

## Vital Signs 2009: National Public Opinion Survey

### Community Quality of Life

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As part of its 2009 Vital Signs program, Community Foundations of Canada commissioned the Environics Research Group to conduct a national public opinion survey focused on the following topics:

- How Canadians' assess quality of life in their communities
- The most important contributor to quality of life in their community
- Impact of the recession on quality of life
- What is most needed to improve quality of life
- Level of confidence in local leadership to make improvements

*The research is based on a telephone survey with a representative sample of 2,007 Canadians (aged 18 and over), conducted August 19 to 26, 2009. A sample of this size will provide national results accurate to within plus or minus 2.5 percent (19 times out of 20), and is large enough to provide for valid results by province and community size, as well as by relevant demographic strata of the population (e.g. by age group, education level). Results are presented as a percentage, unless otherwise noted.*

### **Community Quality of Life Today**

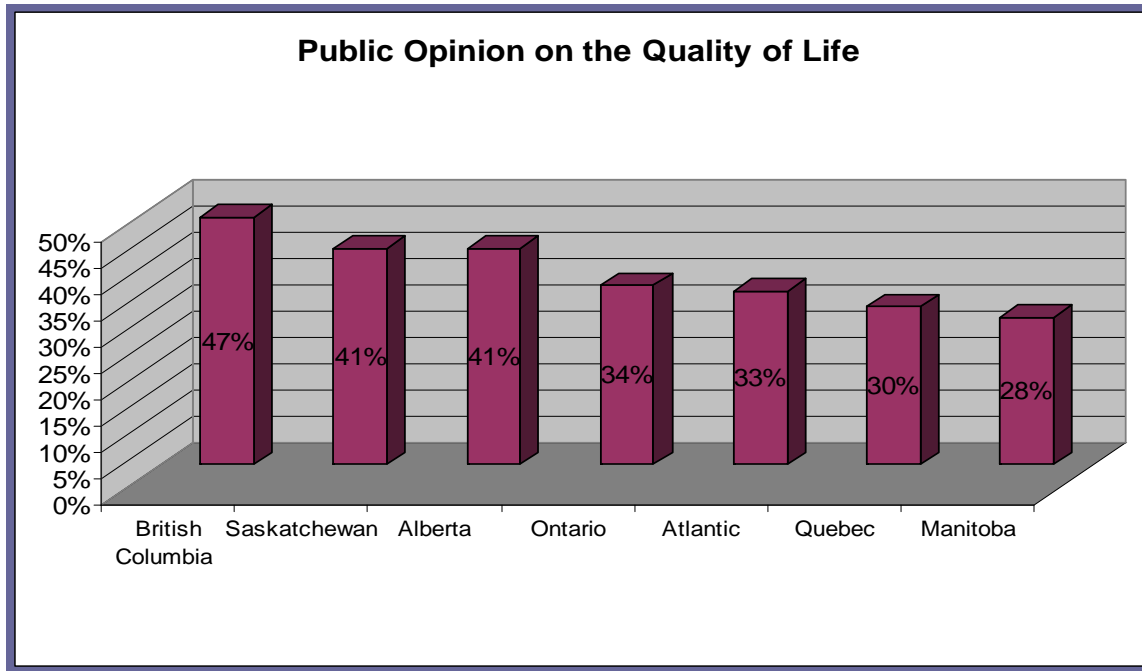
**Almost nine in ten Canadians consider the quality of life in their community to be good, if not excellent. Quality of life ratings increase noticeably along with residents' level of education and income, and tend to be stronger in rural communities than urban ones.**

Canadians are more likely than not to feel positive about the quality of life in their community.<sup>1</sup> More than one-third (36%) describe the quality of life as “excellent”, while another half (50%) consider it to be “good.” By comparison, 11 percent rate their community as “only fair”, while only three percent consider it to be “poor.”

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<sup>1</sup> The survey defined “community” as the city, town or village in which respondents currently live.

## Quality of life across the country



By province, communities are rated most positively among residents of British Columbia (47% say excellent), followed by Saskatchewan and Alberta (41% each), Ontario (34%), Atlantic Canada (33%) and least evident among residents of Manitoba (28%) and Quebec (30%).

- Excellent ratings are most common among residents of rural communities (less than 5,000) (43%), compared to those living in cities of 100,000 or more (32%).
- Quality of life is strongly linked to socio-economic status, reflecting the fact that Canadians with more education and income have greater choice about where they choose to live.
- Among those without a high school diploma, only 25 percent rate their local quality of life to be excellent, compared with 30 percent who describe it as only fair to poor.
- For Canadians with a university degree, the comparable proportions are 43 percent and 8 percent, respectively.
- The percentage giving negative ratings (only fair or poor) does not reach 20 percent in any province or community size.
- Assessments are strikingly consistent across age cohorts, and between men and women.

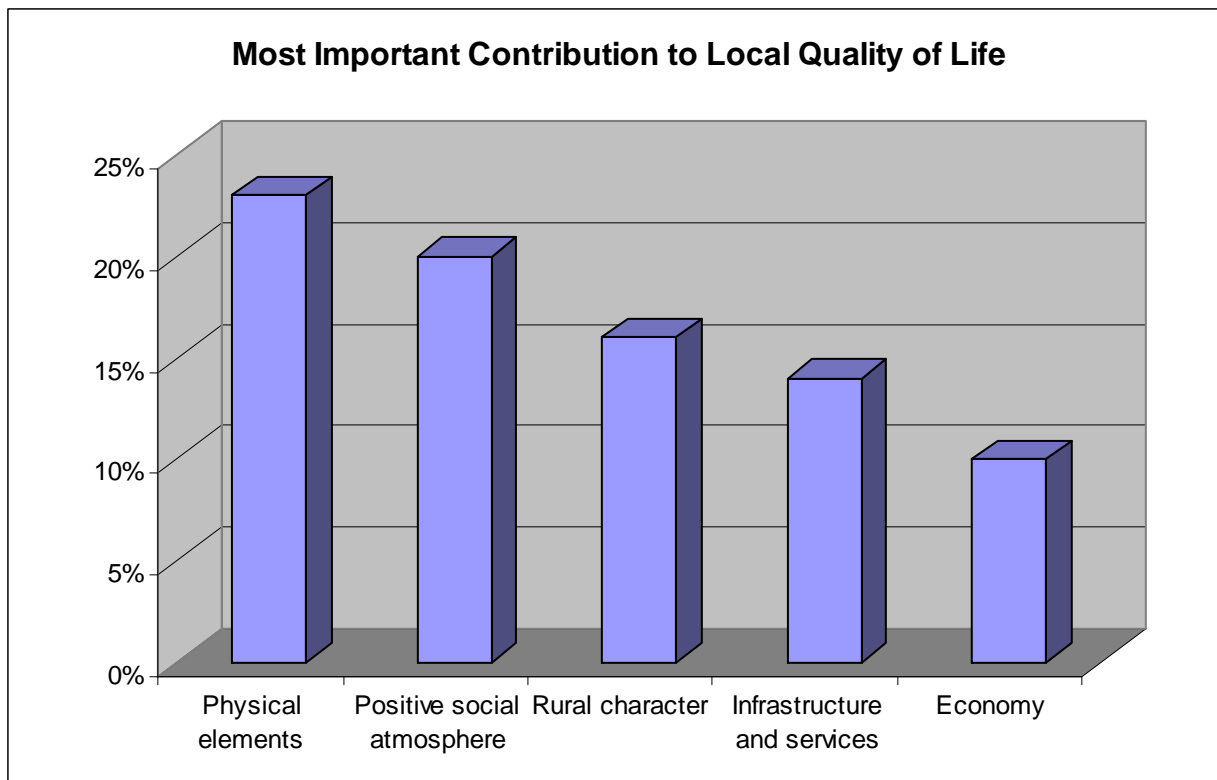
## **MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Residents are most likely to point to the physical attributes (e.g. green space) or social atmosphere as the feature that most contributes to a positive quality of life in their community.**

Across the country, residents tend to focus on place – the setting and physical environment – or the social atmosphere of their communities. These elements are significantly more important to Canadians than such aspects as the economy, civic leadership or public safety.

When asked this question unprompted (without being offered with response choices):

- One-quarter (23%) of Canadians identify physical elements of their communities, including green spaces, the presence of lakes, rivers or oceans and air quality.
- Almost as many (20%) emphasize a positive social atmosphere in their communities.
- Another 16 percent identified the rural or small character of their community is the most important.
- And 14 percent focus on the infrastructure and local services available to community members.
- Despite Canadians' current focus on the economy and unemployment during the current recession, few (10%) specifically identify the economy and/or job opportunities as the most important feature contributing to a positive quality of life in their community.

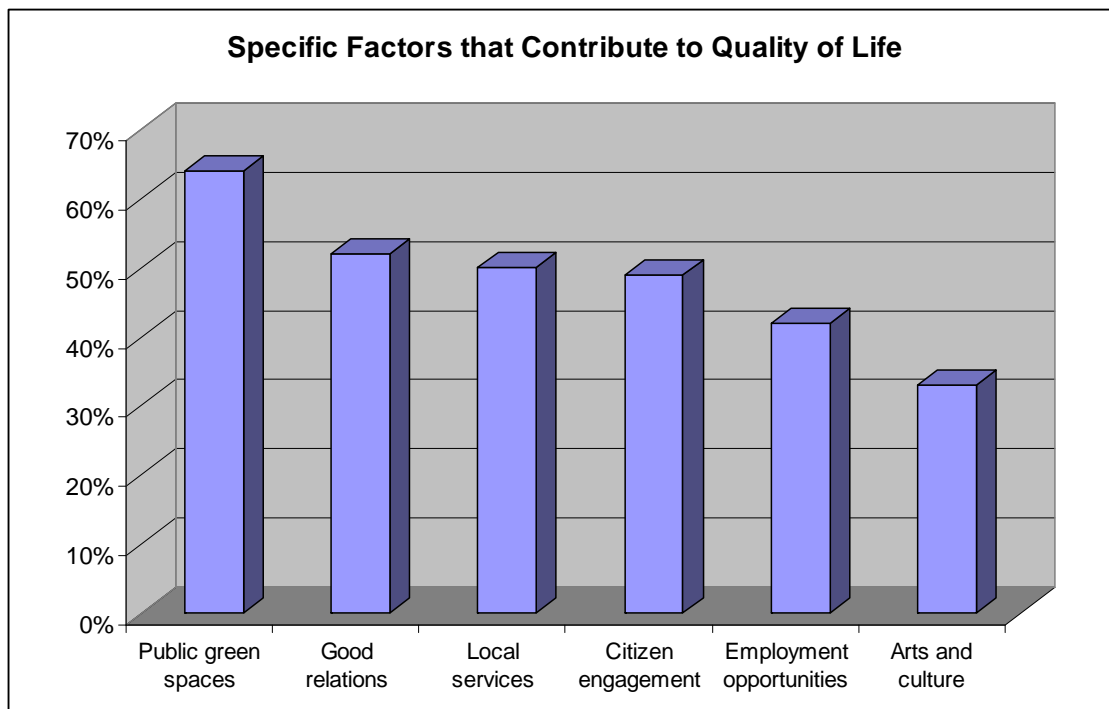


Canadians living in Quebec (32%) and British Columbia (28%) are the most likely to identify the physical environment, while residents of Manitoba (11%) are the least likely to do so. Atlantic Canadians (30%) are more likely to focus on the positive effects of a healthy social atmosphere. There is little variation among Canadians living communities of different sizes; although, Canadians living in the smallest communities (29%) are the most likely to believe the rural or small town character of their community is the most important feature.

### Specific factors that contribute to quality of life

Canadians were also asked the extent to which each of six specific aspects contributes to the quality of life in their communities: opportunities for jobs and employment, availability of arts and culture, public green spaces, good relations between people of different backgrounds, local services to assist people in need of help, and active citizen engagement and volunteering.

In general, Canadians believe all of these factors contribute in some way to the quality of life their communities, although once again this is most likely to be the case with respect to public green spaces (64% say this makes a significant contribution). Half of Canadians think that good relations between different groups (52%), local services (50%) and active citizen engagement (49%) play a significant role in the quality of life in their communities, while four in ten (42%) think the availability of employment opportunities contributes significantly to the quality of life in their communities. Fewer Canadians identify the availability of arts and culture as a contributing factor to the quality of life in their communities, although one third (33%) nevertheless believe it makes a big contribution.



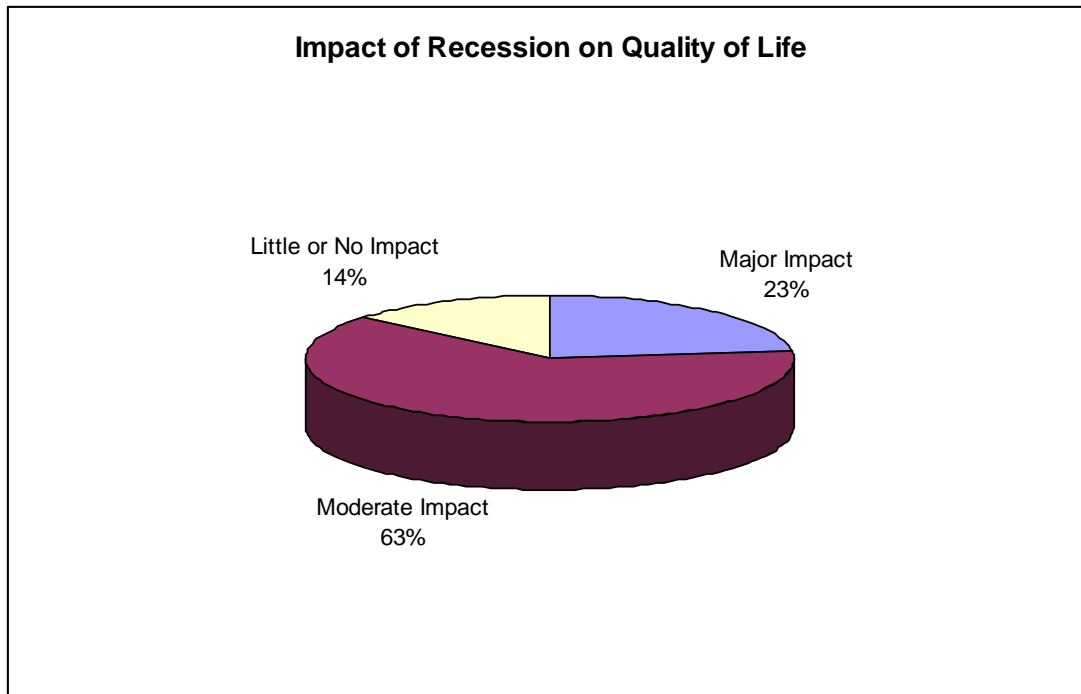
- Opinions on the contribution of these aspects differ significantly between Canadians who live in larger cities and those who live in smaller communities, most notably when it comes to the availability of arts and culture, and the presence of public green spaces.
- Canadians living in communities with greater than 100,000 residents (especially those living in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) are more likely to say that both the availability of arts and culture and the presence of public green spaces have a positive effect on the quality of life in their communities.
- Canadians living in Saskatchewan (70%), and Manitoba (51%) are the most likely to identify employment opportunities as a contributing factor, while residents of British Columbia (30%) are the least likely.
- Canadians offer consistent evaluations of the effects of local services and citizen engagement, regardless of region or demographic differences.

## **IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC RECESSION**

**Most Canadians report the current economic recession has had some impact on the quality of life in their community, but relatively few believe the effects have been significant or have extended beyond the loss of local jobs.**

Canada is currently experiencing the most significant economic recession in almost 20 years, but this does not seem to have had a substantial impact to date on how most Canadians view the general quality of life in their communities.

One in six (15%) report the recession has had a major impact on the local quality of life. Another four in ten (41%) indicating it has had a moderate impact, while an equal proportion see little (33%) or no (9%) such impact.



Given that the recession has affected some sectors more than others, it is no surprise that regional differences are apparent in how Canadians respond to this question, but the size of these discrepancies is modest. Ontarians (19%) and Albertans (16%) are the most likely to believe the recession has had a major impact on their communities, while this view is least evident in Saskatchewan (5%) and Manitoba (9%). As well, reports of significant community impacts are only modestly higher among Canadians with lower household incomes (less than \$40,000 per year), women, and those 60 years of age and over. Results do not vary noticeably across community size.

**Effects of the economic downturn.** Canadians who believe the economic downturn had a major or moderate effect on the quality of life in their communities were also asked how the recession has affected quality of life in their communities (unprompted, without response choices being offered). As might be expected, the most commonly reported impact is the loss of local jobs (51%). Other reported impacts include the effects on local businesses (17%) and tourism (8%), as well as personal issues associated with lower incomes (such as decreased personal spending (12%)).

Opinions on the effects of the economic downturn vary across the country. Residents of Saskatchewan (59%) and Alberta (57%) are more likely than others to mention job losses, while this response is least evident in Manitoba (38%). Ontarians (19%) focus more on the effects of the recession on local business than do other Canadians, while those living in British Columbia (12%), Quebec (10%) and residents of rural communities (11%) note that the loss of tourism has affected the quality of life in their communities.

Few Canadians have noticed a decline in community services and charity work (3%); with this response most evident in the Toronto GTA (9%).

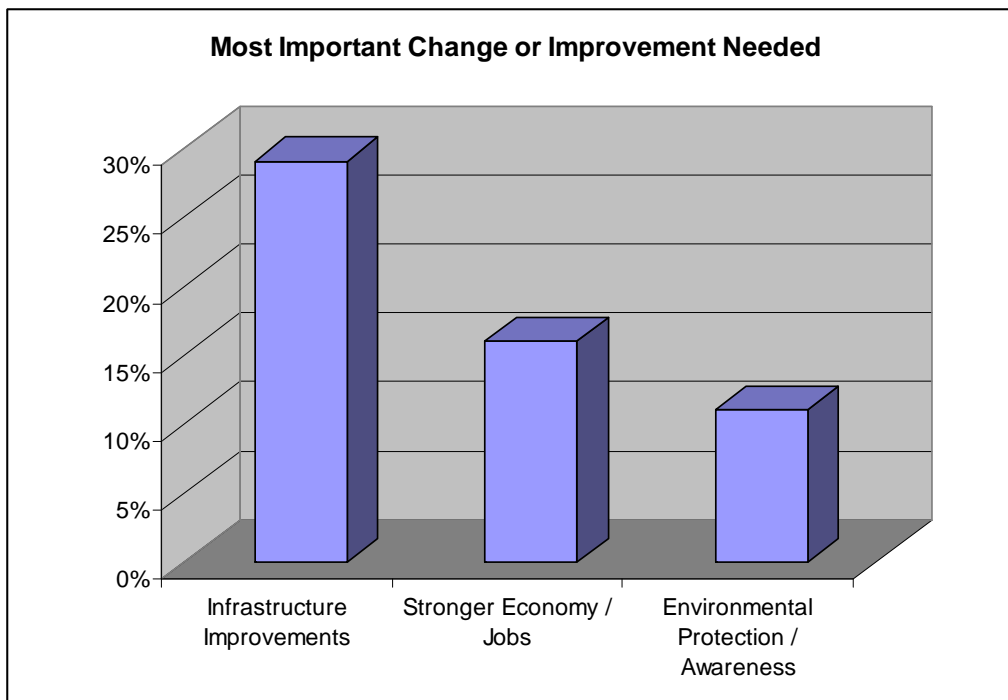
## Looking ahead

### MOST IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENT

**Canadians are most likely to identify better infrastructure (e.g. public transit) as the most important step to improving their community’s quality of life over the next few years. Other priorities include a stronger economy and more attention given to environmental protection.**

Few Canadians identify the infrastructure of their communities as the most important element determining the current quality of life in their community, but it is at the top of the list for many in terms of the most important priority for improvement.

When asked to name the single most important change or improvement needed over the next few years to improve the quality of life in their community, three in ten (29%) identify infrastructure improvements in such areas as public transit (11%), roads/facilities (8%), health care (5%), social services (4%), and others (e.g. recreation, waste management). The next most common priorities are a stronger economy or more jobs (16%) or more improved environmental protection and awareness (11%).

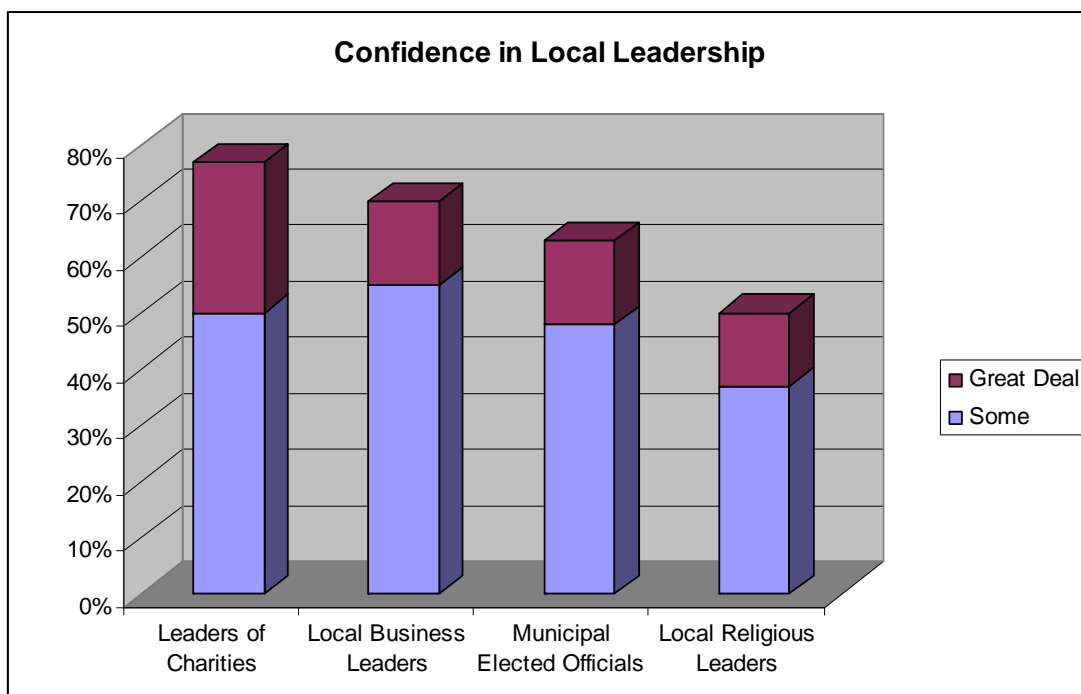


- The emphasis given to improving local infrastructure is evident across the country, but most widespread among residents the major urban areas.
- Residents of Toronto (20%), Montreal (16%) and Vancouver (16%) tend to believe improvements to the public transit systems in their cities would enrich the quality of life in their communities.
- Quebecers are the most apt to be focused on improving local environmental quality.

## CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL LEADERSHIP

**Canadians place the greatest confidence in the leaders of local non-profit organizations in making a positive contribution to improving their community. Somewhat lower levels of confidence are expressed in the leadership of business leaders, municipal politicians, and religious leaders.**

- Three-quarters of residents say they have a great deal (27%) or some (50%) confidence in leaders of charities and other community-based organizations.
- By comparison, seven in ten have such confidence in local business leaders (15% and 55%, respectively).
- While just over six in ten do so with respect to their municipal elected officials (15% and 48%, respectively).
- Half of Canadians say they are very (13%) or somewhat (37%) confident in the ability of local religious leaders to make a positive difference in their community.



Opinions on local leadership are similar across the country. Confidence in non-profit sector leadership is strongest in Quebec (86% a great deal or some confidence) and Atlantic Canada (82%), as are residents in smaller communities. Residents of Saskatchewan (79%) and Quebec (75%) are the most confident in their municipally elected officials, while Ontarians (55%) are the least confident. Views do not vary noticeably across demographic strata of the population.