

# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REVITALIZATION

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SURVEY II

WHAT

WE

HEARD

REPORT



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# Introduction

In December, 2019, the Environmental Assessment Act (2018) came into force. The key goals of the Act are:

- **Enhancing public confidence** by ensuring impacted Indigenous nations, local communities and governments and the broader public can meaningfully participate in all stages of environmental assessment through a process that is robust, transparent, timely and predictable;
- **Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous nations;** and,
- **Protecting the environment while offering clear pathways to sustainable project approvals** by providing certainty of process and clarity of regulatory considerations including opportunities for early indications of the likelihood of success.

To support the first goal of enhancing public confidence, the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) is developing a new Public Engagement Policy. To ensure that wherever possible the new policy reflects the interests of British Columbians, the EAO has conducted two surveys and will be engaging further on a Discussion Paper that outlines the EAO's proposed approach to public engagement. For more details, see "[Next Steps](#)" on page 21.

The first survey was conducted from June 18th to July 30th, 2018 and asked about engagement, learning and information priority preferences. The results of the first engagement survey (including details on who responded) are captured in a [What We Heard Report](#). The responses from this survey allowed the EAO to determine more specific and focused questions to be included in the second survey.

The second survey was conducted between September 6th and October 15th, 2019 and included questions that would also allow our office to refine themes around how to best integrate public engagement into the environmental

assessment (EA) process. The results of this survey (including details on who responded) are reflected in this What We Heard document.

## WHY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS IS IMPORTANT

Public engagement is a central aspect of the EA process to understand what is valued, what potential project effects may be and to understand the consequences of those effects. Public engagement during the EA process promotes the gathering and sharing of information related to the potential effects of a proposed project across the five pillars of assessment (environmental, economic, social, cultural and health), and the [required assessment matters in Section 25 of the Act](#).

Through discussion and information sharing, local knowledge like history, land use, local species, potential effects to community, and others informs the environmental assessment process. This provides the proponent and EA decision-makers with local knowledge and more in-depth and thoughtful information regarding proposed projects, ensuring they have the right information to make sound decisions that consider the interests, concerns and knowledge of all affected and interested members of the public.

One of the stated purposes of the EAO identified in the Environmental Assessment Act, (2018) is to:

*"Promote sustainability by protecting the environment and fostering a sound economy and the well-being of British Columbians and their communities by... facilitating meaningful public participation throughout assessments."*

## Seeking public input enhances an EA by:

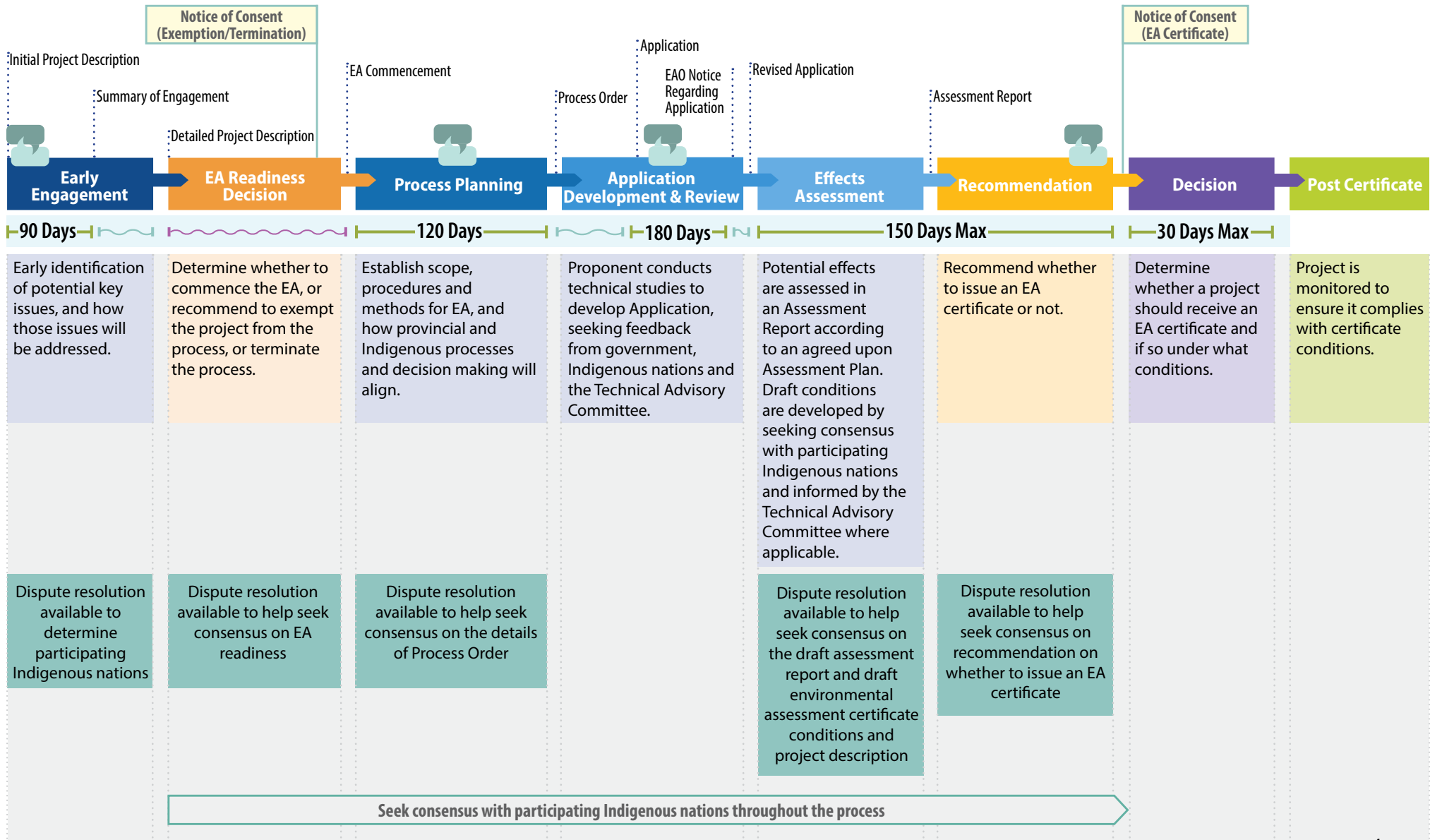
- Ensuring that public concerns relevant to an EA are identified early so they may be appropriately addressed
- Providing proponents and the EAO with useful local information and knowledge for completing the required studies
- Improving overall community and public understanding of the proposed project and the EA process



# Environmental Assessment Process (2018)

## Timeline

-  Legislated Time
-  EAO Time
-  Proponent Time
-  Public Engagement & comment Period



# Who Responded to the Public Engagement Survey

From September 6th to October 16th, 2019, British Columbians were invited to complete a second public engagement survey to help inform the future of public engagement during environmental assessments under the new *Environmental Assessment Act*.

It's important that we design engagement approaches that, wherever possible, work for all British Columbians, recognizing the unique needs of communities and individuals throughout B.C. We collect demographic data to make sure we're hearing from all kinds of British Columbians. We've presented that information here.

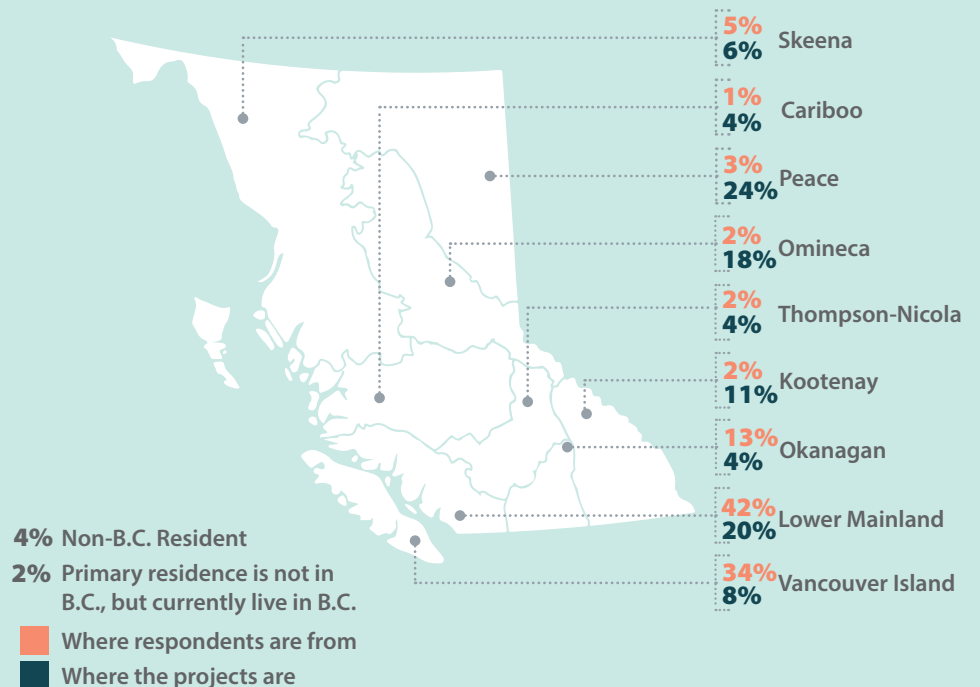
We received 180 responses to the survey, which is valuable and beneficial to analyzing our processes; however, these results represent only a portion of British Columbians. When determining the EAO's future approach to public engagement, we also consider data from the previous engagement survey, formal submissions from stakeholders, and advice and comments from the public and others involved in EA processes.

Similarly, there were several questions in the survey designed for those who had previously participated in environmental assessments. As these questions received few responses (less than 13), they have not been presented here.

## WHAT SIZE OF COMMUNITIES ARE PEOPLE RESPONDING FROM?



## WHERE ARE PEOPLE RESPONDING FROM AND WHERE ARE THE PROJECTS?

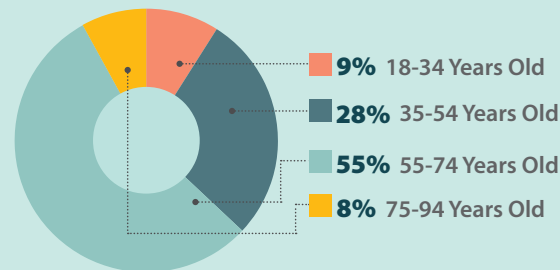


# More About the Survey Respondents

We use GBA+ to help ensure that when we engage with the public, we do so in a way that minimizes barriers to participation. The survey questions on this page help us design engagements that work for all British Columbians.

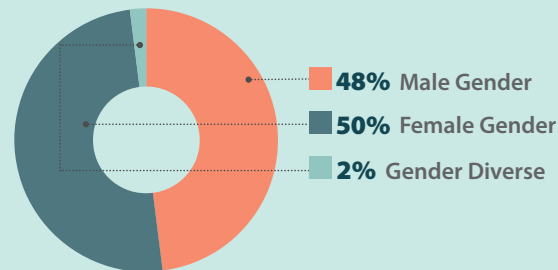
## RESPONDENT AGE

This tells us that the youngest and oldest adults in British Columbia are less engaged in our process than other demographics - which we will explore. When we're looking at the survey data, we need to acknowledge a bias toward those 55-74 years of age.



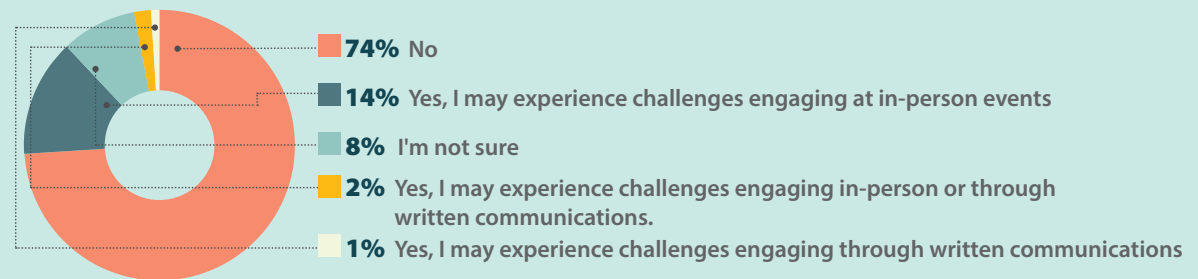
## RESPONDENT GENDER

An even balance of male and female responses, with some representation from gender diverse individuals.



## DO YOU EXPERIENCE ANY ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES THAT MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO ENGAGE IN AN EA?

What we heard: For those that indicated they experience accessibility challenges participating in an environmental assessment, the most commonly reported challenges were: mobility (15%), transportation challenges (15%), dependent care (12%), live remotely (12%), challenges with being in crowds (12%), work scheduling conflicts (12%).



## What is GBA+?

Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The “plus” in GBA+ acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences. We all have multiple identity factors that intersect to make us who we are; GBA+ also considers many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

Source: [Gender Equity Office of the B.C. Government](#)

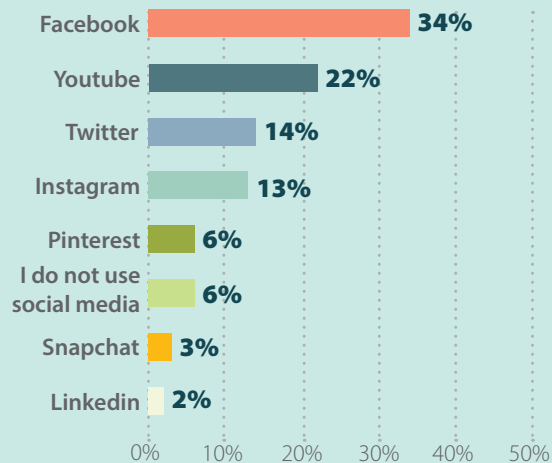


# Social Media and Internet

It's important for the EAO to know what social media channels are most often used by those who engage in the EA process so we can develop ways of communicating that works best for them. Similarly, it's important for us to know how comfortable people are with using the internet, to ensure we continue to provide information and collect feedback in a way that works for everyone.

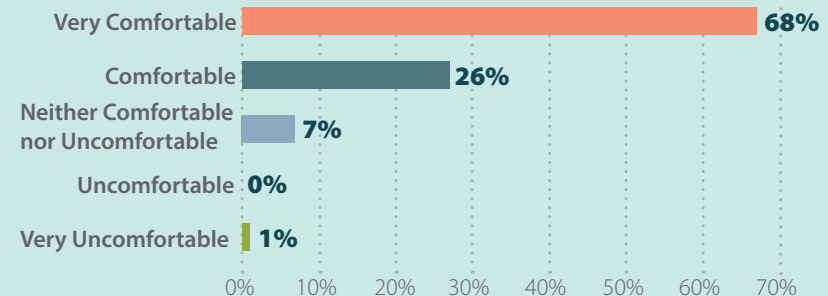
Given this information was collected through an online survey, we acknowledge there is an inherent bias in these responses and we will continue to provide ways of engaging in the EA process that does not require the internet.

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE

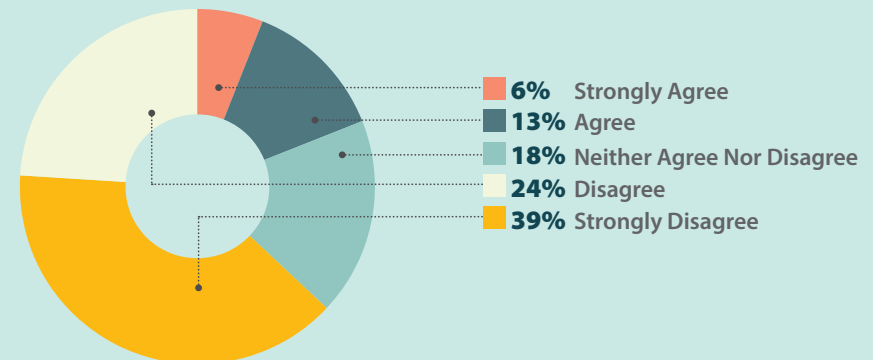


This is helpful in informing our future outreach efforts so we meet people where they're already most comfortable.

## RESPONDENT COMFORT LEVEL USING THE INTERNET



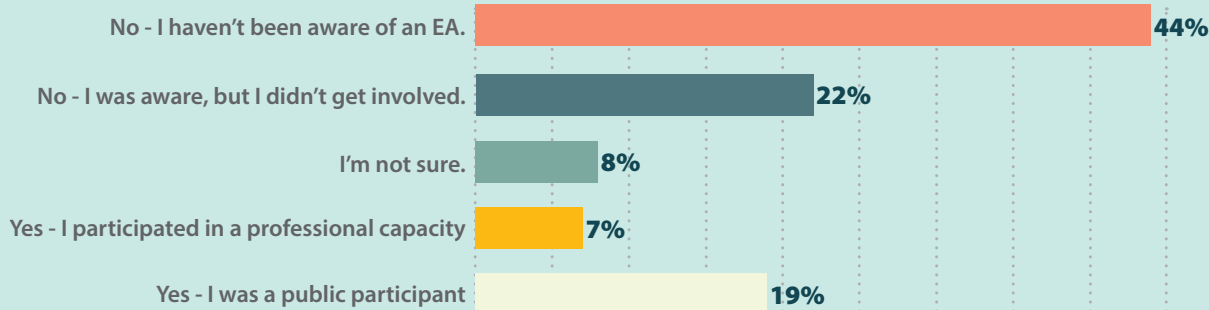
## EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES WITH RELIABLE INTERNET



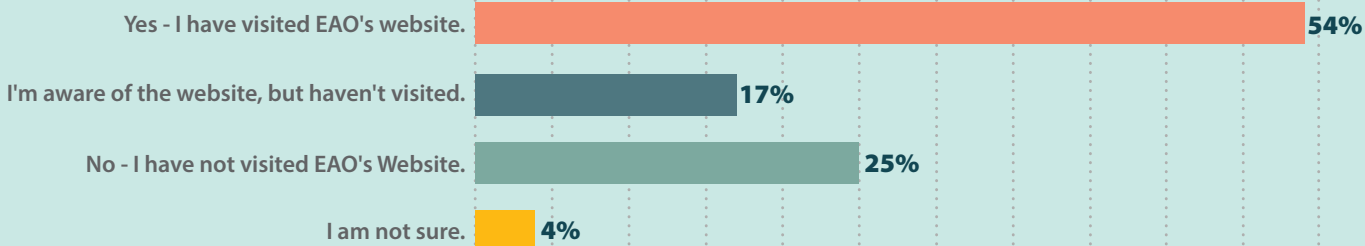
Despite survey respondents being generally very comfortable using the internet, many respondents indicate they experience challenges with reliable internet access. This tells us we need to continue to offer engagement methods that do not exclusively rely on the internet.

# Experience with the EAO

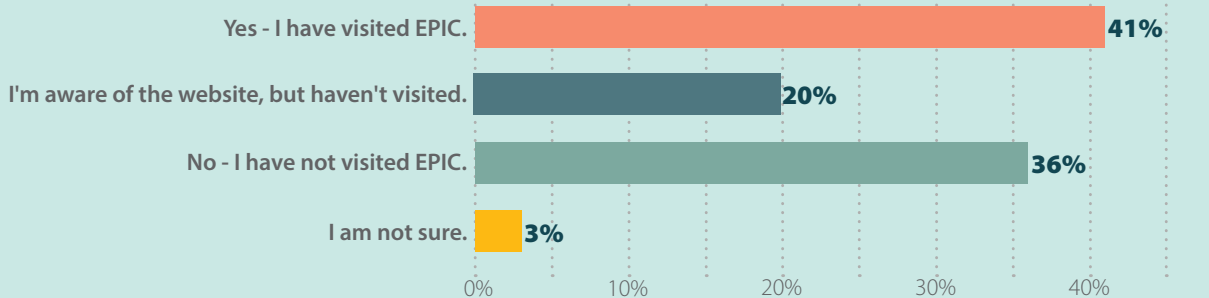
## HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN AN EA IN B.C. IN THE LAST 5 YEARS?



## HAVE YOU VISITED THE EAO'S WEBSITE PRIOR TO TAKING THE SURVEY?



## HAVE YOU VISITED THE EAO'S PROJECT INFORMATION CENTRE WEBSITE PRIOR TO TAKING THE SURVEY?



### EPIC

The [EAO's Project Information Centre](#) (EPIC) houses all documentation, announcements and updates related to projects involved with the EAO.

This tells us that many people who have an interest in environmental assessments may not have any prior experience with environmental assessments or the Environmental Assessment Office. We will continue to keep this in mind when developing engagement or educational materials.

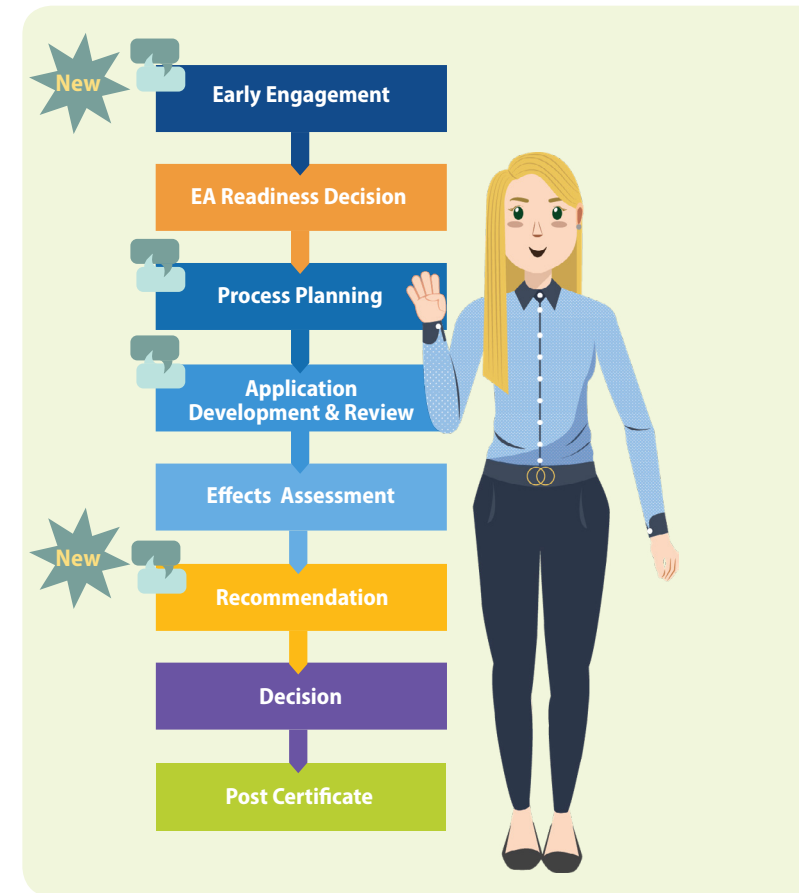


# Changes to Public Engagement Under the Environmental Assessment Act, 2018

The EAO's public engagement approach is flexible so that it can be tailored to meet the needs of a community as well as the requirements of the legislation. Public engagements may vary from one project to another and between each phase in the assessment process. There are four public comment periods, at different phases, to allow the public to meaningfully contribute. Designing engagements using tailored and responsive methods that are appropriate to the participants involved and the proposed project allows for more meaningful participation and greater influence in the environmental assessment (EA) process.

There are several changes in the *Environmental Assessment Act*, 2018 that introduce new public engagement requirements of projects undergoing an environmental assessment (EA), such as:

- Introduction of the Early Engagement phase, where participants have meaningful conversations about the proposed project to identify engagement approaches, potential interests, issues, and concerns before the project design is finalized.
- Holding two additional public engagement periods during an EA, during the new Early Engagement phase and on the draft assessment report and any recommend conditions prior to referral to ministers for a decision. More information on what occurs in each phase and when public engagement periods are held can be found on [page 4](#).
- Establishment of a project-based Community Advisory Committee where there is sufficient public interest. This committee would provide a venue for members of the public (who may have local knowledge of the community, the environment and the use of the proposed project area) to stay up to date on the progress of the EA and to be informed of opportunities to provide their input.
- The reasons for the Ministers' decision to issue or not issue an environmental assessment certificate must address required considerations and will be publicly available and easy to find.
- Enhancement of the EAO Project Information Centre (EPIC) to facilitate public access to information and records relating to environmental assessments.

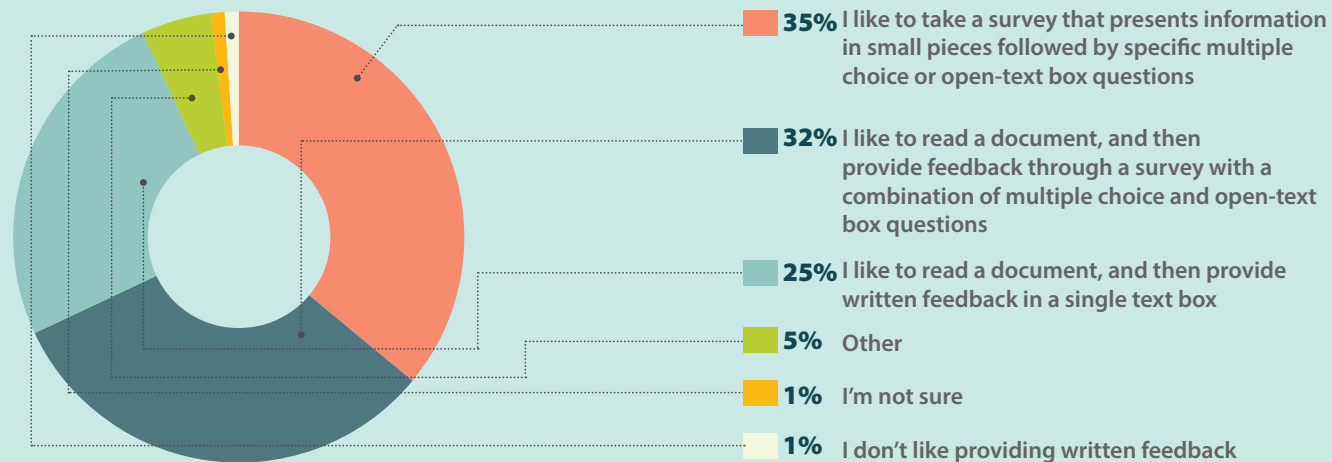


For further reading on the new EAO policies and regulations in greater detail, please see

[2018 Act - Guidance Documents Related to Environmental Assessments](#)

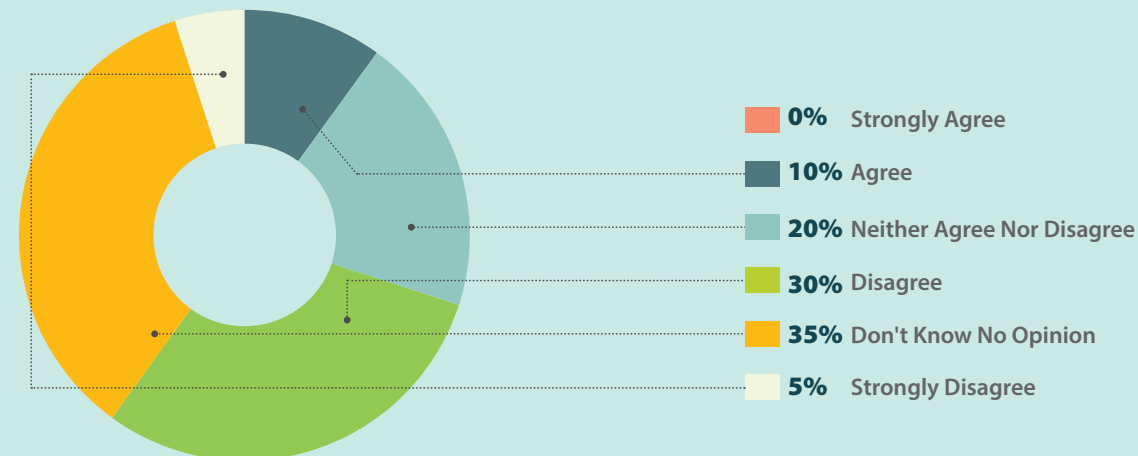
# What We Heard

## PREFERENCE FOR PROVIDING WRITTEN FEEDBACK



One quarter of respondents prefer the EAO's traditional method of providing documents to review, and there is a preference for greater flexibility in how respondents provide feedback.

## THINK ABOUT THE TIME(S) YOU SUBMITTED A COMMENT TO THE EAO. HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING: "MY COMMENT WAS CONSIDERED AND ADDRESSED IN THE EA OF A PROJECT."



Every comment received during a public comment period is absolutely reviewed and considered, however, we acknowledge we could do a better job of showing how we considered those comments.

Due to rounding, combined values may not equal 100%

# In-Person Engagements & Virtual Engagements

In-person engagements are an important public engagement tool for the EAO. There is an intangible value in meeting face-to-face with participants of the EA process that creates the potential for more effective communication, understanding and trust building. There is a greater level of understanding that occurs when people communicate in person – body language, tone, and the conversational style inherent to in-person conversations all contribute to effective communication.

When in-person events are not possible - or as a supplement to in-person events - an online option to conduct public open houses during public comment periods has been developed. Online tools will present material and allow interaction and engagement in real time. We have previously implemented virtual engagement activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the success of these sessions has demonstrated their usefulness as a future option for all projects.

These virtual sessions will be valuable where multiple communities may wish to participate, provincial emergency restrictions are in place, or to best accommodate public participation preferences. During each public comment period, in addition to gathering feedback online through EPIC, the EAO hosts one or more engagement events in communities potentially impacted by the proposed project. While there are many options for these engagements, ‘open houses’ have traditionally been the default format. These events can take many forms with a variety of activities that, wherever possible, suit the unique circumstances of each project, the phase of the project, and the preferences of each community. During the Early Engagement phase, the EAO considers a variety of activities to best engage the public. Subsequent comment periods and engagement activities will be determined by the Assessment Plan developed in

the Process Planning Phase of the project, with community input.

There are some participants in the EA process who desire a ‘town-hall’ style engagement where community members may voice their opinion in a public forum and debate with one another. There are other community members who do not feel comfortable or safe in such environments, and we have heard from some local governments and others that such events are often counterproductive to the collective good of their community.

## Goals of in-person engagement and virtual engagement

### PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PUBLIC TO LEARN ABOUT THE PROJECT AND THE EA PROCESS

For many EA participants, this may be the first time they are hearing about or interacting with the EAO.

### COLLECT FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

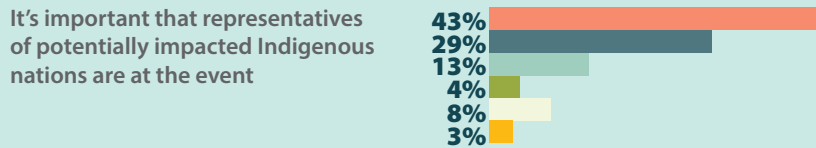
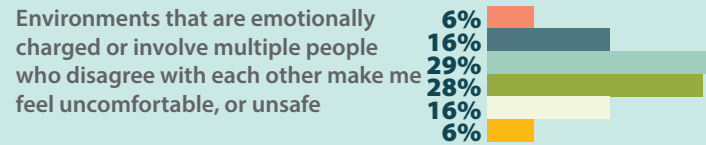
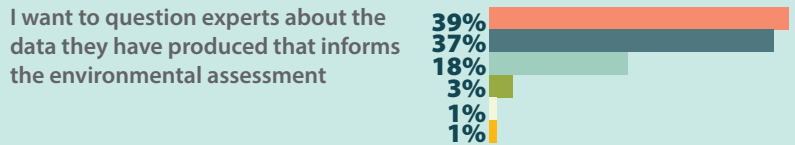
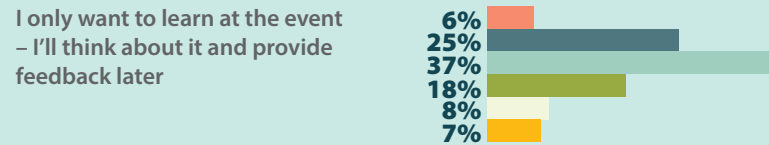
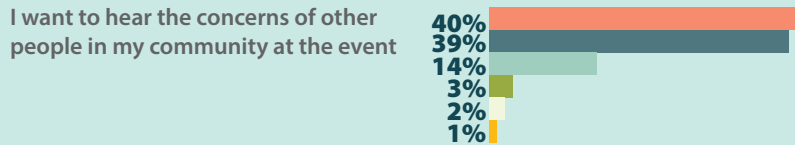
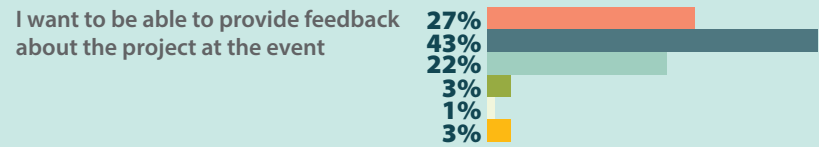
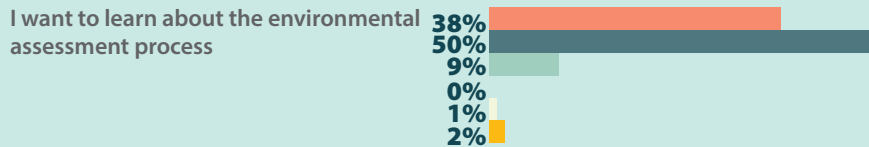
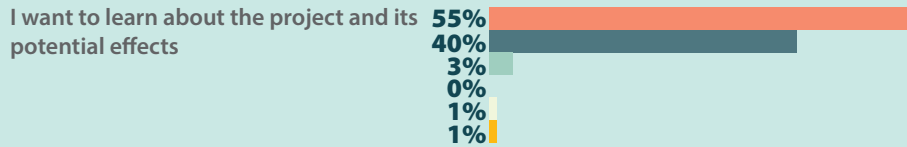
The EAO will seek to understand the unique preferences of each community during these engagements and develop ways of gathering feedback that works best for as many members of the community as possible.

### BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES

Establishing relationships with community members early helps build trust, makes meaningful feedback more likely, and facilitates a more predictable and thorough EA in which all EA participants can be confident.



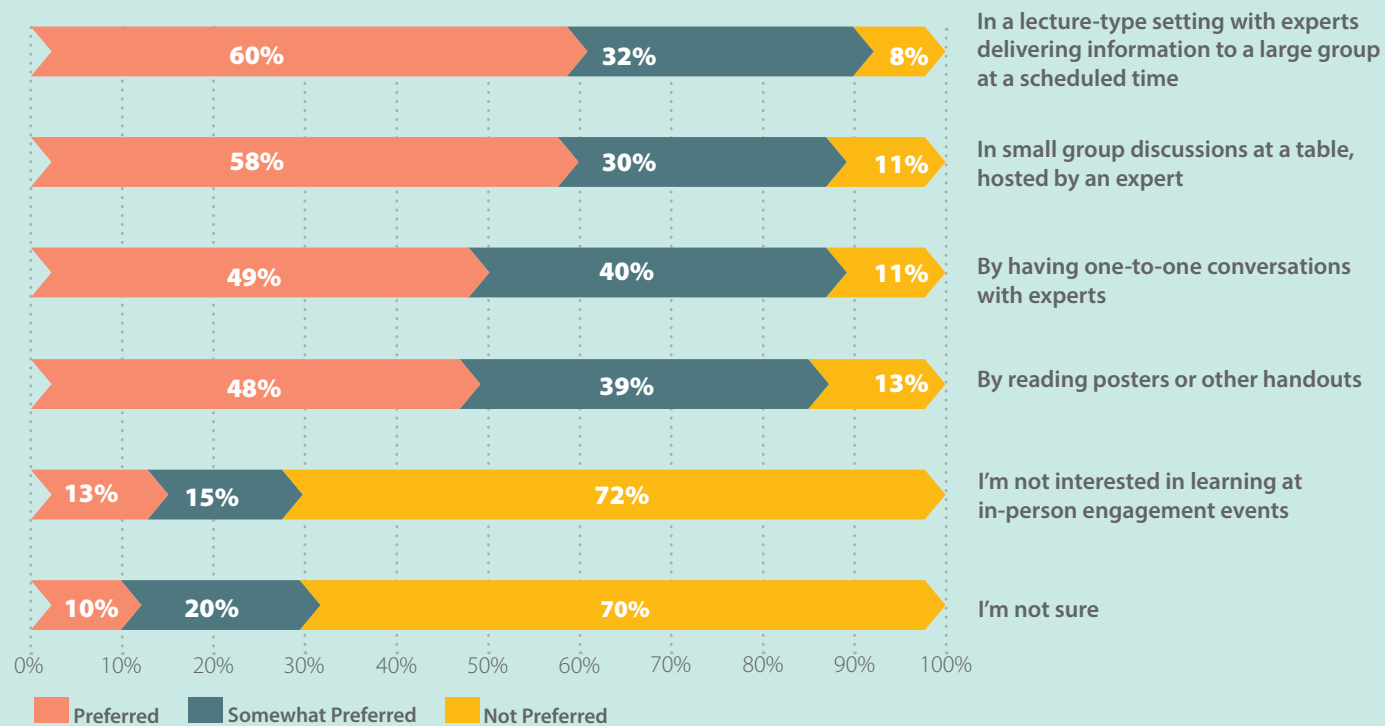
# Preferences at In-Person or Virtual Engagement Events



Strongly Agree Agree Nether Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion

This tells us there are many diverse views of what an ideal in-person or virtual engagement looks like for British Columbians. One theme that emerges is that hearing the views and opinions of fellow community members is important. Figuring out ways of doing that where all attendees feel welcome and safe is top of mind for the EAO.

# Learning preferences for in-person engagement events



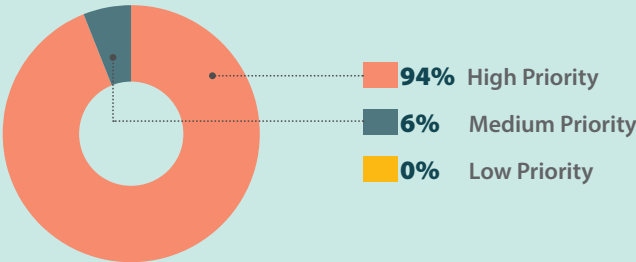
This survey was conducted prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Canada. We're currently conducting all engagements virtually and look forward to when we can engage in-person once again.

This further demonstrates that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to in-person engagements, with most options quite close to each other in terms of preference. This shows we need to present a range of options at in-person engagements.

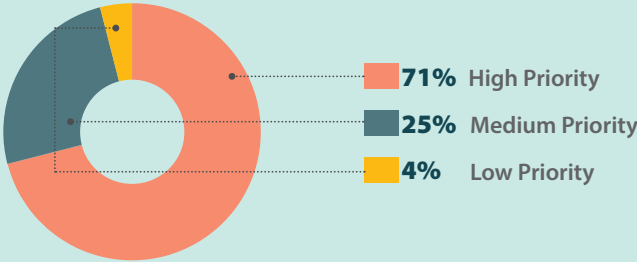
Due to rounding, combined values may not equal 100%

# In thinking about your potential experience at an in-person or virtual engagement event, please rank the priority of the following outcomes

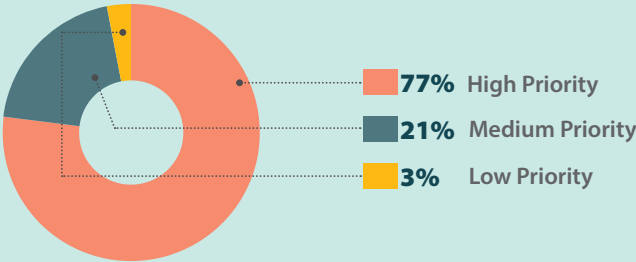
I want to learn more about the project and its potential effects on my community



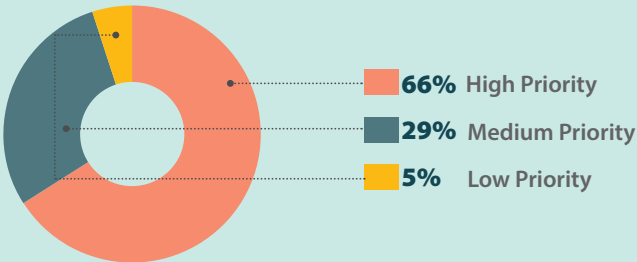
I want to learn about the environmental assessment process and how I can participate



I want to provide feedback on the project and its potential effects on my community

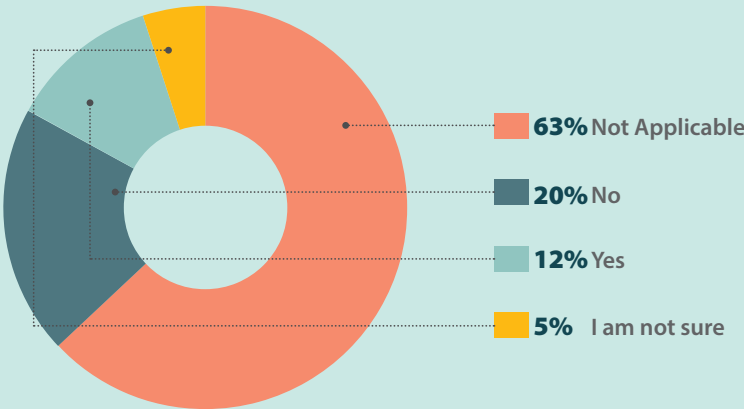


I want to hear others' opinions on the potential effects of the project, and/or share my opinion with others in a public way



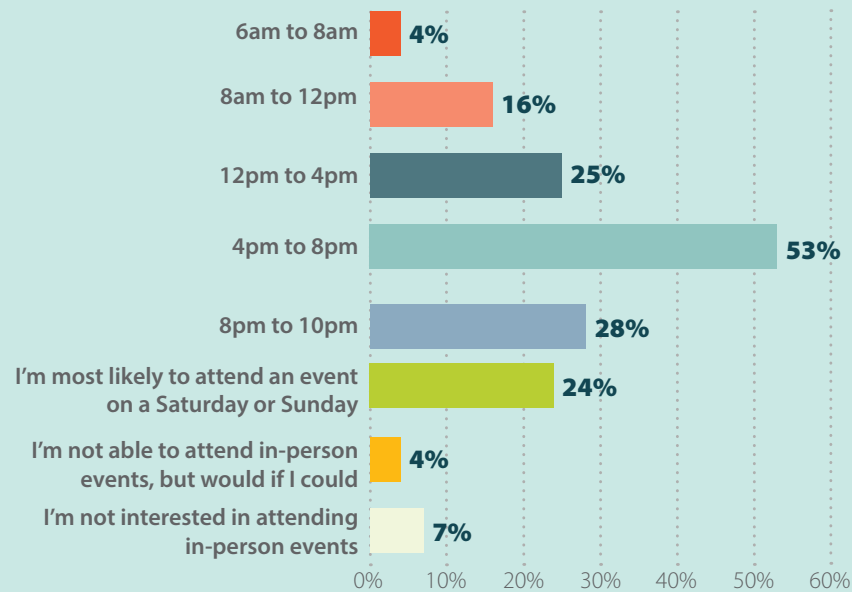
This will help us prioritize the engagement activities and learning materials we develop for in-person or virtual engagements.

## Would you be more likely to attend an in-person engagement event if free short-term childcare was available?



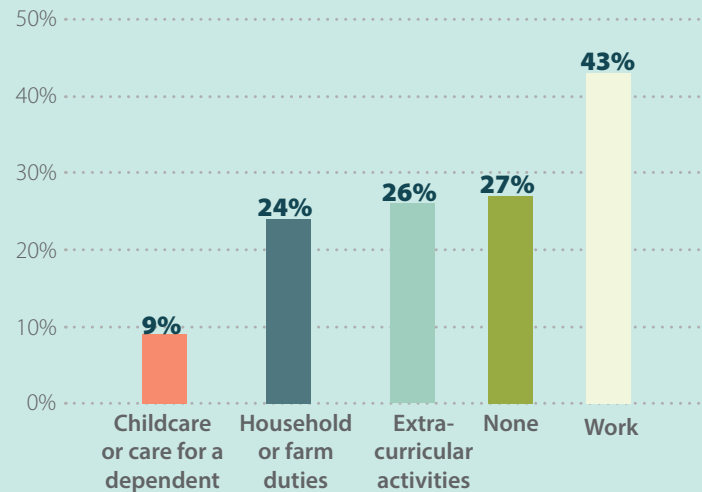
Due to rounding, combined values may not equal 100%

## Time preference for attending an in-person engagement event between Monday and Friday



As respondents could select more than one response, percentages will total greater than 100

## Factors that prevented respondents from selecting additional time-slots



As respondents could select more than one response, percentages will total greater than 100.

Reducing barriers to attending in-person engagements helps ensure we receive a diversity of feedback. There are many factors that may prevent someone from being able to attend an in-person engagement and the EAO seeks to minimize these potential barriers where possible.



# Understanding the Environmental Assessment Process

The EAO assesses the potential environmental, economic, social, cultural and health impacts of major project developments in B.C., in addition to the [required assessment matters in Section 25 of the Act](#). Public and stakeholder feedback throughout the EA process is important to ensure we're conducting a thorough assessment. It's the responsibility of the EAO to ensure the process is as easy to understand as possible, so that participants can provide meaningful feedback with the greatest potential for influence in the process.

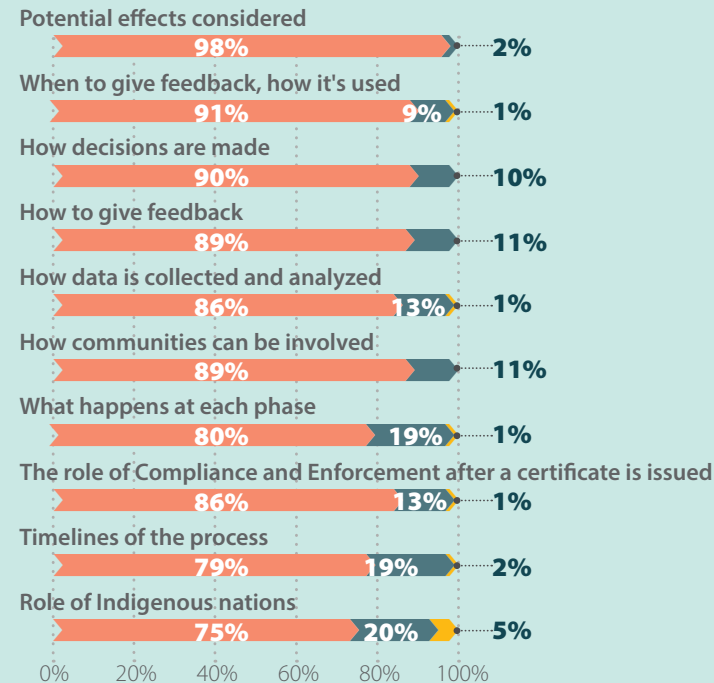
The EAO is developing new educational materials to make the EA process easier to understand, including delivering that information in new ways that work for a variety of British Columbians and their unique learning styles. The feedback provided in the engagement survey (presented on the following page) will help us prioritize these new approaches, which will better empower participants in the EA process.



# What do you feel are the most important things to know about the EA process?

Important Somewhat Important Not Important

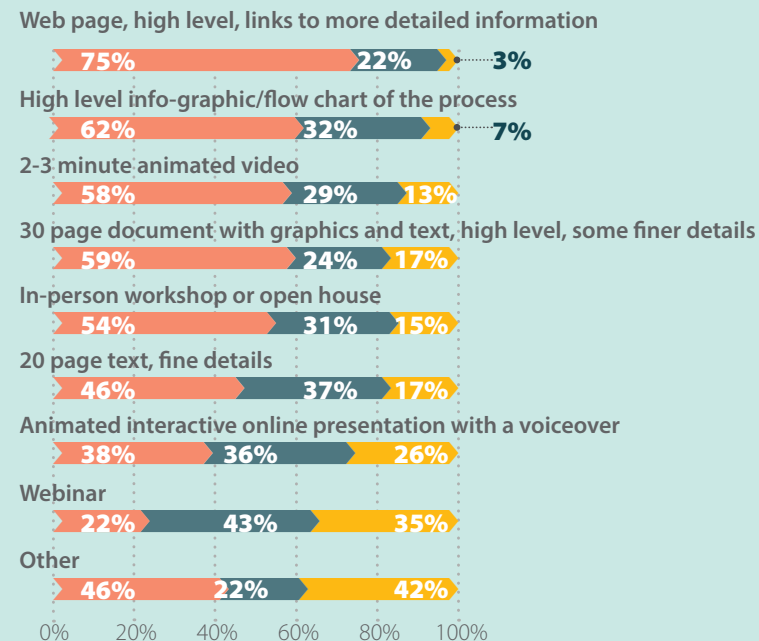
This tells us that when it comes to environmental assessments, the public generally feel that all aspects of an assessment are important to know, which means when we develop educational material it's important to touch on all aspects of the process and the roles of participants.



# What are your communication preferences for learning about the EA process?

Preferred Somewhat Preferred Not Preferred

Information like this greatly helps us decide on the format of the educational materials we develop, so we can ensure we continue to meet the needs and preferences of EA participants.



Due to rounding, combined values may not equal 100%

# Learning About Projects

Reviewable projects come in a range of different shapes and sizes, levels of complexity and potential for effects. Likewise, communities come in different shapes and sizes, have different perspectives on development, and differing levels of experience with the environmental assessment process. In helping communities understand the potential impacts of a project near them (both positive and negative), the EAO takes a tailored approach to ensure public engagement is adapted wherever possible to the unique circumstances of each community. Not all communities participate in public engagement in the same way. Some factors may include the size of community, public knowledge of the project, level of potential impacts, and experience with the EA process.

The EAO is developing new educational materials and engagement approaches to make it as easy as possible to learn about all aspects of a project and its potential interaction with nearby communities. This includes new ways of delivering information that works for a variety of British Columbians and their unique learning styles. The feedback provided in the engagement survey (presented on the following page) will help us prioritize these new approaches, which will better empower participants in the EA process.



# What is the most important information to know about a project undergoing an EA?

Important Somewhat Important Not Important

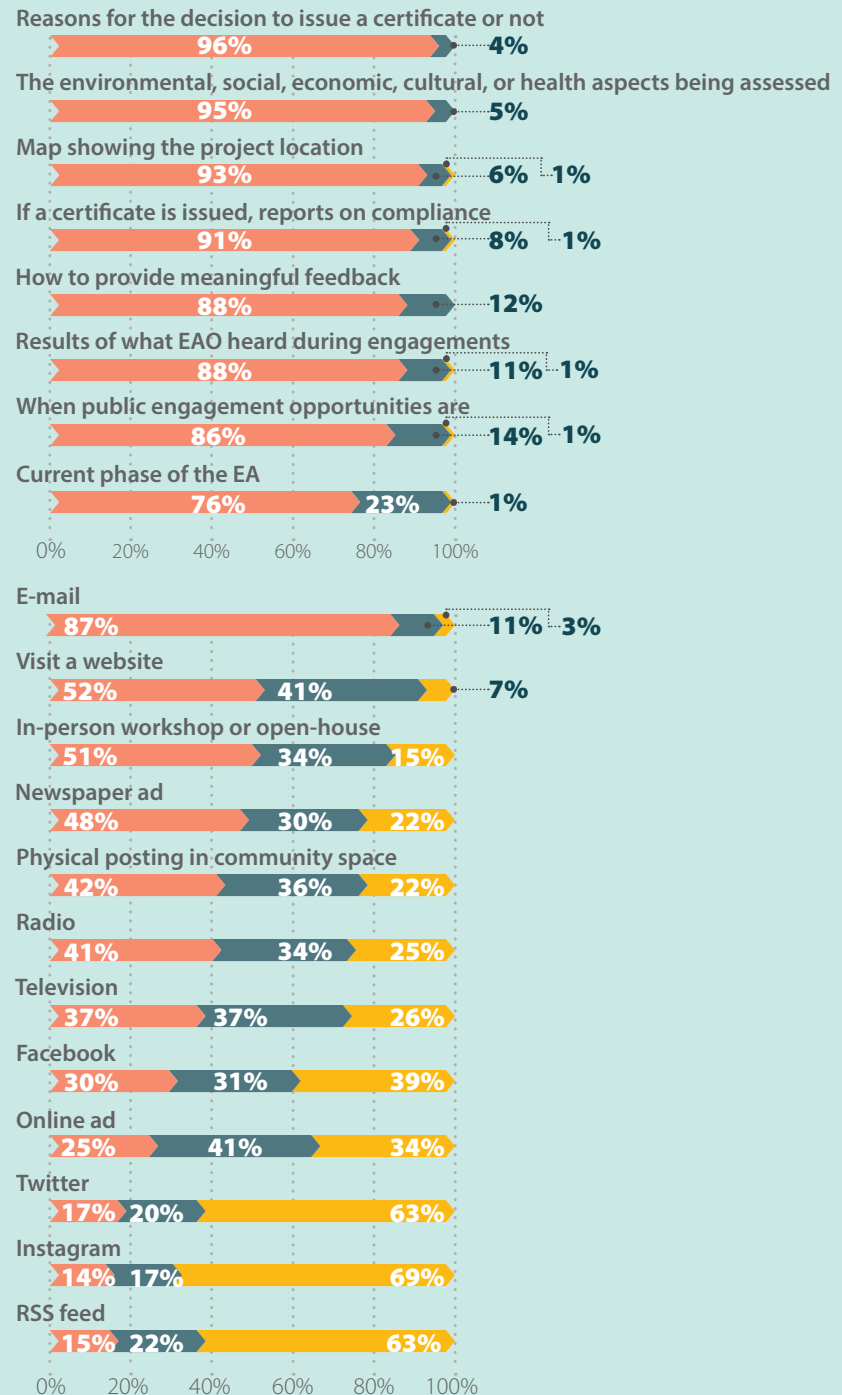
This tells us that when it comes to understanding a project undergoing an EA, the public generally feel that all aspects of the project are important to know. We'll combine these findings with other user experience exercises to help inform the design of EPIC and other project related information to surface the most desired pieces of information.

# Preferences for learning about changes or updates to the EA of a project

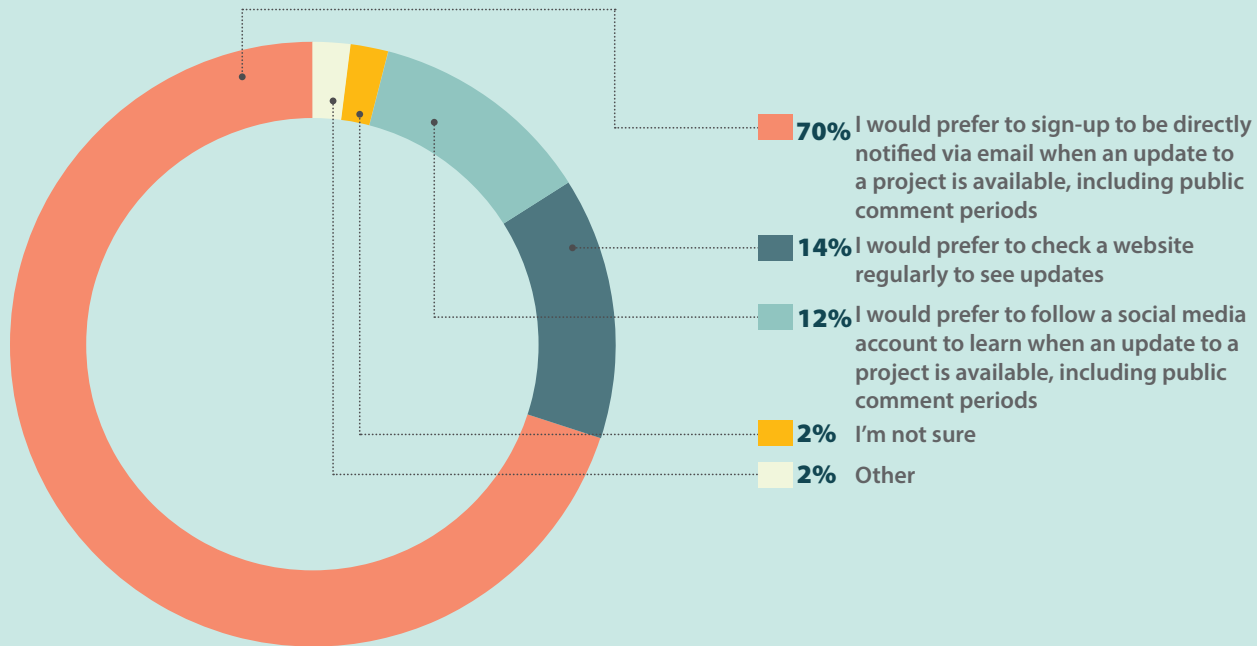
Preferred Somewhat Preferred Not Preferred

Information like this greatly helps us decide on the format of the educational materials we develop, so we can ensure we continue to meet the needs and preferences of EA participants.

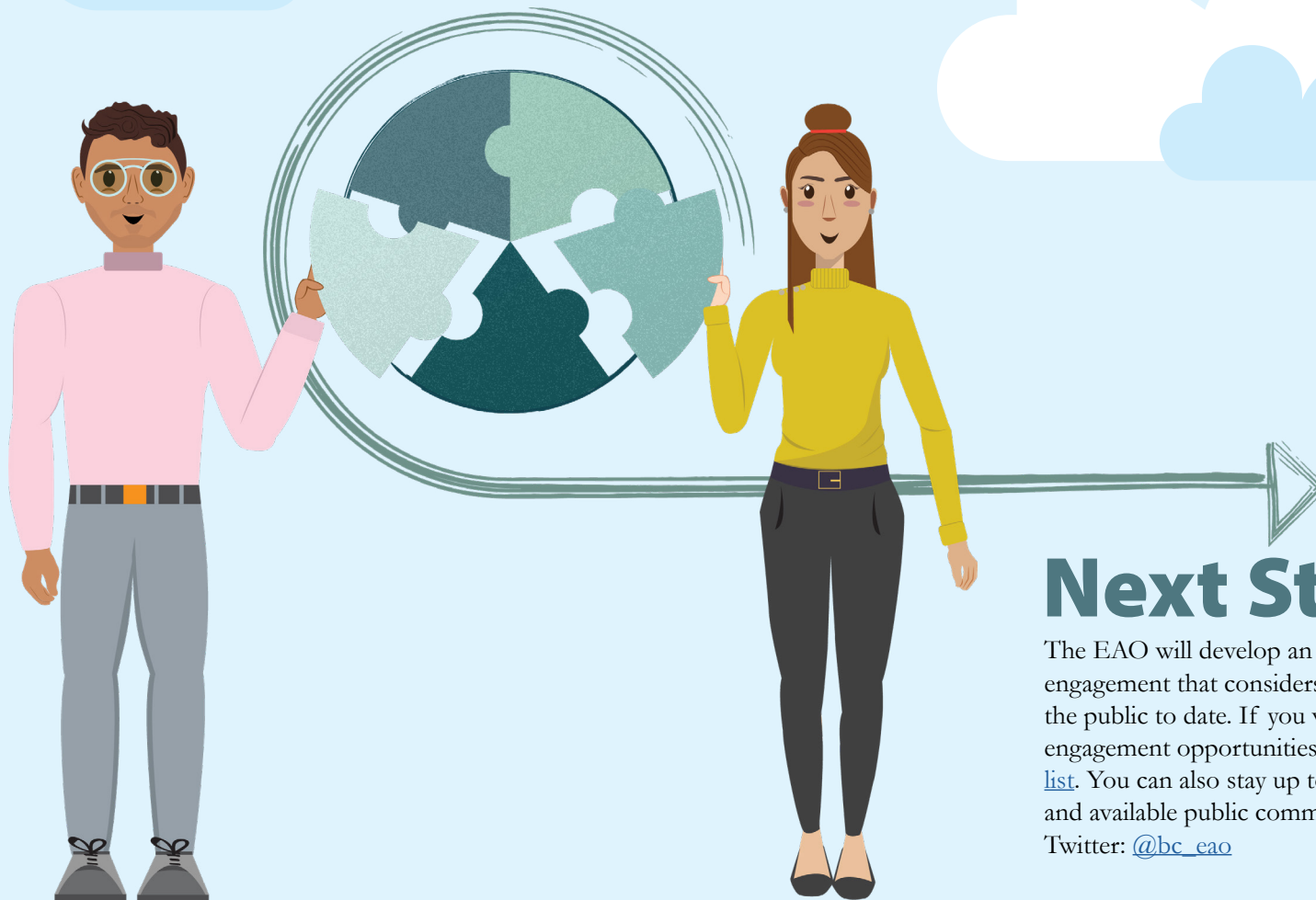
Due to rounding, combined values may not equal 100%



# What's your preference for learning about updates to a project near your community?



This tells us that the majority of respondents prefer an approach to project updates where they are automatically informed of updates, rather than needing to check themselves for updates, and that email is the preferred method of receiving those updates.



## Next Steps

The EAO will develop an updated approach to public engagement that considers all of the feedback received from the public to date. If you would like to be notified of new engagement opportunities, please [sign up to our mailing list](#). You can also stay up to date with project activities and available public comment periods by following us on Twitter: [@bc\\_eao](#)