



Employee Identified Learning Needs

Executive Summary

Prepared for Canada School of Public Service

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Employee Identified Learning Needs Survey

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Prepared for Canada School of Public Service by Nanos Research

June 2023

Canada School of Public Service commissioned Nanos Research to conduct an online survey of public servants to better understand their professional learning needs. A total of 8,709 public servants were surveyed from a randomly selected list provided by CSPS. The online survey was conducted between March 8th and April 6th, 2023. Twelve online focus groups were also conducted between March 27th and April 14th, 2023. This publication reports the findings of this research.

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

The Canada School of Public Service (the School) has a legislative mandate to provide a range of learning activities to build individual, organizational capacity and management excellence within the public service.

Under the Canada School of Public Service Act, the School, as a departmental corporation, is mandated to:

- encourage pride and excellence in the public service
- foster a common sense of the purposes, values and traditions of the public service
- support the growth and development of public servants
- help ensure that public servants have the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to do their jobs effectively
- assist deputy heads in meeting the learning needs of their organization
- pursue excellence in public management

To effectively deliver on its mandate into the future, the School requires information on the current and upcoming learning, training and developmental needs of federal public service learners. The School is seeking information on these needs as perceived by the learners themselves, as well as managers and executives leading teams. Further, information will be sought on what the needs of public servants are at different stages in their public service career, in designated Employment Equity or minority groups, and in various functional areas and roles.

Providing learning content and opportunities to develop the skills of the public service workforce to meet the current and future needs of Canadians is the School's number one priority.

The School engaged in a research project that comprises a Government of Canada-wide survey of public servants at all levels, in all regions, and in all types of occupational roles, to inquire about their self-perceived needs with respect to training, learning and development. This survey will provide a comprehensive learning needs assessment. A survey of this nature has not been done before and is required to meet the needs of public servants, as those needs need to be clearly identified.

The results of the research will be used by the School to inform the future allocation of departmental resources; to support our relationships and interactions with functional communities and departments across the Government of Canada; and, to ensure that external learning resources being curated and procured by the School at scale on behalf of the Government of Canada continue to meet the needs of public servants so they can meet the needs of Canadians.

The results of this research will complement the information on learning needs that currently exists within functional communities.

The primary objective of this research was to provide baseline data for the learning needs of the public service and could be conducted again in the future to capture the evolution of the needs of learners, as this data does not currently exist.

Specifically, the survey was used to inquire about public servants' needs at all levels, in all regions, and in all types of occupational roles, with respect to training, learning and development. The School will use

this information to tailor their learning products and opportunities to better align with learners needs and preferred method of learning.

To address the research objectives, an online survey and online focus groups were conducted with public servants at all groups, levels, in any location.

Methodology

Quantitative phase

The online survey is comprised of 8,709 public servants from a randomly selected list provided by CSPS, between March 8th and April 6th, 2023. The survey was provided in English and French and was distributed to 99,920 randomly selected public servants.

The margin of error for a random survey of 8,709 public servants is plus or minus 1.0 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty (a confidence interval of 95 per cent). The response rate for the survey was 9%.

Nanos provided instructions to the CSPS team on randomly selecting 100,000 records from their database through the use of a randomization formula. Once CSPS made the random selection, the database selection was reviewed by CSPS and then a password protected file was provided to Nanos. The randomization method ensured the database was representative of all departments across the public service. The decision was made to randomly select 100,000 records based on an estimated response rate of 12%.

The survey was also available via an open link on the CSPS website, to collect respondents' self-perceived training, learning and development needs.

All respondents self-administered the survey online.

Qualitative phase

Nanos conducted 12 online focus groups among 87 public servants, recruited from survey respondents who expressed interest in participating. The groups were conducted between March 27th and April 14th, 2023. Ten (10) focus groups were conducted in English and two (2) in French.

Readers should note that focus group research is qualitative and directional in nature and must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion. The focus group research allowed CSPS to gauge the views and gather in-depth insights from public servants, including specific profiles of interest.

The composition of the groups was as follows:

Online, Group 1 – National Capital Region	(ENG)
Online, Group 2 – Non-National Capital Region	(ENG)
Online, Group 3 – Visible Minority	(ENG)
Online, Group 4 – Visible Minority	(ENG)
Online, Group 5 – New Public Servants	(ENG)
Online, Group 6 – Service Providers	(ENG)
Online, Group 7 – Disability	(ENG)
Online, Group 8 – Disability	(ENG)

Online, Group 9 – Visible Minority (ENG)
Online, Group 10 – Disability (ENG)
Online, Group 11 – National Capital Region (FR)
Online, Group 12 – Non-National Capital Region (FR)

The research was commissioned by CSPA and was conducted by Nanos Research.

Key findings

Quantitative Findings

a. Value Provided

- Overall, a majority of responding public servants who report they have participated in professional learning on various topics said the learning provided value to them, with the highest average value rating being provided to communication skills and leadership (mean of 7.7 each out of 10), where close to three in four each (75%) say it provided them a lot of value (score of 7 to 10 out of 10). This is followed closely by training for functional specialists (mean of 7.5), business skills (mean of 7.4) and Indigenous reconciliation (mean of 7.3).

A comparatively lower intensity of value was given to professional learning on product management, agile and design (mean of 7.1), diversity, equity and inclusion (mean of 7.0) and general knowledge on government operations (mean of 6.9).

b. Level of interest in learning more

- Responding public servants who report they have taken professional learning on various topics indicated they have the most interest in learning more about leadership (mean of 7.8), followed by use of data literacy (mean of 7.6), communication skills and digital technology and working in a digital age (mean of 7.5 each). Responding public servants had a lower intensity of interest in taking additional learning on general knowledge on government operations and delegation of authorities (mean of 6.2 each).

c. Applying learning to job/career

- Communication skills top the list when it comes to the type of professional learning that public servants were able to apply the most to their jobs and/or careers (mean of 7.8). This was followed by leadership (mean of 7.5), digital technology and working in a digital age (mean of 7.5), collaboration, and training for functional specialists (mean of 7.4 each). Responding public servants indicated they were the able to apply the least from professional learning on diversity, equity and inclusion (mean of 6.4) and Indigenous Reconciliation to their job and/or career (mean of 5.6).

d. Level of interest in taking professional learning

- Among those who report they have not taken professional learning on the topic(s), digital technology and working in a digital age received the highest mean interest score (mean of 7.3 of 10), followed by professional learning on communication skills and leadership (mean of 7.0 each), while product management, agile and design received the lowest intensity of interest (mean of 4.5).

e. Value in participating in professional learning

- Over seven in ten public servants (73% with a score of 7-10) who report they have not taken professional learning in the area rated communication skills as something that would be valuable if they were to participate in it (mean of 7.6). This was followed by professional learning on leadership (mean of 7.2), mental health and wellbeing (mean of 6.9) and digital technology and working in a digital age (mean of 6.8).
- A lower intensity of perceived value is given to delegation of authorities, Indigenous reconciliation and training for functional specialists (mean of 5.4 each) and product management, agile, design (mean of 4.5) with over a third of responding public servants (36%) who think this would not be valuable to them (score of 0 to 3 out of 10).

f. Obtaining knowledge

- Responding public servants are two times more likely to say much more knowledge is needed to perform at their job (45%) (score of 7-10 out of 10) rather than little or no knowledge needed (22%), and one third say they need a moderate amount of additional knowledge (33%).
- They rank on-the-job learning first (26%) in terms of the most effective learning method for them when it comes to obtaining knowledge, closely followed by online self-paced courses (22%) and in-person classroom learning (15%).

g. Obtaining skills

- Around one in three responding public servants each say there are much more new skills needed for them to perform at their job (38%) (score of 7-10 out of 10) or few to no new skills needed (31%) (score of 0-3 out of 10). Another third say they need a moderate amount of new skills (30%).
- Respondents again ranked on-the-job learning as the most effective learning method when it comes to them obtaining new skills (30%), with 16 per cent each ranking online self paced or in-person classroom learning first.

h. Barriers and factors impacting participation

- A third of public servants rank the relevance of the topic to their work (33%) as the biggest factor that impacts their decision to participate in a particular professional learning activity. This is followed by the workload (21%) and their personal interest in the topic (17%).
- Ahead of all other potential barriers encountered when trying to participate in professional learning activities in the past is a lack of time and operational requirements (63%), followed by courses not being offered (31%), not being available (31%) and being full (31%).

i. Sources for professional learning

- A majority of responding public servants say the Canada School of Public service is one of their main sources of professional learning (85%). One third of respondents selected a college or university (32%) as one of their main sources, followed by online sites (28%), industry associations (12%) and non-profits (10%).

j. Value and interest in learning more by key demographic attributes

- **Age**

- Across nearly all age groups, communication skills and leadership is a top learning area for value, the exception is those 24 and under who found slightly more value in training on business skills (mean of 8.1) rather than communication skills (mean of 7.5), and those 25-29 who found more value in learning on diversity, equity and inclusion (mean of 7.4), and mental health and wellbeing (mean of 8.0) with a mean of 7.1 for communication skills.
- Leadership is also a top learning area in terms of interest in learning more, as is digital technology (especially for those 55 and older, mean of 7.7) and the use of data literacy. Public servants 24 and under are most interested in learning more about business skills (mean of 8.1) and Indigenous reconciliation (mean of 7.9).

- **Gender**

- Both men and women place a high value on learning taken on communication skills (mean of 7.7 each), while women placed a slightly higher value on learning on leadership (women: mean of 7.9; men: mean of 7.4).
- Women are also more interested in learning more on leadership (mean of 8.0) and communication skills (mean of 7.6), while men are most interested in learning on digital technology and working in a digital age (mean of 7.6) and the use of data and data literacy (mean of 7.9).

- **Region**

- Both NCR and non-NCR residents place a high overall value on learning taken on leadership (mean of 7.7 each), while non-NCR residents also highly value communication skills (mean of 7.9 overall) and NCR residents rate training for functional specialists as the second most valuable learning area for them on average (mean of 7.4).
- Leadership training was also the learning area with the most interest in learning more for both NCR (mean of 7.7) and non-NCR residents (mean of 7.8), as well as across all provinces excluding NCR residents, with the exception of Newfoundland and Saskatchewan residents who gave higher ratings to other learning areas.
- Residents of Nova Scotia (mean of 8.2), PEI (mean of 7.6) and Saskatchewan (mean of 7.5) rate learning on mental health and wellbeing as a top area of interest for learning more for them, and Newfoundland residents give learning on digital technology and working in a digital age a top score in terms of interest (mean of 8.4).

- **Employee Role**

- Communication skills is a top valued learning area across all employee roles, with leadership also being highly valued. Executives gave the highest value score to collaboration (mean of 7.9) and communication skills (mean of 7.8), while new public servants most valued communication skills (mean of 8.3) and learning on Indigenous reconciliation (mean of 8.0).

- In terms of their interest in learning more, use of data and data literacy was a top area of interest, as well as leadership for all employee roles. New public servants are also highly interested in learning on product management, agile and design (mean of 7.8), Indigenous reconciliation (mean of 7.9), business skills (mean of 7.8) and collaboration (mean of 7.8).
- **Employee Status**
 - A high value score was given to learning on Indigenous reconciliation for term (mean of 8.1), casual (mean of 8.3) and student employees (mean of 7.9), while term (mean of 8.1) and casual employees (mean of 8.7) also highly valued learning on leadership and student employees valued learning on business skills (mean of 7.9). For indeterminate employees, learning on communication skills (mean of 7.6) and leadership (mean of 7.6) were most valuable to them.
 - Regarding their interest in learning more in these areas, indeterminate employees have the highest level of interest in learning on leadership (mean of 7.7) and the use of data and data literacy (mean of 7.6), while term employees are most interesting in learning more about leadership (mean of 8.2) and communication skills (mean of 8.1). Casual and student employees are highly interested in learning more on Indigenous reconciliation (casual: mean of 8.2; student: mean of 8.0), while students also want to learn more on business skills (mean of 7.8) and casual employees want to learn more about mental health and wellbeing (mean of 8.2).
- **Tenure**
 - Employees who have been with the government for less than 5 years place the highest value on learning they took on communication skills (<1 year: mean of 8.2; 1-5 years: mean of 7.9), with those who have worked less than one year also highly valuing learning on Indigenous reconciliation (mean of 8.1) and those with a tenure of 1-5 years highly valuing learning on business skills (mean of 7.7). Learning on leadership was a top valued area for employees across all higher levels of tenure (6-25 plus years), with communication skills also being highly valued.
 - Across nearly all tenure levels, employees are most interested in learning more about leadership, as well as the use of data and data literacy. Those who have been with the government for less than a year are also highly interested in more learning on communication skills (mean of 8.1), while those who have been with the government for more than 25 years are most interested in more learning on digital technology and working in a digital age (mean of 7.5) and mental health and wellbeing (mean of 7.7).
- **Language**
 - Communication skills and leadership were highly valued learning areas by participants across all language profiles (in terms of their First Official Language and the language they use the most at work). Individuals who report often speaking in a language other than English or French also highly value learning on collaboration (mean of 8.2), and those whose First Official Language is neither English nor French highly value learning on digital technology and working in a digital age (mean of 7.9).

- In terms of their interest in learning more, across all language profiles leadership was top rated, as was the use of data and data literacy. Those whose First Official Language is neither English nor French are also highly interested in taking more learning on communication skills (mean of 8.1), as are those who primarily speak French at work (mean of 8.0).
- **Disability**
 - Leadership and communication skills are highly valued by individuals regardless of whether they self-identify as having a disability or not, while those who identify as having a disability also highly valued learning on the use of data and data literacy (mean of 7.6).
 - Individuals who self-identify as having a disability are also highly interested in learning more on leadership (mean of 7.9), as are those individuals who do not identify as having a disability (mean of 7.7), and those with a disability are highly interested in learning more on the use of data and data literacy (mean of 8.0).
- **Ethnic Community**
 - There is quite a bit of variance across ethnic communities in terms of the value they received from learning in different areas, with those who identify as Chinese or Black giving the highest level of value to communication skills, with Black identifying individuals also highly valuing learning on leadership. Those who self-identify as South Asian highly value learning on digital technology and working in a digital age and collaboration. Of note, individuals who self-identify as Metis, mixed descent, First Nations, Black and Latin American place a high value on learning on Indigenous reconciliation, while those who identify as Arab gave this a much lower value score (3.9).
 - Learning on leadership and business skills are both areas of interest for learning more across most of the ethnic communities, as is Indigenous reconciliation (again given a low score of 3.7 by those who identify as Arab).
- **Classification Group**
 - Value of learning varies by classification group, with indigenous reconciliation, training for functional specialists, leadership, and communication skills being the learning areas most often receiving a top score for the different groups.
 - Interest in learning more also varies across the groups, however leadership was given a top score by eight of the 12 classification groups. Learning on Indigenous reconciliation and use of data and data literacy were also rated a top score by multiple classification groups.
- **Classification Level**
 - Learning on leadership was given a top score for value by all classification levels (ranging from 7.6 out of 10 to 8.2), and communication skills was given a top score by nearly all levels.
 - Leadership also received top scores for interest in learning more by all classification levels, while use of data and data literacy and communication skills also frequently received top scores for this within each classification level.

- **Functional Area**
 - Indigenous reconciliation, communication skills and training for functional specialists received top value scores from a number of functional areas. Those in the client contact centre gave high mean value scores across all learning areas, ranging from 7.4 for knowledge on government operations to 8.3 for communication skills.
 - In terms of interest in learning more, once again communication skills and leadership often receive top scores within each functional area, as did use of data and data literacy, and digital technology and working in a digital age. Again, those in the client contact centre functional area gave high average scores across all learning areas, with the highest mean given to leadership (mean of 8.3).

Qualitative Findings

a. Opportunities and barriers

- Certification and/or recognition was most likely to motivate participating public servants to participate in more professional learning activities, followed by relevant and more advanced training tailored for their specific role. Time was mentioned as a top barrier for participating in more professional learning activities and supports needed to address this barrier were having allocated time in their schedule for training, support from management, and having courses be available at multiple times/on different days.
- Many participants mentioned that the dissemination of course information and availability was an important support they need to participate in the professional learning activities they are interested in. This dissemination could include clear course descriptions, learning outcomes, and even a learning path to connect multiple courses to desired outcomes.

b. Learning experience

- Aspects of a positive learning experience most often mentioned by participating public servants were a good instructor, the quality of the content and delivery, and applicability of the content. Conversely, participating public servants most often mentioned a bad instructor, poor delivery of the content and not being able to apply the learnings in their job as aspects of a negative learning experience.

c. Methods of learning

- Participating public servants commonly said that acquiring knowledge was best suited for online learning, while learning a new skill was best suited for in-person learning. Many participants mentioned that in-person group learning was their preferred method, while some said they preferred a mix of methods including online self-paced and online in a group setting.
- Benefits of online solo learning included flexibility in scheduling and allowing them to go at their own pace, while drawbacks included a lack of engagement and that it can be harder to focus on the learnings. Online learning in a group setting was thought to be beneficial by offering more opportunities for engagement than solo learning and being

accessible both in terms of travel/mobility, as well as availability of supports such as closed captioning. Drawbacks mentioned by participants were similar to those of online solo learning such as limited engagement, as some participants will keep their cameras/microphones off and that it is easy to multitask and tune in and out of the learning activity.

- Benefits of in-person group learning mentioned by participants included networking and making new connections, less distractions, better flow for discussions and even class structure (i.e. regular breaks which can often be neglected when at home), and the ability to learn from your peers or gain different perspectives. Drawbacks of in-person learning in a group setting mentioned by participants were namely cost, approvals for in-person activities often being harder to get, and time management.

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For more information, contact Department at

This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify, as a Representative of Nanos Research, that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Government of Canada's Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, party standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.



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