

# **Developing the statistical system through partnerships with users— The Canadian experience with the information society statistics program**

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Canadian legislation gives Statistics Canada a very comprehensive mandate, broad in scope and continuing in nature, and Canadians invest significant resources to fulfill that mandate. Still, the need for information consistently exceeds the means of the statistical agency to produce information.

Statistics Canada relies to a good extent on building partnerships with users to fill data gaps. These partnerships allow the statistical system to establish priorities, define needs, obtain financial resources and develop the knowledge networks required to build new statistical infrastructure and outputs.

The information society statistics program is a case in point. It began in the mid-'90s as a 5-year partnership between Statistics Canada and Industry Canada "to develop the statistical and analytical infrastructure required to understand the information society", a partnership later renewed to add partners and further develop statistics and analysis.

The original goal of the program was met through the creation of new knowledge on major economic and societal developments and the use of this knowledge to inform policy at the federal, provincial and international levels. For instance, much of what we know today about the prevalence and diffusion of Internet applications across the Canadian society and economy, the nature and extent of the digital divide, the evolution of the Canadian information society compared to that of other countries, and the impact of information and communication technologies and related policies on our society can be attributed to this program. Of equal importance, the program has afforded opportunities for the statistical, policy and academic communities to engage in joint research projects and to add value to existing data through integrated analysis.

The paper's objective is to share the Canadian experience in developing and implementing a user centric statistical program. It does so by describing how the information society statistics program was built and how it evolved through time with the help of partners, by providing examples of how statistical instruments were developed (e.g. surveys), how and by whom its outputs are used, and by sharing some of the lessons learned along the way. As well, it highlights the two-way linkages between domestic and international work, particularly at the OECD and the UN. It then offers some thoughts on how such a program could evolve to increase its usefulness or, put another way, how it could provide a better return on investment in the years to come.