



Looking into and out for Canada's charities and nonprofits

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Examiner et renforcer des organismes de bienfaisance et sans but lucratif au Canada

Ottawa, July 20, 2010

Hon. Tony Clement, PC, MP
Minister of Industry
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5

Dear Minister:

I am writing to express Imagine Canada's disappointment and concern about the decision to replace the long-form census survey with a voluntary household survey. Imagine Canada is a national umbrella for charitable and nonprofit organizations across Canada.

Statistics Canada is rightly seen as a world leader in the collection and development of accurate and timely data. This reputation has been earned, in no small part, through Statistics Canada's excellent development and stewardship of the census.

In recent years a great deal of work has been done to strengthen access to and utilization of census data. The Data Liberation Initiative, spearheaded by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, opened up census data to universities across the country, not only allowing them to improve the quality of their research but to help train the next generation of researchers and strengthen Canada's capacity to develop sound policy. The Community Social Data Strategy, developed by the Canadian Council on Social Development, improved access to census data to municipalities and community organizations. There have been a number of such initiatives that have led to census data now being used much more widely and effectively than at any time in the past. At a time of significant public policy challenges, we should be trying to build on this success.

Many charities and nonprofits use census data and census-derived data to develop their own approaches to ensure that the services they provide respond to the unique needs of their communities. Imagine Canada itself makes extensive use of census-derived data to better understand the nonprofit sector and to identify emerging trends and issues to which the sector needs to respond in order to continue to effectively serve individuals and communities across the country.

Without the accurate representative data that the long form census provides, the sector will lose a significant resource that has been essential for developing its responses to the economic, social, environmental and cultural challenges that face communities across Canada.

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Moreover, the long form census provides the foundation on which the vast majority of other surveys and data initiatives are based; without the accurate and statistically valid data provided by the long form census, there would be great difficulty in developing the weighting and methodology for any other survey. We have serious concerns about the impact this will have on, for example, the *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* – a world-leading initiative that informs the nonprofit sector’s thinking and actions.

The world has seen Canada as a leader in data and statistics, largely due to the rigor of Statistics Canada’s methodology – which is itself underpinned by the long form census. We find it extremely difficult to comprehend why Canada would abandon its leadership role at this time. It is puzzling that Canada would replace the system that has served us so well with a voluntary survey that will be less accurate and limit our ability to measure trends over time as it will not be compatible with previously compiled data. In the long term, this will do serious harm to the ability of governments, nonprofits, and businesses to plan and improve their activities.

Imagine Canada urges you to reconsider this decision. The 2011 census should be conducted in the same way as past censuses; if there are proposals to improve the administration of future censuses, these should be subject to broad consultation so that other levels of government, charities and nonprofits, and the private sector can bring their perspective to the table.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marcel Lauzière', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marcel Lauzière
President & CEO

cc: Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Hon. James Flaherty, PC, MP
Hon. Diane Finley, PC, MP