021 Census of Population, Statistics Canada chose to continue to use the term “visible minority” because this is the term currently used by the federal *Employment Equity Act*. The term is also used in the 2026 Census of Population content consultation questionnaire and guide, as it reflects the question as it appeared on the 2021 Census of Population questionnaire.

2. The question about religion is included in the Census of Population every 10 years.

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- Looked for paid work in the four weeks prior to reference date
- Reasons unable to start a job
- When last worked for pay or in self-employment
- Main job – name of employer
- Main job – kind of business, industry or service
- Main job – work or occupation
- Main job – main activities at work
- Main job – class of worker
- Self-employed – incorporation status of business or farm
- Number of weeks worked for pay or self-employment
- Main reason why person did not work for the whole year
- Full time or part time paid work
- Main reason why person worked mostly part-time instead of full-time

Place of work and commuting to work

- Place of work
- Modes of transportation usually used to get to work
- Main mode of commuting to work
- Number of persons sharing ride to work
- Time person usually leaves home to go to work
- Usual number of minutes to get from home to work

Income and expenses

- Amount paid for child care
- Amount paid for child or spousal support payments
- Income (from linked data)

Housing

- Dwelling – who pays the rent or mortgage, taxes, electricity, etc., for this dwelling
- Dwelling – owned or rented, including band housing
- Dwelling – part of a condominium development
- Dwelling – number of rooms
- Dwelling – number of bedrooms
- Dwelling – period when dwelling was built
- Dwelling – need of repairs
- Dwelling – located on an agricultural operation
- Dwelling – yearly payments for electricity
- Dwelling – yearly payments for oil, gas, coal, wood or other fuels
- Dwelling – yearly payments for water and other municipal services
- Renter – monthly rent
- Renter – subsidized dwelling
- Owner – monthly mortgage or loan payments

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- Owner – property taxes (municipal and school) including estimated yearly property taxes and as part of monthly mortgage or loan payments
- Owner – estimated value of dwelling if to sell
- Owner – monthly condominium fees
- Dwelling provided by the local government, First Nation or Indian band, monthly payment paid to use or occupy this dwelling

Appendix B - 2021 Census of Population release schedule

The 2021 Census of Population produces a wide range of analyses and data, by topic, which paint a portrait of Canada. Related information is released by topic on the following dates:

Release topic	Release date
Population and dwelling counts	February 9, 2022
Age, sex at birth and gender Type of dwelling	April 27, 2022
Families, households and marital status Canadian military experience Income	July 13, 2022
Language	August 17, 2022
Indigenous peoples Housing	September 21, 2022
Immigration, place of birth and citizenship Ethnocultural and religious diversity Mobility and migration	October 26, 2022
Education Labour Language of work Commuting Instruction in the minority official language	November 30, 2022

Visit the [Census Program website](#) for the latest data releases.