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Briefing Note

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Implications of Proposed Changes to
Statistics Canada's Census Long Form & Data Collection Model

Issue / Background:

On June 26th, the Government of Canada announced its intention in *Canada Gazette, Part I* of doing away with the 35-year-old Statistics Canada long census form for the 2011 Census and will replace it with a voluntary "National Household Survey". By all accounts, the Government provided no indication of its intention to eliminate the long census form during Statistics Canada's pre-2011 Census consultation with municipalities, provincial officials, academia the NGO community and other stakeholders. A spokesperson for Industry Minister Tony Clement has confirmed that the decision to change the 2011 Census came from the federal government and not from the Ministry (Industry Canada) or Statistics Canada, stating "this change was made to reasonably limit what many Canadians felt was an intrusion on their personal privacy."

The Census has been traditionally comprised of two census forms: a short and a long form. The completion of both forms is mandatory. The short form is sent to 100% of Canadians and contains the following data: age, gender, martial status, household characteristics (e.g., number of dependents), and mother tongue language. The long form is sent to one in five Canadians (20% sample) and extrapolated to the rest of the population. The long census form is the only source of regular, detailed, and consistent data (35 year archive of directly comparable data) on socio-economic information. Census long form data includes information on activity limitations, ethnicity, culture, immigrant status, income, education, labour force, housing, and other vital information about Canadians, enabling analyses at a local, regional and national scales.

The City of Toronto relies upon the long form census data generated by Statistics Canada as part of the core data sets that guide the City's program planning and targeted funding allocations for a variety of human services and supports. As with other municipalities and community-based service and funder organizations, the integrity of Statistics Canada's long form census data is paramount in ensuring the City is maximizing its resource allocations to meet the needs of Torontonians. The proposed shift to a less-accurate long form census data collection model presents a significant challenge for the City of Toronto's place-based service delivery planning and community investment mechanisms across a range of human services and supports.

Key Points:

Proposed Changes to the 2011 Census
- The 2011 Census will consist of the same eight questions that appeared on the 2006 Census short-form questionnaire and past Census. The information previously collected by the long-form census questionnaire will be collected as part of the new *voluntary* National Household Survey (NHS).
- The new NHS will cover most of the same topics as the 2006 Census, but will exclude the question asking for consent to release personal census information after 92 years, as consent is only required for mandatory census data. (i.e. Those previously unwilling to grant consent now simply do not have to respond to any of the NHS' eight questions, as all information is provided voluntarily.)

- Statistics Canada has not yet released the questions that will be asked under the NHS, although a Ministry spokesperson has stated the NHS questions will be the same as the long form questions of the 2006 census.

- The National Household Survey will be conducted within four weeks of the May 2011 Census and will be sent to approximately 4.5 million Canadian households (one-in-three Canadians). This represents a 13% increase in distribution compared to the 2006 Census long form, albeit without a legal mandate to respond to NHS questions.

- Peter Morrison, Statistics Canada's Assistant Chief Statistician responsible for census and operations, has confirmed that Statistics Canada does not have a target response rate for the NHS to ensure adequate national coverage, nor is he aware of any other country that collects census data in the manner of Statistics Canada's newly mandated model.

- Statistics Canada and census long form data users have identified a number of expected impacts resulting from the shift to the NHS model:

  ➢ Data Accuracy:
    Statistics Canada A/Director General Rosemary Bender has acknowledged, "…that we may not get the same level of detail [from the NHS] as that of the census". The nature of volunteer surveys means that the resulting data will not be objective and thus reliable as a resource for effective service planning. Certain groups of Canadians and regions of Canada might be more inclined not to fill out the form, skewing the results. Essentially asking more people to voluntarily complete the NHS questionnaire does not mean that the data generated will be useable or is comparable to the traditional mandatory long form census data.

  – Costs:
    Initial Statistics Canada cost estimates to implement the NHS model indicates, "the cost of the change could reach $30 million… $5 million for the additional mail-out, and $25 million in case there is a major problem in getting people to respond". Given the current Statistics Canada funding model, these additional costs may be passed on to users of NHS data.

  – Data Comparability over Time:
    By definition, a change in statistical collection methodology precludes direct statistical comparison of data gathered before and after the change. To date, Statistics Canada's adherence to the same statistical collection methodology for 35 years has allowed for accurate data comparison and invaluable trend analysis. While some comparative analysis may be possible between previous long form census data and NHS model data, direct accurate data comparison and trend analysis will not be possible.

  – Data Availability:
    Variations in sampling in different jurisdictions could render data dissemination at smaller geography levels impossible (e.g., Toronto neighbourhoods, Wards, Service Delivery Areas, Census Tracts or Dissemination Areas). The result would be the provision of data at higher levels of geography to maintain statistically accurate analysis, rendering NHS model data's use for local place-based planning difficult or not possible.

Implications for the City of Toronto

- The City relies on Statistics Canada's long form census data as a vital resource to help better understand the socio-economic characteristics of Toronto residents on geographic, demographic and ethno-cultural levels. Long form census data is vital for the planning of efficient and targeted social, health and other community services and development of effective strategies to manage the growth of the city's economy, build form and transportation networks.

- The federal government's decision to mandate the NHS model will hinder the City's ability to accurately develop plans and policies for a wide range of service delivery requirements -- from immigrant settlement programs to public transit design.

- The City and makes extensive use of Statistics Canada's long form census data in the development of program/project funding proposals for other orders of government. Provincial and federal governments continue to press for more detailed program/project funding submissions (often involving micro-geographic, socio-economic, demographic and/or ethno-cultural data) in keeping with expanded accountability frameworks. The mandated shift to the NHS model may hamper the City's ability to develop successful program/project funding submissions and/or require the City to allocate additional program/project funds to generate data profiles previously available from the long form census model.

- Areas of work that may be impacted by the mandated shift to the NHS model of particular concern to the City include:

  - Transfer Funding from Other Orders of Government: Many of the City of Toronto's cost-shared programs and transfer-fund supported projects are based on data that is, in part, derived from an accurate and complete enumeration of Toronto residents. Accurate statistics are important to determine the needs of communities and directly affect education, day care, transportation, health care and other services that will be provided in those areas.

  - Targeted, Place-Based Investment in Neighbourhoods and Communities: The City's targeted, placed-based approach to service coordination and investment is predicated on the City's ability to employ accurate neighbourhood-level data profiles. As a result of the City's access to reliable local census long form data, strategic approaches to community development such as the 13 Priority Neighbourhoods for Investment have been implemented. Place-based strategies currently in development (e.g. the Community Partnership Strategy/Neighbourhood Well-Being Indices, Community Hub Strategy, Neighbourhood Revitalization Strategies) will require access to neighbourhood-level data profiles of equal quality to the census long form data to accurately inform service provision and neighbourhood investment priorities going forward.

  - Official Plan Revisions: City Planning has traditionally used census long form data to understand changing patterns of growth and neighbourhood shifts in preparing updates to the Toronto Official Plan, related Secondary Plans and Ontario Municipal Board proceedings. It is unclear if data generated by the newly mandated NHS model will be sufficient for City Planning's operational needs.

  - Labour Market Development Strategies: Both the Economic Development & Culture and Toronto Employment and Social Services Divisions employ census long form data relating to workforce profiles in the development of local and city-wide labour market development strategies. As this work entails significant trend and service gap analysis, accuracy of data over an extended time is critical. It is unclear if the mandated shift to the NHS model will provide data of equivalent quality to census long form data.

  - Childcare Provision: Children's Services has incorporated census long form data as part of its childcare subsidies equity formulas. Equitable funding distribution requires a significant level of accurate local data to ensure funding distribution effectively addresses areas of greatest need. It is unclear at this time if the mandated NHS model will continue to provide a sufficient level of data required by Children's Services.

  - Immigration Settlement: The City's coordinated immigration settlement and support services require accurate local profiles of recent immigrant settlement in Toronto to effectively plan and provide services for a highly mobile and diverse clientele. Census long form data has traditionally provided both the depth of data and the ability for trend analysis required to support immigration settlement

services' needs, however it is unclear if the mandated NHS model data will provide the same analytical depth or trend analysis going forward.

– Recreation Service Planning: Different socio-economic, demographic and ethno-cultural groups have different recreation service requirements. To effectively respond to local recreational needs and ensure effective recreational services planning going forward, Parks, Forestry & Recreation has drawn upon census long form data to inform is work. It is unclear at this time if the mandated NHS model data will provide a similar level of local detail to support the Division's strategic planning efforts.

– Service Provision Report Cards: The City has periodically published 'report cards' on various human services areas over the past 20 years, relying on census long form data to inform City staff's analyses. Key 'report cards' have included the Children's Report Card, the Housing & Homelessness Report Card, Toronto Public Health's Health Inequalities Report, and Senior's Task Force Reports. It remains unclear at this time if the mandated NHS model will be capable of providing the same quality and depth of data analysis required to inform the development of future City 'report cards'.

– Integrated Transportation Strategies: Similar to City Planning's work, the development of local and city-wide integrated transportation strategies draws upon census long form data to develop clear profiles of who uses transportation networks and how such networks impact their surrounding neighbourhoods. Continued effective development of integrated transportation strategies will require accurate neighbourhood, regional and city-wide residential profiles. It remains unclear at this time if the mandated NHS model will be capable of providing such data on a consistent basis.

– Ward and Neighbourhood Profiles, and Social Atlas: Using census long form data, the City-generated ward, neighbourhood and social atlas profiles are heavily-used by the community-based service organizations to support funding application development, community needs assessments, service program development, etc. There were close to 100,000 website visits to the Neighbourhood Profiles alone in 2009. It is unclear if the mandated NHS model will provide sufficient accurate data to support regular continued updating of these valuable profiles.

– Community Social Data Strategy: A consortia comprised of City Divisions, the Toronto District School Board and over 50 community-based service organizations that has access to census data at detailed geographies for their planning purposes has been coordinated by the City. Community-based service organizations target areas where a specific population needs services through the Community Social Data Strategy, supplementing the efforts of the City and Toronto District School Board. As such, it is very important that the census data accessed through the Community Social Data Strategy is wholly representative of Toronto residents to give an accurate portrait for service planning and needs identification. Data identifying areas of poverty/low-income and high concentrations of elderly or single parent households are of particular interest to Strategy members. It is unclear if the mandated NHS model will continue to produce sufficient accurate data to respond to the needs of the Community Social Data Strategy.

Questions & Answers

Q: Is the federal government's decision to change the 2011 census' model final?
A: It is unclear if the federal government's change is final. Traditionally, changes to an upcoming census' format are published in the *Canada Gazette* in advance of the census being finalized – as occurred in the June 26, 2010 issue of the *Canada Gazette*. That being said, it is also clear that this change is not one

recommended by either Statistics Canada or Industry Canada (oversees Statistics Canada) staff, and as such is a political decision and somewhat more subject to public pressure.

Q: How are Census long form data stakeholders responding to the change?

A: Within the City, SDFA research staff have informed other Divisions of the change and are coordinating Divisional responses/briefings through the PCT research representatives. SDFA research staff are also engaging the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) through our representation on the Quality-of-Life-Reporting System, and Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) because of SDFA's involvement as local lead for the Community Social Data Strategy. A conference call among national representatives of both groups is scheduled for July 6th, to develop an appropriate national response from both groups.

City staff also understand the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) has been notified through other municipalities and is considering its response. In addition, a variety of academic researchers/research networks and community-based organizations have expressed significant concern over the federal government's mandated change and are developing advocacy strategies opposing the change.

The mandated shift to the NHS model has also attracted growing press attention following an initial series of reports by the Canadian Press. A Google News search on the story on July 2nd at 6pm recorded 173 news stories on the change published in the last seven days, most notably including a July 2nd Montreal Gazette editorial calling on the Government of Canada to reverse its decision.

Q: Are the eight National Household Survey questions public?

A: Not at this time. City staff have been told the questions will be made public later this month.

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