Canadiana
by CRKN | par RCDR

CANADIANA USER SURVEY REPORT

CRKN RCDR

Canadiana User Survey Report, 2023−2024

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Introduction

In 2022, the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN) formed the Canadiana User Research Task Group, an informal group comprised of CRKN staff members with the goal of better understanding Canadiana's user base. User-driven development has become central to CRKN's plans for the [future of Canadiana](), and has formed an important part of our [development roadmap](). Creating this task group was a vital first step to engaging with the Canadiana user community and learning about their research needs.

With the recommendation of CRKN's Preservation and Access Committee (PAC), one of the task group's first initiatives was to create a brief survey that Canadiana users could complete in their first few minutes of accessing the site. The goal of the survey was to gather basic information about who Canadiana users are and where their interests lie. The survey also invited respondents to share their email addresses for follow-up studies.

The survey was approved by the PAC and launched in late November 2023 as a pop-up on the Canadiana site. The survey was available in both English and French, and these translations were automatically presented on the English and French sides of the Canadiana site, respectively.

The survey consisted of the following three questions:

1. Please tell us about yourself. I am a... (select all that apply)
    a. Genealogical researcher
    b. GLAM professional
    c. Government employee
    d. Legal researcher
    e. Member of the general public
    f. Post-secondary researcher
    g. Student
    h. Teacher
    i. Other (please describe)

2. What field(s) of research are you most interested in? (select all that apply)
    a. Computer science
    b. Digital Humanities
    c. Education
    d. Environment/Climate
    e. Gender Studies
    f. Genealogy
    g. Geography
    h. Health
    i. History
    j. Indigenous Land Claims
    k. Indigenous Studies
    l. Information Science
    m. Law
    n. Linguistics
    o. Literature
    p. Political Science
    q. Other (please specify)

3. Thank you for taking the survey! Are you interested in helping us improve Canadiana through focus groups and/or feature testing? Please input your email here. You can also reach out to us at info@crkn.ca.
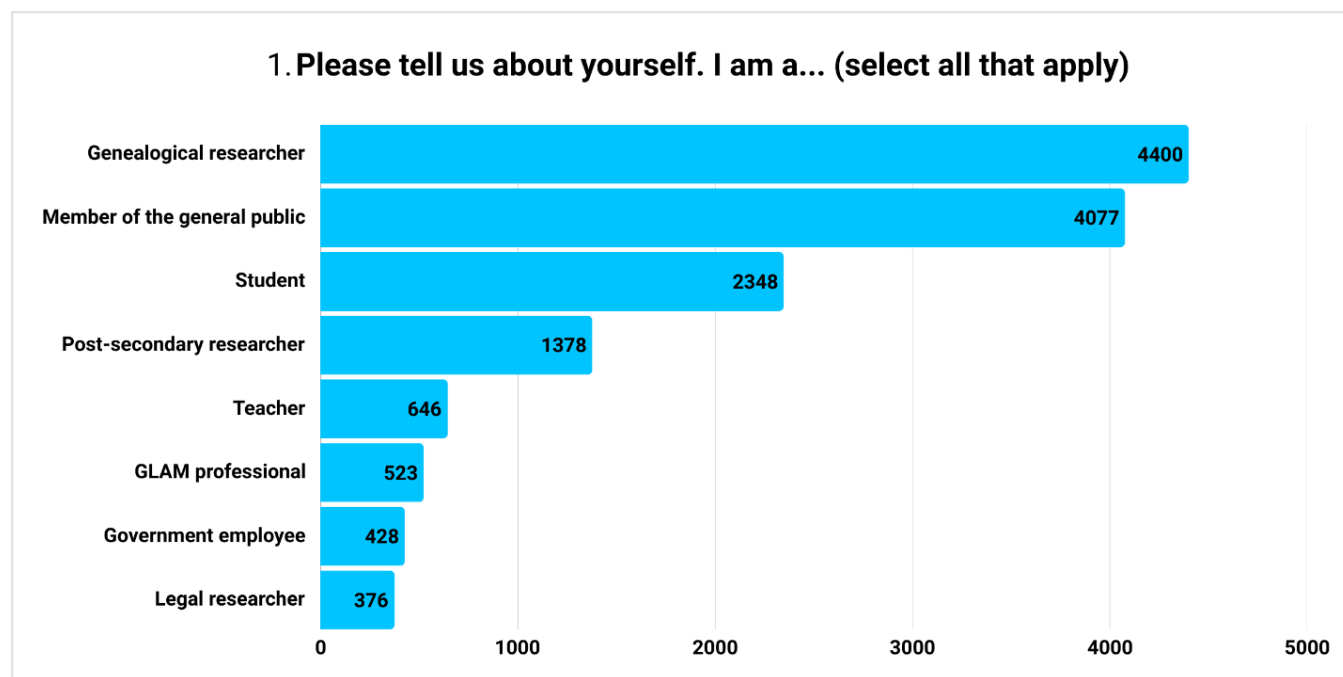
The survey received a higher than expected response rate throughout the time it was open, and the User Research Task Group provided regular updates on its status to the PAC. Based on guidance from the PAC, the survey was closed in early June 2024 as it had received a sufficient number of responses and had been open for most of the academic year, covering potential seasonal shifts in research activities.

The English translation of the survey received approximately 9,948 unique responses, and the French translation received approximately 1,105 unique responses, for a total of 11,053 responses. Gross responses, which the charts in this report are based upon, totaled 13,230 responses.

In comparison, the most recent Canadiana user survey prior to this one was completed in 2018, after the merger between CRKN and Canadiana but before the removal of the Canadiana paywall. The survey was distributed via email to individual Canadiana subscribers (around 300 individuals) as well as to the CRKN email list, which at the time included around 1,600 email addresses. This survey received approximately 69 responses.

Part 1: Who is the Canadiana Community?

In Question 1, CRKN provided a list of titles and affiliations for survey respondents to select from. Results for this question are provided below.

1. **Please tell us about yourself. I am a... (select all that apply)**

Category	Value
Genealogical researcher	4400
Member of the general public	4077
Student	2348
Post-secondary researcher	1378
Teacher	646
GLAM professional	523
Government employee	428
Legal researcher	376

Largest Defined-Choice User Categories

The top three defined-choice user categories selected by respondents were **Genealogical researcher, Member of the general public**, and **Student.**

Smallest Defined-Choice User Categories

The bottom three defined-choice user categories selected by respondents were **Legal researcher**, **Government employee**, and **GLAM professional**.
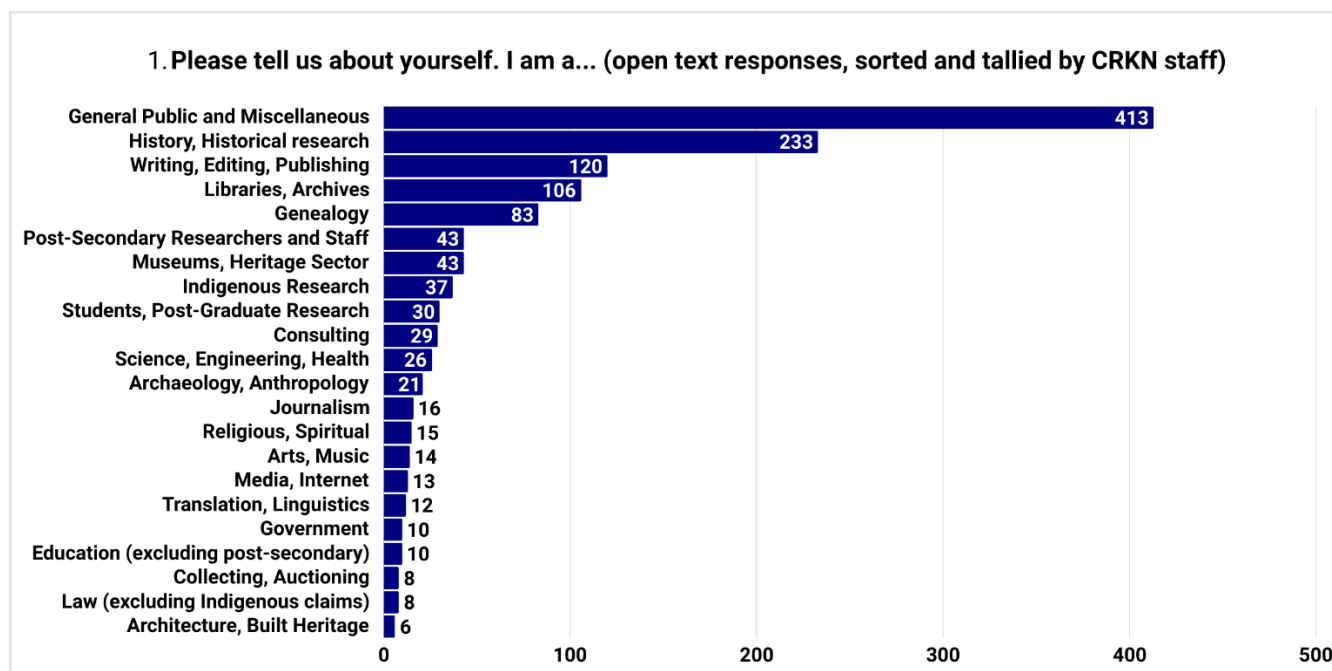
The Educational Sector

Defined-choice user categories related to the educational sector—**Post-Secondary Researcher, Teacher,** and **Student**—received a comparatively moderate number of responses, accounting for approximately a third of the total responses received to this question. A high-level analysis of the users who selected one or more of these categories reveals that they are relatively distinct groups, with very few respondents selecting multiple categories in this area.

Multiple responses to categories corresponding to the educational sector	
Category combination	**Responses**
Post-secondary researcher and Student	144
Post-secondary researcher and Teacher	71
Student and Teacher	42
Post-secondary researcher, Student, and Teacher	24

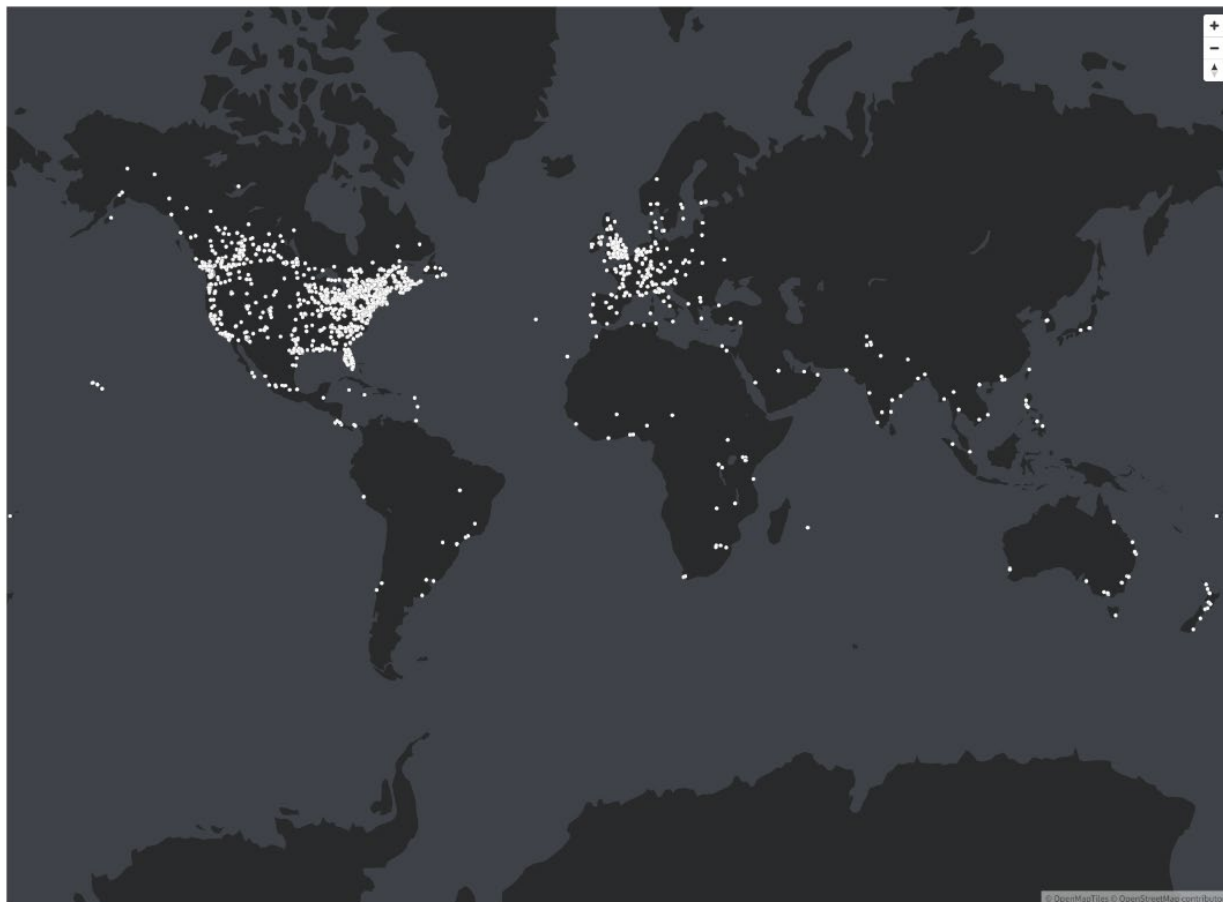## Open Text Responses to Question 1

Many survey respondents added open text responses to Question 1 by selecting the "Other (please describe)" category.[1] These responses were sorted into categories based on the respondents' self-identification, then tallied. The results suggest that the largest category of users not already covered in the list of CRKN-defined user categories is **Writers, Editors, and Publishers**. Spam and error responses were omitted. Definitions for the categories in the chart can be found in the Appendix.

1. **Please tell us about yourself. I am a... (open text responses, sorted and tallied by CRKN staff)**

Category	Value
General Public and Miscellaneous	413
History, Historical research	233
Writing, Editing, Publishing	120
Libraries, Archives	106
Genealogy	83
Post-Secondary Researchers and Staff	43
Museums, Heritage Sector	43
Indigenous Research	37
Students, Post-Graduate Research	30
Consulting	29
Science, Engineering, Health	26
Archaeology, Anthropology	21
Journalism	16
Religious, Spiritual	15
Arts, Music	14
Media, Internet	13
Translation, Linguistics	12
Government	10
Education (excluding post-secondary)	10
Collecting, Auctioning	8
Law (excluding Indigenous claims)	8
Architecture, Built Heritage	6

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[1] In this report, open text responses are considered separately from responses to the defined-choice categories. Survey respondents could select defined-choice categories as well as insert open text responses to add to, or clarify, the defined-choice category they selected.
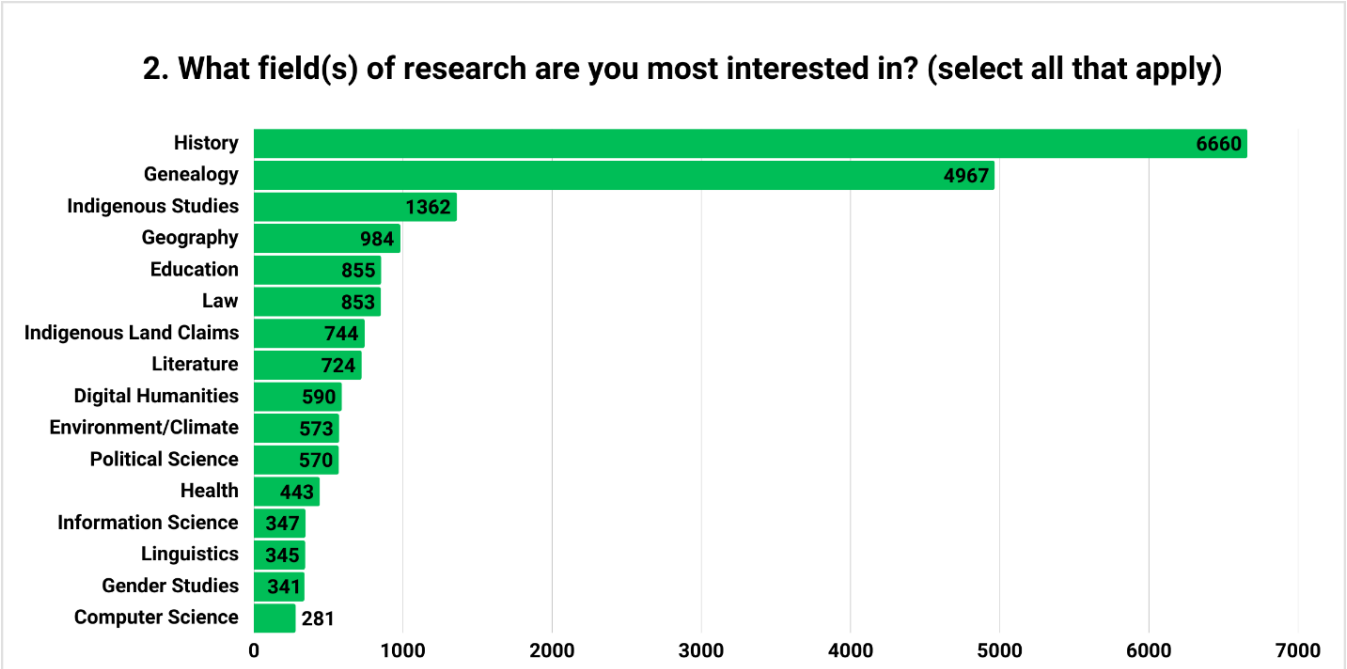
Geographic Location of Respondents

The survey software gathered data on the latitude and longitude of survey respondents. The majority of respondents were located in Canada, with representation from every province and territory except Nunavut.[2] Responses were also collected from the United States and internationally, suggesting usage of Canadiana beyond only users based in Canada.

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[2] See details on provincial response rates in the Appendix.

Part 2: What is the Canadiana User Community Interested In?

In Question 2, CRKN provided a list of topics and fields of research for survey respondents to select their interests from. Results for this question are provided below.

2. What field(s) of research are you most interested in? (select all that apply)

Field	Count
History	6660
Genealogy	4967
Indigenous Studies	1362
Geography	984
Education	855
Law	853
Indigenous Land Claims	744
Literature	724
Digital Humanities	590
Environment/Climate	573
Political Science	570
Health	443
Information Science	347
Linguistics	345
Gender Studies	341
Computer Science	281

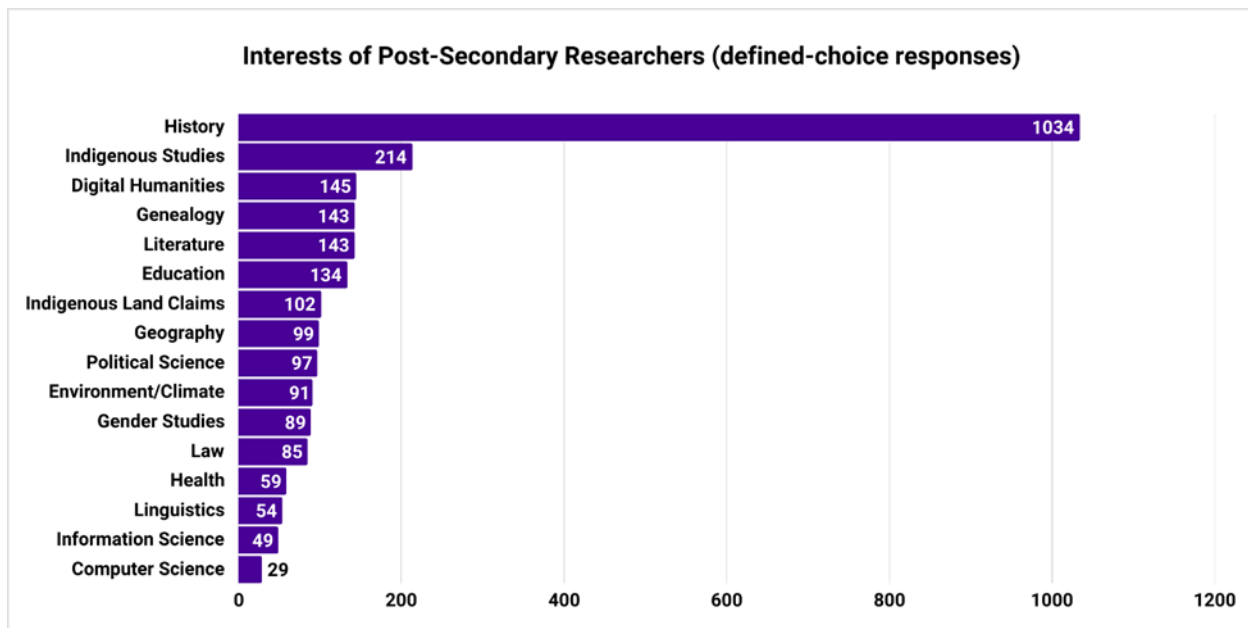### Largest Defined-Choice Interest Categories

The top three defined-choice interest categories selected by respondents were **History**, **Genealogy**, and **Indigenous Studies**.

Smallest Defined-Choice Interest Categories

The bottom three defined-choice interest categories selected by respondents were **Computer Science**, **Gender Studies,** and **Linguistics**.
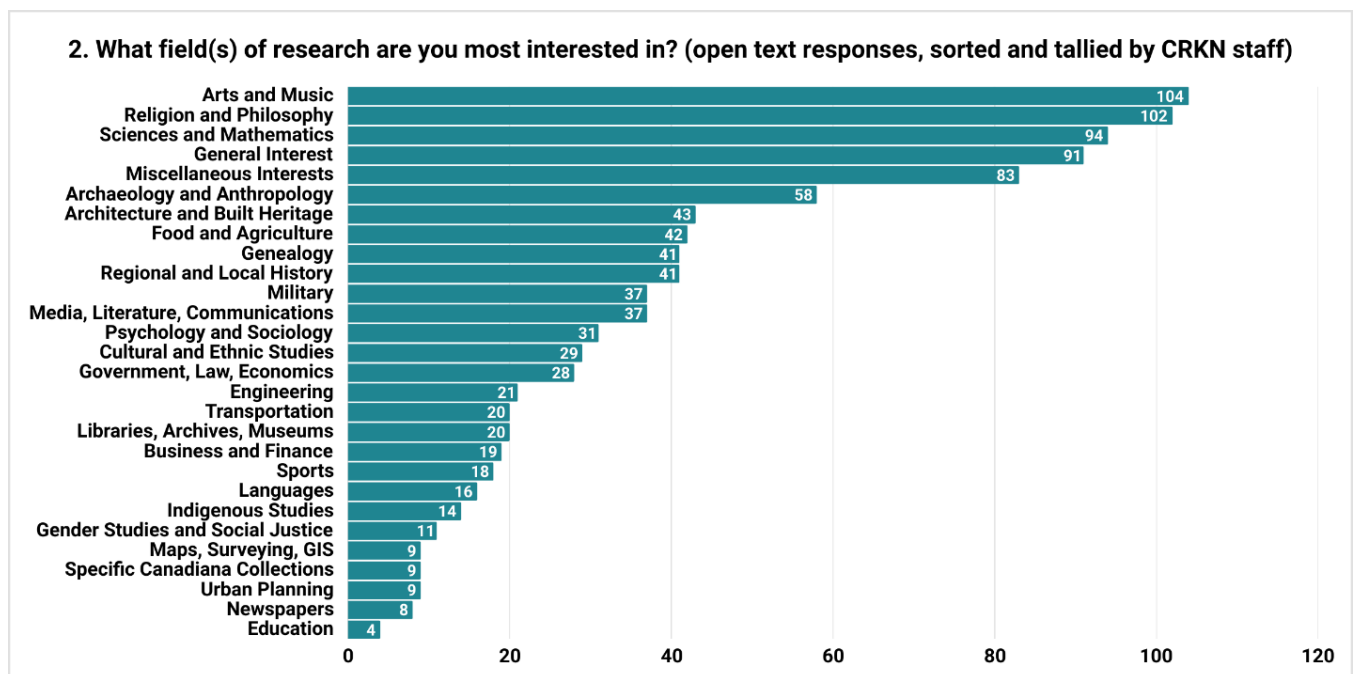
Interests of Post-Secondary Researchers

Since most CRKN members are post-secondary institutions, the category of Post-secondary Researcher is particularly relevant. Below is an additional breakdown of the interests of this user category (defined as those who selected it in Question 1). The results of this analysis indicate that while **History** and **Indigenous Studies** are still in the top three interest categories, a higher proportion of Post-Secondary Researchers selected **Digital Humanities** as a field of interest than in the overall respondent pool. This increased rate is to be expected, given that digital humanities is not a widely known field outside of academic research.

Interests of Post-Secondary Researchers (defined-choice responses)

Category	Value
History	1034
Indigenous Studies	214
Digital Humanities	145
Genealogy	143
Literature	143
Education	134
Indigenous Land Claims	102
Geography	99
Political Science	97
Environment/Climate	91
Gender Studies	89
Law	85
Health	59
Linguistics	54
Information Science	49
Computer Science	29

Open Text Responses to Question 2

Many survey respondents also added open text responses to Question 2 in the "Other (please describe)" category. These responses were sorted into categories and tallied. Spam and error responses were omitted.

2. What field(s) of research are you most interested in? (open text responses, sorted and tallied by CRKN staff)

Category	Value
Arts and Music	104
Religion and Philosophy	102
Sciences and Mathematics	94
General Interest	91
Miscellaneous Interests	83
Archaeology and Anthropology	58
Architecture and Built Heritage	43
Food and Agriculture	42
Genealogy	41
Regional and Local History	41
Military	37
Media, Literature, Communications	37
Psychology and Sociology	31
Cultural and Ethnic Studies	29
Government, Law, Economics	28
Engineering	21
Transportation	20
Libraries, Archives, Museums	20
Business and Finance	19
Sports	18
Languages	16
Indigenous Studies	14
Gender Studies and Social Justice	11
Maps, Surveying, GIS	9
Specific Canadiana Collections	9
Urban Planning	9
Newspapers	8
Education	4

Part 3: Insights

1. Canadiana contributes to the public good

The results of the survey strongly suggest that a wide variety of users visit Canadiana, including for purposes beyond traditional academic domains such as genealogical research, museum and heritage sector research, consulting, and journalism. As it is clear that Canadiana is a versatile resource serving diverse needs, more investigation will be needed to determine how best to support users approaching the collection with different research requirements, as well as to determine opportunities to engage further with them.

This result also demonstrates that by supporting Canadiana as an access-at-no-charge resource, the CRKN membership is supporting research at a grassroots level. As an organization devoted to open and accessible knowledge, CRKN can be proud of Canadiana's impact to the public good, and we anticipate that our user research and infrastructure development plans will allow us to increase this impact going forward.

2. Users have varied research interests

Following upon the previous insight, the survey results indicate that Canadiana users approach the collection with a range of professional and personal research interests extending beyond historical topics. Examples are found particularly in the survey's open text responses, which include a high number of users reporting involvement in the writing and publishing sector in Question 1, and high response rates for the arts and music, religion and philosophy, and science and mathematics in Question 2.

The variety of interests reported in the survey may pose engagement opportunities such as curating thematic sub-collections of Canadiana materials, or creating informative blog posts, articles, or webinars on topics represented in Canadiana.

3. Strong user engagement

CRKN staff were greatly encouraged to see the high level of engagement throughout the duration of this survey. Notably, approximately 1,155 respondents provided their email addresses to be contacted for future user research opportunities, which have already been used to recruit user testers for potential new infrastructure tools.

The survey also provided an example of how Canadiana can engage specific community groups. In January 2024, CRKN published communications about the new [RCMP Quarterly collection on Canadiana](#), a digitization project conducted with the University of Regina. From February onwards, we received 81 survey responses from current or retired RCMP officers, a higher number than expected by staff. This fact that many responses were received from this group during this period suggests that communications campaigns are an important part of attracting new users to Canadiana, and that users whose research interests are represented in the collection will be encouraged to engage with us through user activities such as surveys.

Next Steps

The results of this brief survey point to the need for deeper qualitative data about Canadiana users. To achieve this, CRKN's next major user research activity will be a set of virtual group interviews with users of Canadiana and other digital collections platforms, drawn in part from survey respondents who agreed to be contacted by CRKN.

Group interviews will consist of structured discussions moderated by a facilitator, who will ask participants questions about their attitudes, behaviours, needs, and goals when interacting with Canadiana and other digital collections platforms. The groups will be broken down into categories generally following the choices listed in Question 1 of the user survey, with two categories for post-secondary researchers working with different research methodologies:

- Genealogical Researcher
- GLAM Professional
- Interested Citizen (i.e. general public)
- Post-secondary Researcher (traditional research methodologies)
- Post-secondary Researcher (computational research methodologies)
- Professional Researcher (i.e. outside academia)
- Student (post-secondary)
- Teacher (post-secondary or other)

Following the group interviews, CRKN staff will create anonymized datasets and analysis reports to assess results. Group interviews will begin in mid-2025, with a public report on the findings to follow.

CRKN is also planning for significant updates to Canadiana's infrastructure in 2025, aligning it closer to the standards set by other major digital collections such as Trove and Europeana. These updates may create an opportunity to increase awareness of Canadiana among CRKN members and their research communities through communications campaigns and the creation of user support materials. These updates could also increase usage of Canadiana among post-secondary researchers thanks to improved functionality.

As we undertake this work, CRKN is entering into a new five-year strategic plan with a refreshed mission: *Together, we empower Canada by creating pathways to trusted knowledge.* This mission includes our efforts to ensure that Canadiana remains the best collection of digitized Canadian documentary heritage in the world, a task that would be impossible without the support of our user community. We look forward to engaging with them further to learn more about how we can meet their research needs and continue creating pathways to open, accessible, and trusted knowledge.

Appendix

Definitions of open-text user categories for Question 1: "Please tell us about yourself. I am a…"

These categories were created by CRKN staff to capture the variety of themes and topics included in open-text survey responses. Certain responses may be able to fit into more than one category, therefore, categories and their response rates should not be considered exact.

	Category	Includes open-text responses identifying as:
1	Archaeology, Anthropology	Archaeologists and anthropologists
2	Architecture, Built Heritage	Architects and those interested in architectural conservancy
3	Arts, Music	Artists, musicians, and researchers of art and music
4	Collecting, Auctioning	Collectors, auctioneers, and booksellers
5	Consulting	Consultants in various industries
6	Education (excluding post-secondary)	Teachers, tutors, and educators
7	Genealogy	Genealogists and family historians, and those expressing interest in family history research
8	General Public and Miscellaneous	Amateur historians, general or unspecified researchers, miscellaneous professionals, retired individuals, and interested citizens
9	Government	Employees and citizens involved in various levels of government
10	History, Historical Research	Historians, local historians, historical researchers, and independent researchers
11	Indigenous Research	Indigenous community members, Indigenous land claims researchers, and those working on behalf of Indigenous communities or organizations
12	Journalism	Journalists and columnists
13	Law (excluding Indigenous claims)	Individuals working or studying in the legal profession
14	Libraries, Archives	Librarians, archivists, library assistants, cataloguers, library technicians, and library and archives volunteers
15	Media, Internet	Film and TV professionals, YouTube creators, Wikipedia editors, and audiovisual researchers
16	Museums, Heritage Sector	Curators, museum staff, historical interpreters, and museum or heritage volunteers
17	Post-Secondary Researchers and Staff	Professors, lecturers, and other post-secondary staff
18	Religious, Spiritual	Members of faith groups, ministers, and priests
19	Science, Engineering, Health	Scientists, engineers, medical professionals, and surveyors
20	Students, Post-Graduate Research	Students or post-graduate researchers
21	Translation, Linguistics	Translators, linguists, and interpreters
22	Writing, Editing, Publishing	Writers, editors, and those working in the publishing industry

Definitions of open-text user categories for Question 2: "What field(s) of research are you most interested in?"

These categories were created by CRKN staff to capture the variety of themes and topics included in open-text survey responses. Certain responses may be able to fit into more than one category, therefore, categories and their response rates should not be considered exact.

	Category	Includes open-text responses stating an interest in:
1	Archaeology and Anthropology	Archaeology and anthropology
2	Architecture and Built Heritage	Architecture, historic buildings, conservation
3	Arts and Music	Fine arts, art history, music, crafts, design, fashion, theatre
4	Business and Finance	Business, finance, and accounting
5	Cultural and Ethnic Studies	History of specific cultural and ethnic groups, folklore
6	Education	Education
7	Engineering	Various branches of engineering
8	Food and Agriculture	Food, culinary history, agriculture, farming, horticulture
9	Gender Studies and Social Justice	Women's history, human rights, equity, sexuality
10	Genealogy	Genealogical research
11	General Interest	General history, curiosity, personal interest
12	Government, Law, Economics	Topics related to government, political history, legal history, economics
13	Indigenous Studies	Indigenous studies and research
14	Languages	Languages, linguistics, lexicography
15	Libraries, Archives, Museums	Library and information studies, archives, museum studies
16	Maps, Surveying, GIS	Maps, surveying, and GIS
17	Media, Literature, Communications	Film, photography, advertising, books, journalism
18	Military	Topics relating to military history
19	Miscellaneous Interests	Various other interests, including miscellaneous historical topics
20	Newspapers	Newspapers
21	Philately and Numismatics	Philately, postal history, numismatics
22	Psychology and Sociology	Psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social work
23	Regional and Local History	History of specific locales and regions, place names
24	Religion and Philosophy	History of religious life and communities, theology, philosophy
25	Sciences and Mathematics	Various topics within science, mathematics, medicine
26	Specific Canadiana Collections	Specific collections including Héritage, RCMP Quarterly, and an unnamed publication
27	Sports and Athletics	Specific sports, sports history
28	Transportation	Transportation, aviation, railways
29	Urban Planning	Urban planning, urbanism, community design

Canadian Provincial and Territorial Response Rates

Province or Territory	Gross total Canadian responses	Percentage of total Canadian responses	Percentage of Canadian population, Q1 2024[3]
Ontario	5,013	46.6%	39.1%
Quebec	1,971	18.3%	22.0%
British Columbia	1,149	10.7%	13.8%
Alberta	772	7.2%	11.7%
Nova Scotia	558	5.2%	2.6%
New Brunswick	500	4.6%	2.1%
Saskatchewan	350	3.3%	3.0%
Manitoba	249	2.3%	3.6%
Newfoundland and Labrador	111	1.0%	1.3%
Prince Edward Island	70	0.7%	0.4%
Yukon	8	0.1%	0.1%
Northwest Territories	5	<0.1%	0.1%
Nunavut	0	0.0%	0.1%
Total:	**10,756**	**100%**	**100%**

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[3] Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0009-01 Population estimates, quarterly, https://doi.org/10.25318/1710000901-eng.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the staff members who contributed to this cross-team project. We are very grateful to everyone who took the time to participate in the survey and provide their insights. Thank you for your support in our efforts to continually improve Canadiana.

As always, we extend sincere thanks to CRKN members for their financial support of Canadiana that enables CRKN to make this vital resource available at no charge to users.

We thank you for your support in our efforts to continually improve the Canadiana Collections.

Contact

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