

2021 June SCOOP Mixed Topic Survey: Return to In-person Engagement



Research Results

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In June 2021, Strathcona County conducted an online survey as part of its Strathcona County Online Opinion Panel (SCOOP) initiative. This project, entitled *the Mixed Topic Survey*, consisted of different survey areas whereby only a limited number of questions were asked within one or more topic areas and was exclusive to residents who signed up to be part of SCOOP. The June 2021 mixed topic survey consisted of three distinct topic areas: Creeks and waterways in Strathcona County, returning to in-person engagement, and Strathcona County's preschool programs.

This report presents results pertaining to the County returning to in-person engagement. Obtaining primary data from residents directly will provide Strathcona County departments with information and enable County officials to make decisions that accurately reflect the perspectives and attitudes of residents. This report will provide a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results. The results from this study were prepared by Phil Kreisel, Ph.D. (Communications); SPSS was used for the data analysis.

A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation of this survey can be found in the next section of this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. The Questionnaire

The questions used in this study were new, using questions that were submitted by department representatives who deal with in-person public engagement. The survey was then created, reviewed and modified where necessary by members of Survey Central for wording, question ordering and general understanding. This included a final check of the content by FOIP¹ prior to the release of the survey to the public.

B. Sampling Design and Data Collection Procedure

The sample frame used in this study consisted of 576 people who did one or more parts of the June 2021 survey. All participants were drawn from people who had previously signed up to be part of SCOOP, Strathcona County's online opinion panel. Overall, 74% of the participants lived in the urban area, 23.4% came from rural parts of Strathcona County, and the remaining 2.6% worked in Strathcona County but did not live there.

Although poll-based data is derived from people who decide to participate, were not randomly selected and have access to the online poll, the margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is $\pm 4.1\%$, 19 times out of 20.²

During the fielding of the survey, respondents had the option to skip a section if they felt that the topic had no relevance to them.

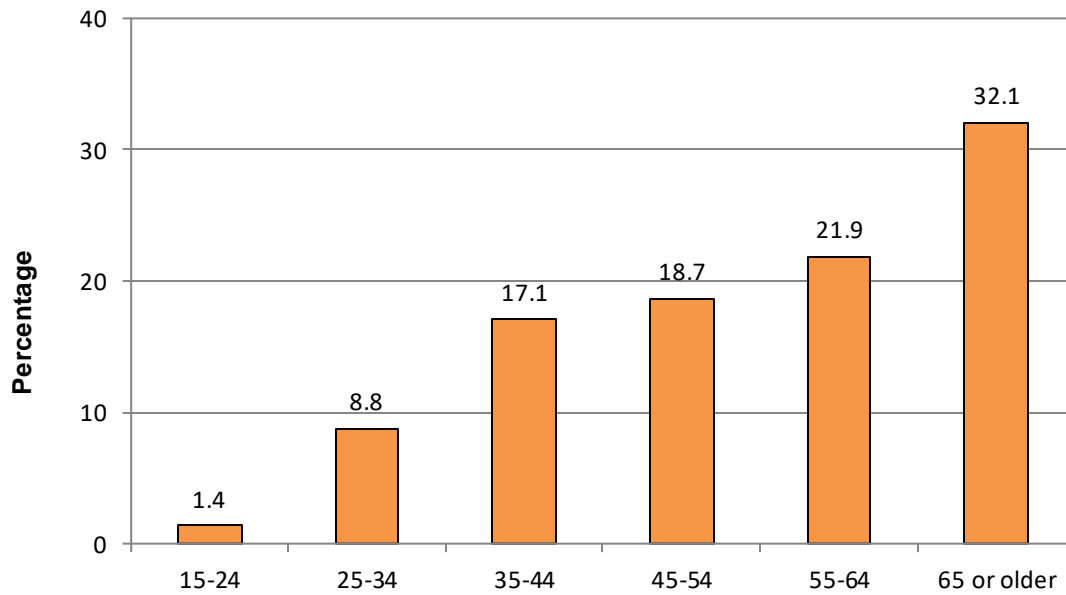
As seen in Figure 1, most of the respondents who participated in the survey are over the age of 44, with 25.9% of the participants between the

¹ FOIP stands for Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and was reviewed by selected members from Strathcona County's Legislation and Legal Department (LLS).

² The $\pm 4.1\%$ is the *margin of error* associated with this study and refers to the potential percentage spread that exists within answers to questions. This means that an answer could be up to 4.1% higher or lower than what is reported. Please note, however, that the data was gathered through an online survey and no controls were undertaken to make this a random sample.

age of 25 and 44. Only a very small percentage of participants were under 25. Overall, 58.7% of participants were female while 41.3% were male.

FIGURE 1
Age of Respondents



III. SURVEY RESULTS

A. In-Person Engagement

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about returning to participate in in-person engagement events for Strathcona County. Overall, 88.7% of the participants opted to answer questions from this topic. This topic arose as a result of restrictions surrounding COVID-19; since March 2020, the County temporarily halted all public engagement, and in June 2020 began focusing on online engagement only.

Initially, respondents were asked if they had participated in any digital engagements with the County since COVID restrictions went into effect. Overall, the majority of participants (85.1%) had done at least one online survey prior to the June mixed topic survey. It was also determined that 31.7% participated in at least one of the SCOOP discussion boards and 21.8% participated in a digital face-to-face engagement via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Only a small percentage (8.3%) had not done any type of online engagement prior to this June mixed topic survey.

A further analysis revealed that outside of the 8.3% who had not done any type of online engagement:

- 52.7% had done one of the three types of engagement; the one most done often was the online survey;
- 31.1% had done two of the three forms of engagement; and
- 7.9% did all three forms noted above.

In terms of demographics, an examination of age groups revealed the following trends:

- For the SCOOP discussion boards, participation was highest among those aged 15-34 (at 40%), and continued to drop as respondents grew older (31.9% of those aged 35-64 and 26.8% from those aged 65 or older);

- Participation in online surveys was strong among all three age groups (15-34 @ 80%; 35-64 @ 86.3%; and aged 65 or older @ 85%);
- Digital face-to-face engagement was higher among older respondents (35-64 @ 21.8% and aged 65 or older @ 22.9%) compared to those under the age of 35 (16%).

A comparison of males and females revealed the following trends:

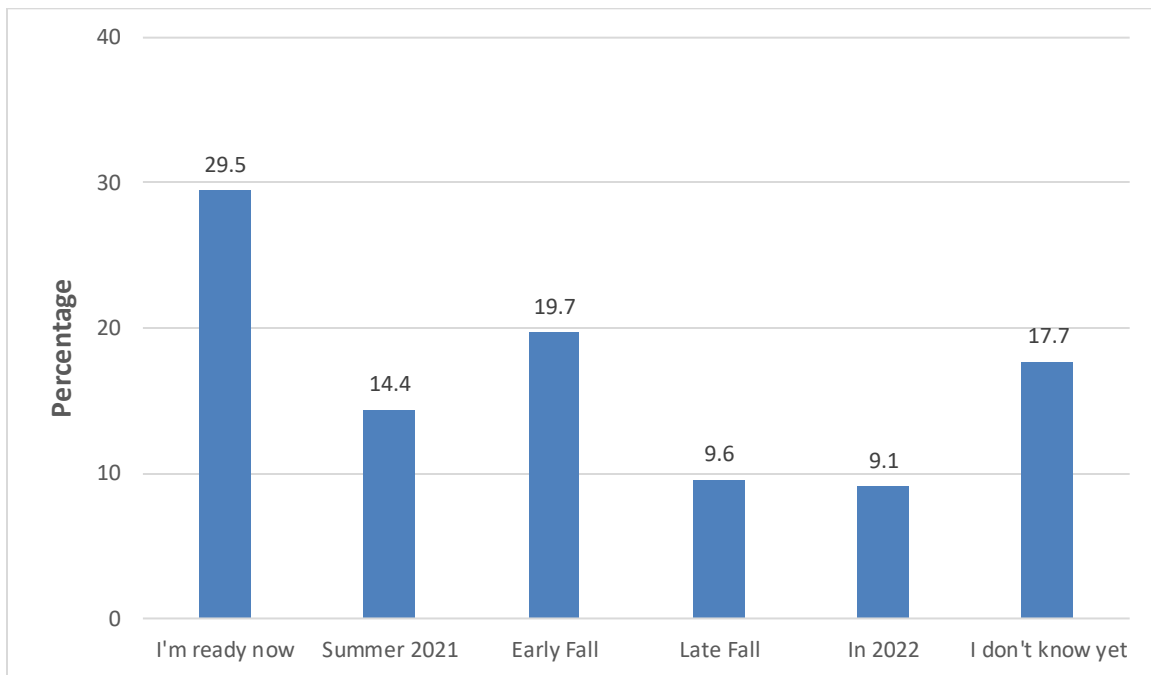
- For the SCOOP discussion boards, a higher percentage of males (36.8%) took part in this form of engagement compared to females (28.8%);
- More females (88.3%) participated in online surveys than males (81.9%);
- Digital face-to-face engagement was about the same for males (19.7%) and females (22.8%).

With respect to urban and rural residents:

- For the SCOOP discussion boards, a higher percentage of rural residents (38.4%) took part in this form of engagement compared to residents who lived in Sherwood Park (29.5%);
- Proportionally, more rural residents (87.5%) participated in online surveys than urban residents (83.9%);
- Digital face-to-face engagement was almost the same regardless of where the respondents lived (21.1% urban and 21.4% rural).

All respondents were then asked about when they might be ready to do an in-person public engagement event with Strathcona County. A summary of these options is presented in Figure 2 below. A person's readiness does vary, though it can be seen that 63.6% would be ready by early Fall (Sept/Oct) of this year.

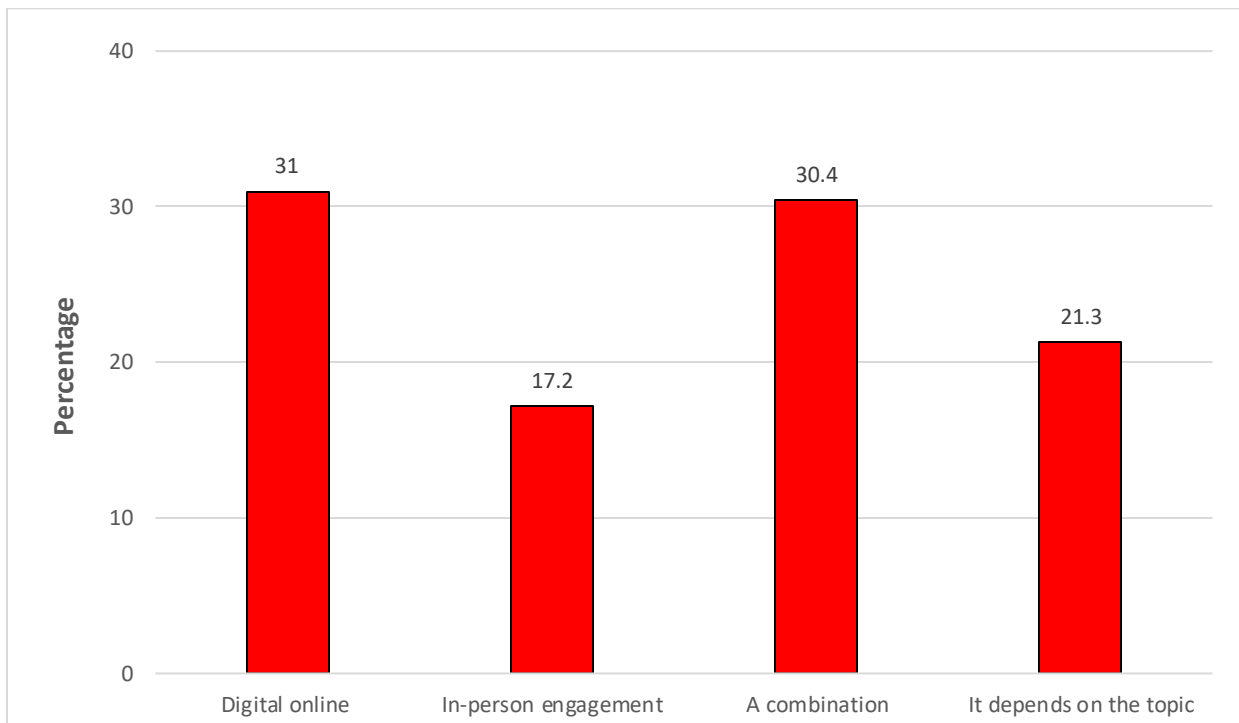
FIGURE 2
Readiness to return to in-person engagement events



A further examination by gender revealed that males were ready now (41.8%) compared to females (20.8%). A considerably higher percentage of females (22.3%) didn't know when they'd be ready compared to males who felt that way (10.8%). One's age did not enter into the readiness factor to any great extent, though it was seen that younger people were more willing to be ready now compared to older age groups. Where one lived was not a major factor influencing when people would be ready to do in-person engagement events.

All respondents were then asked about preferences toward digital engagement and in-person engagement. It can be seen in Figure 3 that overall, people were leaning toward a digital or a combination of digital and in-person engagement as opposed to a sole in-person engagement experience. Just over 21% felt that it would depend on the topic.

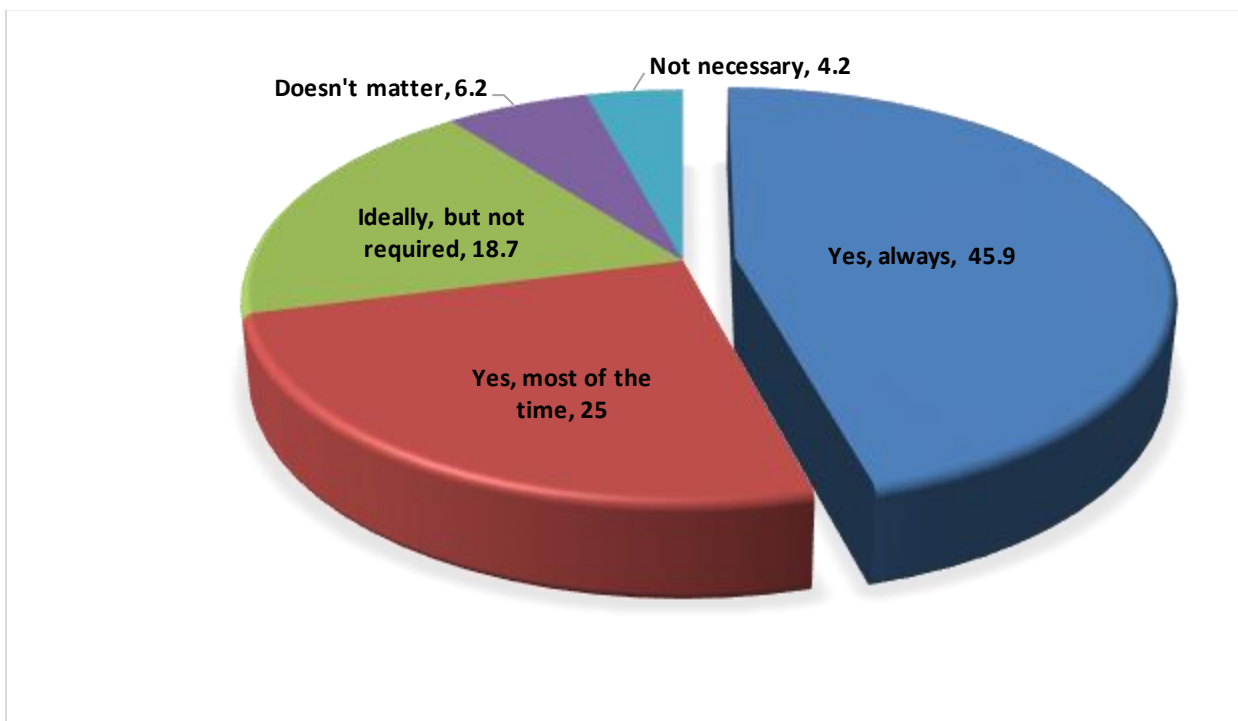
FIGURE 3
How future engagement events might look like



In terms of gender, females preferred the digital or a combination (66.3%) compared to males (53.9%). When age was examined, those under 35 preferred the digital option, while older respondents leaned toward in-person engagement. About an average of 30% across age groups, however, thought that a combination of the two would be a viable option.

A follow-up question to this was to ask respondents if a digital engagement option should accompany in-person engagement for people who can't attend /do not feel comfortable to attend in-person. It can be seen in Figure 4 that the majority of people (45.9%) felt this should always be part of the equation for future in-person engagements, while an additional 25% thought this should occur most of the time.

FIGURE 4
Should future in-person engagement events have a digital component



The final question pertaining to a return to in-person engagement was for respondents to indicate what safety protocols should be put in place (above and beyond those mandated by public health). Overall, the percentage of people who wanted additional safety protocols put in place included the following:

- 58.5% - Providing hand sanitizer
- 52.0% - Pre-registration for events to limit crowds
- 50.8% - Limitations on number of participants at events
- 46.4% - Maintain physical distancing between participants
- 41.9% - Use of masks (staff and participants)
- 18.0% - Barriers between participants (i.e. plexiglass) when the engagement is unable to be well distanced.
- 16.0% - Additional safety protocols are not important to me
- 3.2% - Other

Other suggestions put forward included:

- Mask related comments:
 - If I'm uncomfortable or feel unsafe, I can wear a mask or leave the event.
 - Will not enter a county facility if masks and spacing are not mandatory.
 - No masks. otherwise what's the purpose of in-person meeting?
- Education about viruses and bacteria and how they transmit.
- Cancellation policies that allow for people to stay home if they feel unwell and still get 100% of their money back (limit barriers that prevent people from isolating).
- My opinion really depends on what happens in the fall re Covid numbers, variants etc.
- Vaccination protocols:
 - Vaccinated people only allowed to participate.
 - Not mixing with unvaccinated people.
 - participants must be double vaccinated.
 - No in-person until more people vaccinated. I'm all for a Covid passport.

- I don't know, depends on how much COVID is effecting our lives then.
- County staff demonstrating a return to the pre-covid way.
- Health check/assessment. Stay home if you feel unwell.
- Improvements to ventilation, as more data regarding covid transmission via airborne route becomes confirmed.

With respect to demographics, those aged 65 or older wanted most safety protocols put in place to a greater extent than younger respondents, particularly maintaining physical distancing and having pre-registration. The one exception was providing hand sanitizer, which was a safety protocol shared by a strong percentage of participants, regardless of their age or gender.

With respect to other safety protocols and gender, a higher percentage of females wanted more safety protocols in place for in-person engagement events compared to males.

Residency was not a factor influencing safety protocols.