

REPORT

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: April 24, 2023

From: Lisa Spitale
Chief Administrative Officer
File:

Item #: 2023-251

Subject: Demographic Profile of Be Heard New West Registered Users

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

To inform Council about the overall demographic profile of registered users of the City's Be Heard New West online engagement platform as of February 2023, as it compares with the overall demographic profile of New Westminster from the 2021 Census.

SUMMARY

Public Engagement staff have completed a comparison of the aggregated demographics of Be Heard New West online platform members with data from the 2021 Census. While there are several limitations to the data, this information provides Council, staff, and the community with specifics about which groups in the community are highly under-represented in the City's *online* public engagement activities. In particular, it's important to note that this demographic comparison does not include in-person engagement participants, and reaching people "where they already are" is a key strategy in reaching more diverse voices.

The data shows that residents who identify as people of colour and/or racialized are highly underrepresented on Be Heard New West. Of all the demographic measures that were compared, this was the biggest gap: 46.8% of New Westminster residents were identified as "visible minorities" in the 2021 Census, while only 11.9% of Be Heard users self-identified as people of colour. Staff have been making efforts to reach these community members before the availability of this data. However, as a result of this

information, more of staff's outreach efforts will go towards reaching racialized groups moving forward.

Other groups that are underrepresented on Be Heard include renters, youth and children (ages 19 and under), and community members born outside Canada. Efforts will continue to include more of these voices as well.

Some unexpected results of the comparison include a similar proportion of Be Heard members who are ages 65 and older as that age group in the community overall, and an over-representation of Be Heard members who have children under age 18 in their household.

BACKGROUND

The City's online public engagement platform, [Be Heard New West](#), was launched late in 2020. While all of the project information on the site is fully accessible without an account, community members are encouraged to sign up for an account on the platform. An account is required to participate in most of the feedback tools on the site such as surveys, online discussion forums, mapping tools and online brainstorming boards, etc.

The Be Heard account sign-up form includes several demographic questions, which allows the City to better understand who is participating in online engagement activities, and which voices may be missing / seldom heard. Postal code, year of birth, connections to New Westminster, and a variety of diverse identity and household characteristics are collected. See Attachment 2 for the full sign-up questionnaire.

To date, engagement summary reports have provided demographic information about participants on a project-by-project basis, but until now staff have not had enough consistent data to assess representation of public engagement participants across multiple projects / more generally. Prior to the launch of Be Heard, there was a lack of consistent demographic information collected about participants in the City's public engagement activities.

Now that the City has about two years of data about Be Heard registered users, Public Engagement staff have undertaken a comparison of Be Heard users overall with the 2021 Census profile of New Westminster.

It's important to note that this demographic comparison does not include participants in the City's in-person engagement activities. Most public engagement projects include both in-person and online options for community members to provide input to the City, and "going where people are" to seek their feedback is a key principle of our engagement practice. Collecting demographics of in-person participants is more challenging than for online participants, in particular for more sensitive information such

as Indigenous, racialized and/or LGBTQ2S+ identities, those who are living with a disability, and other demographic details.

Be Heard membership continues to grow, and staff are working to encourage underrepresented groups to sign up on the platform. The demographic comparison of Be Heard users with 2021 Census data included in this report represents a point-in-time analysis as of February 27, 2023.

ANALYSIS

As of February 27, 2023, Be Heard had 3,458 registered users. Administration accounts, staff accounts, and those pending activation are not included in this total or the demographic comparison.

Staff compared the aggregated Be Heard users’ demographic information with the closest available marker from the 2021 Census. In some cases, the Census uses different language than the Be Heard sign-up form – for example, where the Census uses “visible minority”, the Be Heard asks community members if they “identify as a person of colour and/or part of a racialized group”. In other cases, there is no equivalent information collected in the Census – for example, LGBTQ2S+ identity. It’s also important to note that the Census tracks some measures on a household level, rather than an individual level, while the Be Heard New West sign-up is for individuals. This means that some of the demographics cannot be compared one-for-one with the Census – in particular, this applies to households with children under age 18. It’s possible for two separate Be Heard account holders in one household to both be counted towards the total households with children.

It’s also important to note that Be Heard demographics are self-reported and much less official than the Census, so staff expect some participants’ information to be false and/or incomplete. Furthermore, the “More info about you (select any/all that apply)” question on the Be Heard sign-up form is optional and therefore the data set is incomplete. For the membership analyzed here, 7% of all users skipped the “More info about you” question, and an additional 10% selected “Prefer not to say” for this optional question. This means we do not have any “More info about you” information for 17% of users.

Profile of Be Heard Users Compared with Census Profile of New Westminster

Connections to New Westminster	2021 Census	Be Heard Participants
Residential tenant (renter) in New West	45.3%	24.1%
Residential property owner (condo, townhouse, house, etc.) in New West	54.7%	70.8%

Age Groups	2021 Census	Be Heard Participants
19 and under	16.4%	0.7%
20-34	23.9%	19.1%
35-49	22.9%	37.9%
50-64	20.8%	26.7%
65 and older	16.1%	15.6%
More Info About You	2021 Census	Be Heard Participants
I identify as a person of colour and/or part of a racialized group	46.8%	11.9%
I identify as Indigenous	3.1%	2.5%
I was born outside of Canada	37.5%	19.2%
I moved to Canada within the last 5 years	6.5%	3.4%
There are children (under age 18) in my household	20.2%	31.3%

Please see Attachment 1 for a summary of the details above, and status of each measure as comparable, underrepresented or overrepresented compared to the Census.

The proportion of Be Heard users is similar (within +/- 5%) to the Census for ages 20-34 and ages 65 and older, for residents with Indigenous identity, and those who moved to Canada within the last five years (new immigrants). The proportionality of older adults is noteworthy in that City staff and officials are often concerned that technology is not as widely used or accessible to older adults.

The following groups are overrepresented on Be Heard: residential property owners, ages 35-49 and ages 50-64, and those who report children (under age 18) in the household. As noted above, the Census reports children on a per household basis while Be Heard users are counted individually. This could lead to the same household with children being counted more than once, and likely explains some of the overrepresentation. Despite different counting approaches between Be Heard and the Census, the analysis indicates there is strong representation from parents in the City’s public engagement participants. This is noteworthy given that staff and officials traditionally consider parents as harder to reach.

The following groups are underrepresented on Be Heard: residential tenants (renters), ages 19 and under, people of colour / racialized residents, and those born outside Canada. In particular, the lack of participation on Be Heard from racialized community members is highly concerning to staff, and continued efforts will be made to build relationships and encourage participation from these residents.

It's important to highlight that public engagement requires residents to choose to participate and share their input with the City. The City's role is to clearly explain the project / opportunity to participate, and to offer a variety of accessible opportunities for the community to share feedback. Once community members have the information, it is up to them to opt-in and participate. This "participation by choice" approach makes public engagement distinct from other activities such as public opinion polling where specific segments of the population are directly approached to share input, and results are calculated based on a representative sample of the community.

Public engagement is not designed to achieve a representative sample. However, staff recognize that we hear more from some groups than others, and we must continue to work actively to include diverse voices and reduce barriers to participation.

Outreach Efforts Underway and Upcoming

While the comparison of Be Heard users with Census data has provided staff with specific information about which specific groups are seldom heard in the City's online engagement activities, the understanding that we hear from some groups more than others is not new. Public Engagement and project staff have been working continually to build relationships, reduce barriers to participation, and seek feedback from more diverse voices. There is also a recognition that it will take time to build trust, demonstrate inclusivity, and increase equity – in particular, with groups that have been historically excluded from government processes.

Recent and ongoing outreach initiatives include pop-ups during summer 2022 to spread the word about Be Heard New West, the Youth Elections Ambassador program aimed at increasing youth involvement, the Community Action Network (CAN) New West program with a focus on people with lived experience of poverty, and City Hall tours with New West residents who are newcomers to Canada. As noted above, most engagement projects also include in-person activities in the community to reach residents where they already are. Demographic-specific engagement sessions are also planned where possible – i.e. youth-specific workshops, class visits, etc.

NEXT STEPS

Additional analysis of the Be Heard members' profile is expected. For example, Public Engagement staff plans to work with the GIS team to determine neighbourhood representation across the overall Be Heard membership.

The data about which specific groups are underrepresented on Be Heard will help staff to target outreach efforts to these groups with the goal of maximizing available resources. In particular, staff will be putting more focus on reaching people of colour / racialized community members.

Public Engagement staff will continue to monitor the growth of the Be Heard community, and plan to update the analysis of overall membership on an annual basis.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Public Engagement staff presented this information to the Reconciliation, Social Inclusion and Engagement Task Force, and have been sharing the information with departments across the City.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council receive this report for information;
2. That Council provide alternative direction to staff.

Staff recommends Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Comparison of Be Heard membership with 2021 Census profile of New Westminster, February 2023

Attachment 2 – Be Heard New West account sign-up form demographic questions

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Jennifer Miller, Manager of Public Engagement

This report was approved by:
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer