

COVID-19 MOTIVATIONS FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Appealing to *Social Values*
to Flatten the Curve

April 2020

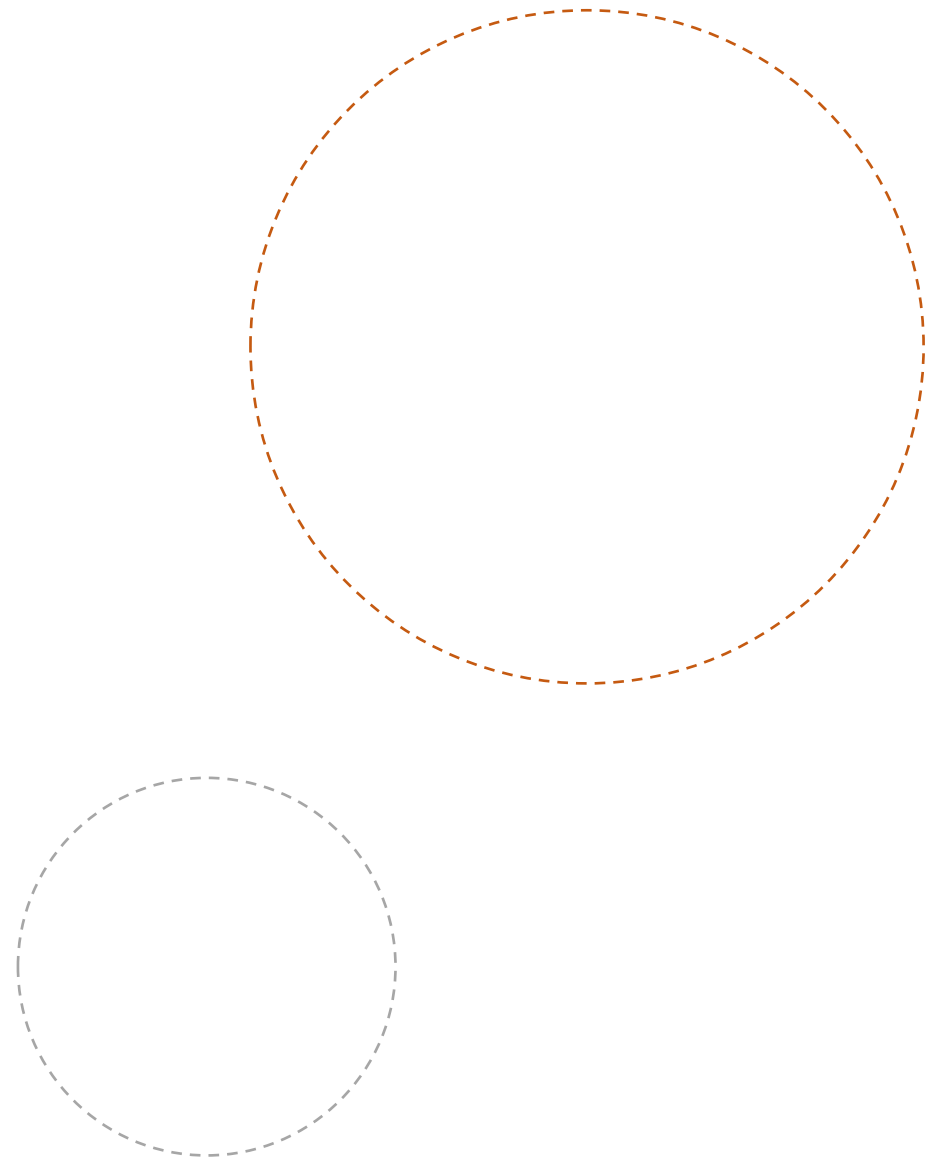




IMAGE CREDIT:
UNSPLASH

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the daily lives of millions of Canadians – but the duration of the pandemic, and how lasting an effect it will have on the population, is still unknown.

We know that the ability of our society to practise physical distancing is one key factor in flattening the curve; but ensuring that Canadians comply with these measures requires an understanding of what motivates people.

Environics' *Social Values* serve as a framework for understanding human behaviour. By understanding the fundamental motivators that drive support for physical distancing, we can inform key decisions that businesses and government organizations need to implement to keep our citizens, customers and employees safe during this difficult period.

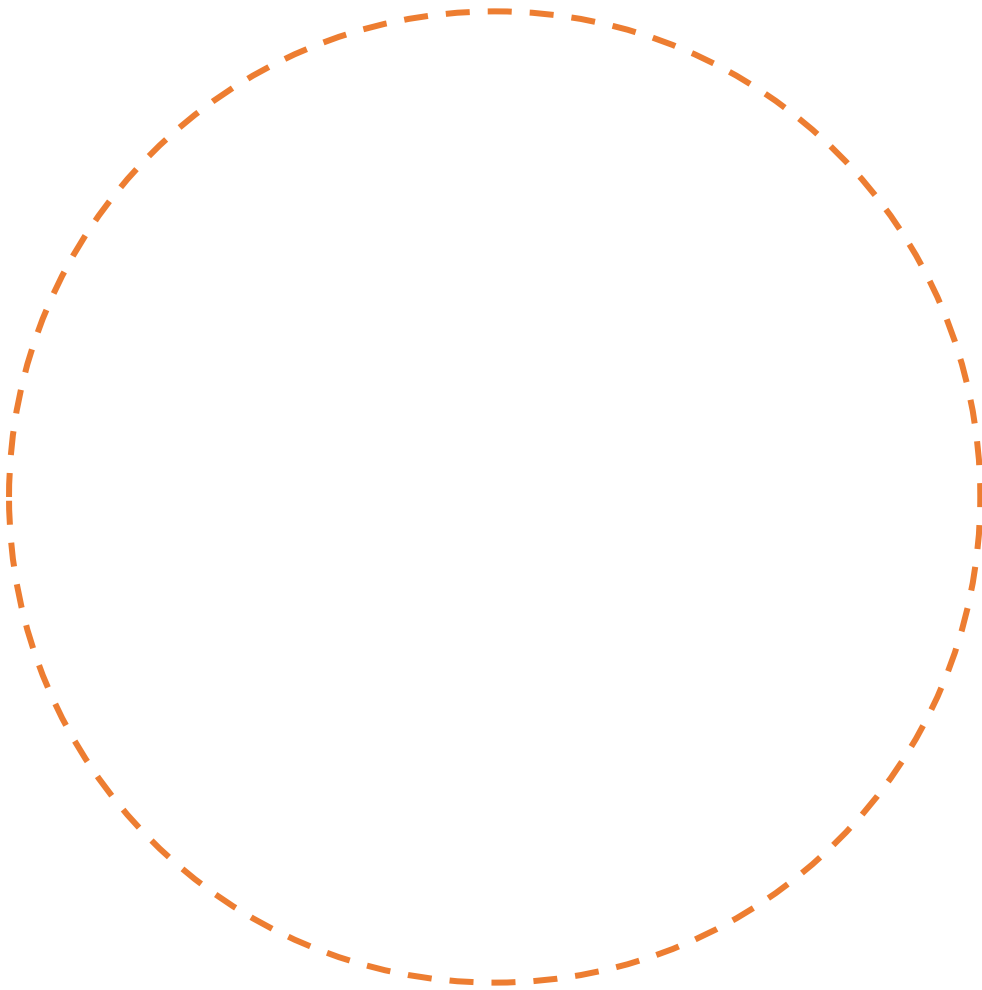


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To establish a baseline understanding, we identified the differentiating values of those who were first to change their behaviour. In a survey fielded between February 19th and March 5th 2020, we found that just over half of Canadians were concerned about COVID-19 (including 16% very concerned).

The same survey uncovered that, at this early stage of the outbreak:

- Almost half of Canadians were reporting more frequent hand washing.
- One in ten reported working from home or avoiding other activities that put them in contact with others.
- Seven percent had purchased or worn a surgical mask or other physical protection.



Among the one in ten Canadians who acted to avoid others, we found two distinct groups, who have different value motivations for their actions.

The first group represented about six percent of Canadians and skewed older (two-thirds aged 45+). They share an interesting mix of *Social Values*, including a tendency to finish what they start, and persevering until their self-assigned challenges are complete. They believe that duties and obligations to others should be fulfilled before turning to one's personal pleasures and interests; and reject the notion that inequities in society are inevitable and should be expected. For them, physical distancing was the right thing to do to protect themselves, their loved ones and their communities.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A belief that active involvement in the political process can make a difference in society. People strongest on this construct reject the notion that inequities in society are inevitable and should be expected.

DUTY

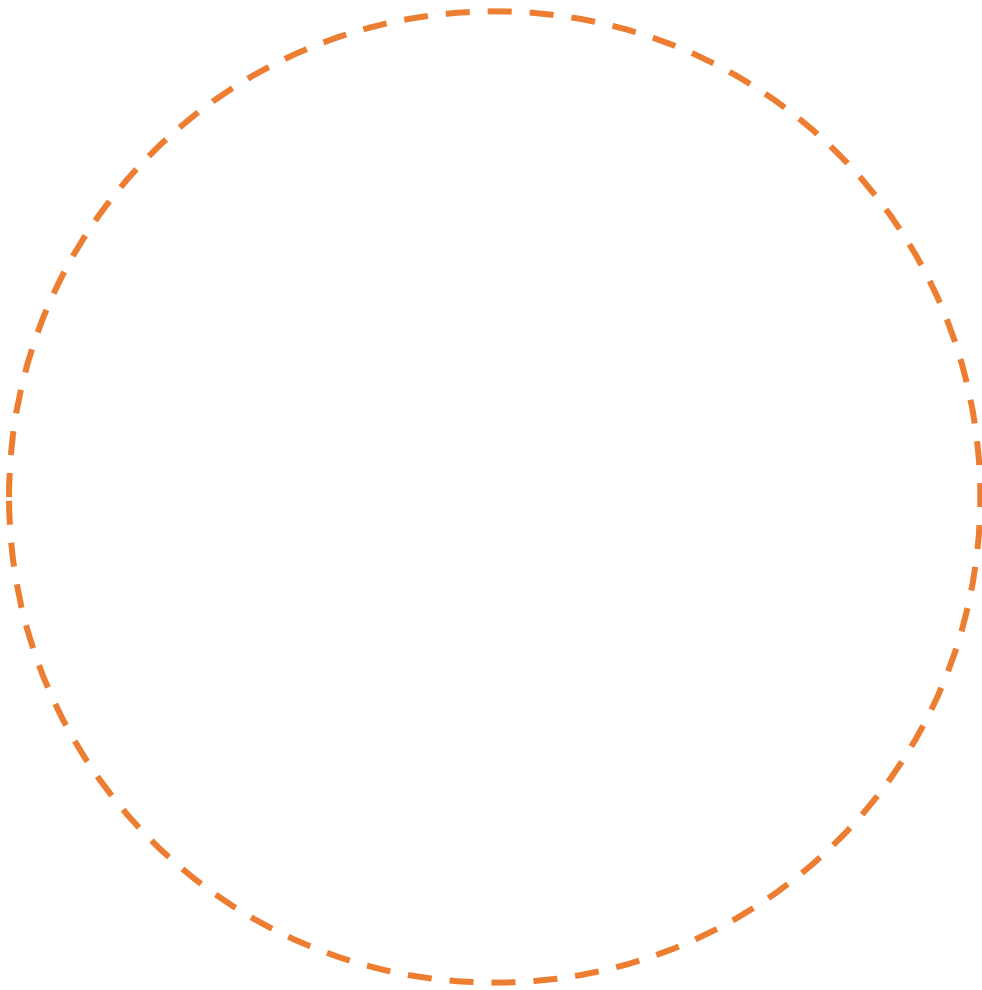
Belief that duties and obligations to others should be fulfilled before turning to one's personal pleasures and interests.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Setting difficult goals, even if just to prove to themselves that they can do it. People strong on this construct finish what they start, persevering until their self-assigned task is completed to their satisfaction. Rejecting personal failure.

PRIMACY OF FAMILY

Centrality of family; making personal sacrifices and providing for one's children over all else.



The remaining early adopters of physical distancing comprised a small group of about 3 percent of Canadians, and skewed toward younger males, with two-thirds under the age of 45.

This group demonstrates certain anti-social tendencies and may be lacking life goals. They feel alienated from society and therefore are apathetic about current events; and withdrawal may be their default, as opposed to a modification of their behaviour.



PENCHANT FOR RISK

Desire to take risks in order to get what one wants out of life. Also, indulging in dangerous and forbidden activities for their associated emotional high.

ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE


People highest on this construct believe that violence is an inevitable fact of life that must be accepted with a certain degree of indifference. Belief that violence can be both cathartic and persuasive.

REJECTION OF AUTHORITY

The belief that organizations or persons in positions of authority should not be deferred to at all times. There are rules in society, but everyone shouldn't necessarily follow them. Feeling that young people in particular should be taught to question authority rather than obey it.

ANOMIE/ AIMLESSNESS

The feeling of having no goals in life. Experiencing a void of meaning with respect to life in general. A feeling of alienation from society, having the impression of being cut off from what's happening.



As the health crisis accelerated in mid-March, the warnings and actions taken by federal, provincial and local governments became more strict. Non-essential businesses were temporarily closed, events postponed, and many Canadians found themselves forced to work from home.

Not surprisingly the proportions of Canadians that began practising physical distancing increased significantly over a short period of time.

In a second survey, fielded March 26th to April 2nd 2020, we observed that proportions of Canadians practising specific precautionary behaviours (e.g. hand washing, or wearing a mask) nearly doubled; and collectively, 88 percent of the population was practising some form of physical distancing. How do we motivate the remaining proportion of the population?





85%


of Canadians were reporting more frequent hand washing.

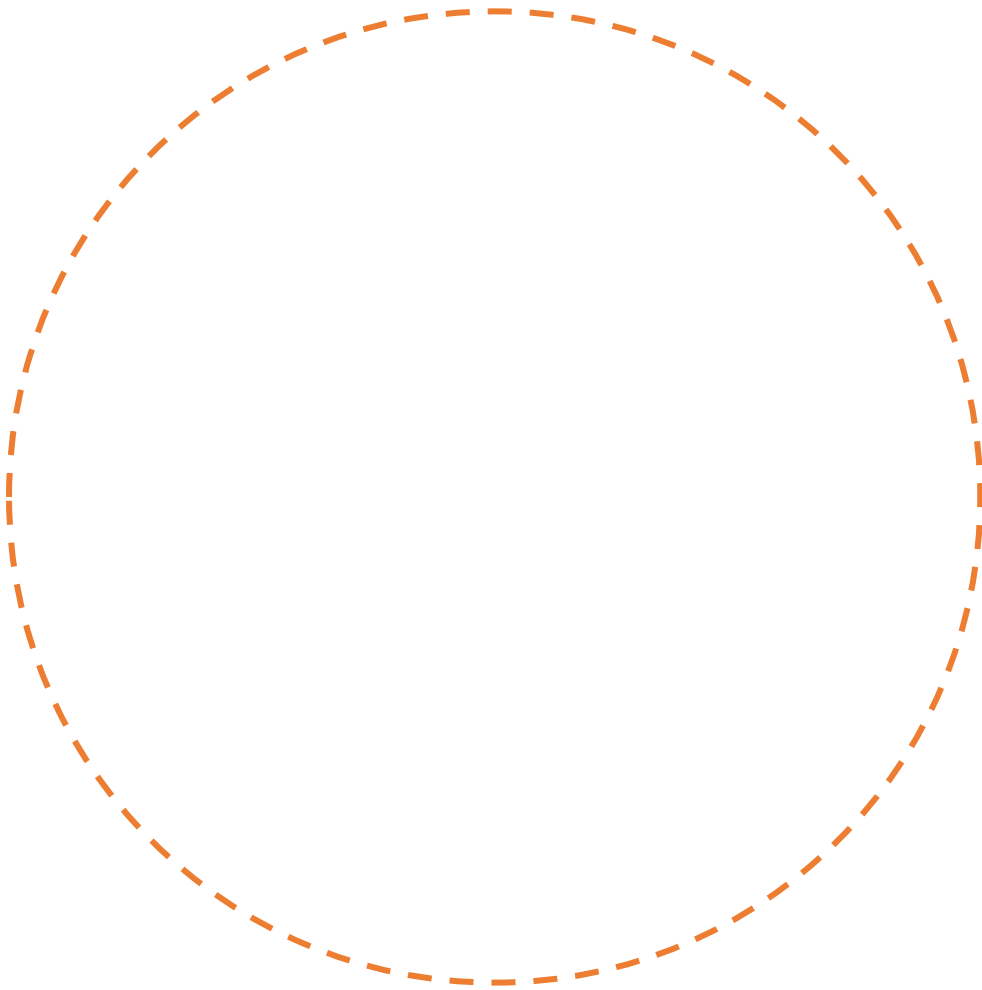
88%

of Canadians reported working from home or avoiding other activities that put them in contact with others.

12%

of Canadians had purchased or worn a surgical mask or other physical protection.





The roughly one in ten Canadians (12%) not practising physical distancing is comprised of two noteworthy values segments.

The first group tends to be younger and single, with lower household incomes. This group prefers to make decisions that are guided by reasons and logic and can rationalize that some things are simply beyond our control. They also hold progressive views on equality, and relations between youth and elders, and they care about the environment.

Getting this group to act will involve appeals that highlight the impact a collective effort will make; particularly where those appeals speak directly to the causes they care about – such as reducing the risk of infection among vulnerable populations, for example. Additionally, messages that highlight the residual impact of physical distancing on the environment will resonate with their desire to protect the planet for future generations.

POST-MATERIALIST MINDSETS

Openness to and acceptance of new forms of social living, lifestyles, ideas, hedonisms, sexual orientations, etc. brought into being by diverse social groups and by youth. Change-oriented. Hold experiential rather than material-oriented values and mental postures.

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

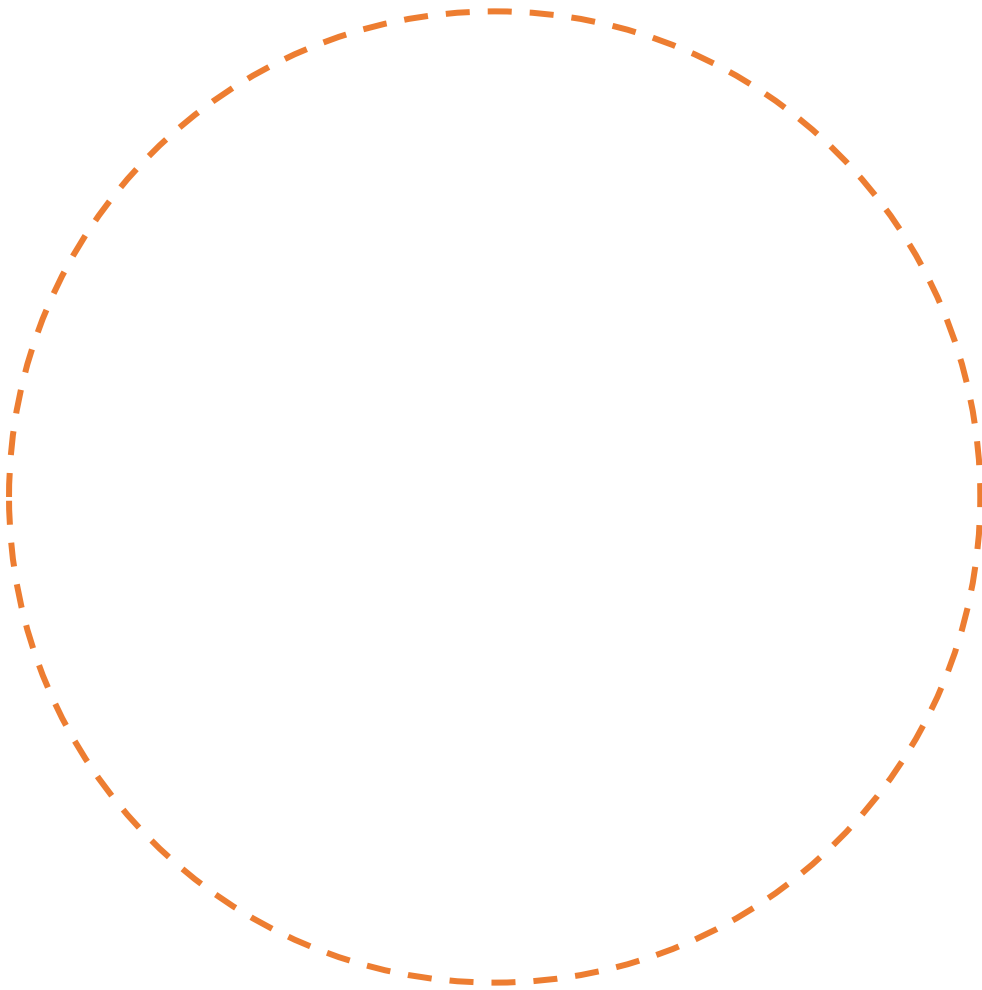
A propensity to give priority to reason as the principal way of understanding life. A desire to keep one's emotional life "on an even keel", to use logic and reason to control one's feelings and emotions and to base day-to-day decisions on reason and logic. A reluctance to experience or express emotions.

ECOLOGICAL LIFESTYLE

Giving a high priority to integrating environmental concerns with purchasing criteria. This can have positive consequences, as when consumers are willing to pay more for an environmentally friendly product, or negative consequences, as when consumers refuse to buy a product whose manufacturer has an unsatisfactory environmental record.

EQUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUTH

Breaking down traditional hierarchical and patriarchal relationships by giving youth equal freedoms as those of adults. Discipline, as that issued by adults over young people, is therefore replaced by freedom and increased individualism.



The second group has higher household incomes and is well-educated. They are motivated by a concern for how others view them. They believe that if they work hard enough, they will get ahead in life; and place a great deal of importance on their social standing, as projected through displays of affluence. Yet, this group also possesses a sense of social responsibility and a belief that one should behave in a way that demonstrates respect for oneself and others.

This group may not yet be practising social distancing because the pandemic has not hit home for them personally; for example, they may not have personal contacts who have become infected. An effort to motivate this group to practise physical distancing could leverage their desire for status recognition by, for example, suggesting that they do, *and therefore be seen doing*, the right thing.



NEED FOR STATUS RECOGNITION

Desire to be held in esteem and respect by others, and to express one's social standing or aspired status, through a display of fine manners, good taste, style or "chic".

CONCERN FOR APPEARANCE

Placing a great deal of importance on appearing "attractive" and concerned about the image projected by one's appearance. People who are strong on this construct are image-driven.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A belief that society, and the individual, has a responsibility to help those less fortunate. Tendency to believe that quality of life can improve when people work together.

PROPRIETY

The importance of dressing so as not to give offence, but rather to elicit and communicate respect in more formal relationships, in public and at work. Behaving in a way that respects oneself and others. A preference for the formal over the casual.






IMAGE CREDIT:
UNSPLASH

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Canadians are facing a long road back to “normal” life. Before schools and workplaces can re-open and economic activity can resume, we are facing weeks – and potentially months – of social distancing. Accelerating the pace of recovery means motivating those who are not yet fully participating, using messages that resonate with their core beliefs.

It is also likely true that even those who are on board with physical distancing behaviours are forced into situational decisions in which they don’t strictly adhere to best practices. All told, more needs to be done at both the macro and micro level to promote physical distancing.



IMAGE CREDIT:
GETTY IMAGES

WHO SHOULD PLAY A ROLE?

Our leaders and governments must continue their efforts to inform and educate the public. The focus now must shift to the laggard population and spur them into action. Messages appealing to their values have a better chance of breaking through the clutter and encouraging the vital behavioural change.

Brands, celebrities and social influencers also have a role to play, using their platforms to reinforce the “Stay Home” message; and engaging the millions of Canadians seeking validation and support during these uncertain times. Messaging and promotion related to physical distancing will create lasting engagement with your audience, and play a critical role in motivating the laggards who must join in to help flatten the curve.



IMAGE CREDIT:
GETTY IMAGES

WHAT MESSAGES WILL RESONATE THE MOST?

Reaching those who are not yet engaged will depend on two considerations. First, they must be convinced that they have a role to play in stopping the pandemic and that physical distancing is a meaningful part of the solution. Second, they need to be convinced that “doing nothing” represents a real risk to something they care about.

In the case of our two groups, this means informing them about: the real impacts of the pandemic on their communities; the consequences of a prolonged pandemic for those less fortunate than themselves; and the efforts of societal influencers – who are leading by example and making a difference.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The Environics Research *Social Values* measurement system identifies the structure of social values in society and monitors change in those values over time. *Social Values* represent a person's mental posture or fundamental world view; and set the context for reactions to situations, events, opportunities or challenges.

Environics Research has been measuring *Social Values* since 1983. Since then, we have compiled the largest database of *Social Values* trends in North America. Our annual surveys of more than 10,000 Canadians and Americans allow us to precisely track changes in *Social Values* over time. Data on specific topics, such as social distancing as addressed in this paper, can be attached to the larger data set, enabling deeper insight into motivations and world views.



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