



THE OCEAN AND SOCIETY SURVEY

A LIVING LAB APPROACH

Centre for Ocean Literacy Collaboration (COLC) — Halifax, Canada

FIELDWORK

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SAMPLE

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Centre for Ocean Literacy Collaboration

DATA HELPS TO INFORM:

NATIONAL OCEAN LITERACY STRATEGY

COLC'S LIVING LAB APPROACH

NETWORK ANALYSIS

IMPACT MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK



WHAT IS THE OSS?

A global tool designed to help countries understand how their population thinks and feels about the ocean, and their capacity and willingness to take action on ocean health.



OSS PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

In 2025, 14 countries ran the OSS. Open access, nationally representative datasets are available. **2026 is open for participation.**

WHAT DID THE OSS REVEAL?

Interesting results from OSS Canada (2025) included:



75%

of people in Canada agree that ocean protection is an important step their government can take for climate action.



81%

of respondents believe industry and government must take responsibility for addressing threats to the ocean. But, only **27%** express trust in industry and **40%** express trust in government to actually take meaningful action.



75%

of Canadians said they are fairly or very willing to change their lifestyle in the next year if it would help protect the ocean.

WHY DID THEY RUN THE OSS?

COLC aims to build an ocean-engaged society, empowering people to better understand, value, and care for the ocean. COLC acts as a catalyst, connector, and enabler: innovating public ocean engagement, building collaboration across the ocean sector, strengthening capacity, and amplifying what works.

COLC's efforts are guided by ongoing evaluation to track impact on knowledge mobilization and ocean engagement over time. Within this context, the OSS serves as one tool to provide unique insights into how people across Canada think, feel, and act toward the ocean. These insights contribute to four distinct, but interconnected foundational pillars of COLC's work:

1 NATIONAL OCEAN LITERACY STRATEGY

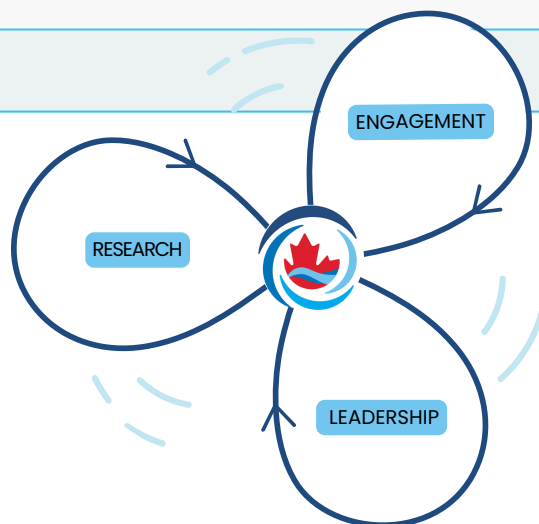


After launching the world's first national ocean literacy strategy in 2021, COLC continues to take a research-based and 'learning loop' approach to building, implementing, and tracking engagement impact. OSS data helps, in part, to ensure strategy implementation and engagement design stay grounded in ways that reflect the people in Canada's activities, choices, and habits that shape ocean relationships. OSS insights are helping to directly inform COLC's updated National Strategy, for release in Fall 2026.

2 COLC'S LIVING LAB APPROACH

COLC's Living Lab Approach helps to bring the National Strategy to life through priority areas of **research, engagement, and leadership**. As a living lab, catalysts for ocean literacy (such as events, tools, experiences, resources, or funding opportunities) are identified. The ways people engage with these catalysts are then studied, and how public ocean perceptions are shifting is tracked – what concerns people, how willing they are to change their behaviours to benefit the ocean, what motivates them to change, and what holds them back.

This knowledge generated through the living lab approach informs COLC's work - where to stay the course and where to pivot. Insights are shared across COLC's partner network, multiplying its capacity to elevate high-impact public ocean engagement, and ultimately foster a more ocean-engaged society.



3 NETWORK ANALYSIS (NA)

After 4+ years of Strategy implementation using the living lab approach, Network Analysis helps map and better understand COLC's partner ecosystem. In 2024 and again in 2026, COLC, in collaboration with Limnology Research, conducted a network analysis focusing on four relationship types – partner, key initiative, sector, and region.

In conjunction with OSS insights on where the public learns about the ocean and who they trust and look to for leadership, COLC gains a clearer picture of **how influence and knowledge can flow** through the above four relationship types. For example, network analysis helps to: visualize engagement levels and resilience of specific key initiatives; identify collaboration synergies, challenges, and opportunities in targeted communities, regions, and sectors; and inform decision-making about COLC's investment partnerships and resource allocation (e.g., where to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones).

In summary, network analysis insights, together with key findings from the OSS, highlight where and how to bolster network action and impact.

COLC has developed and tested its Impact Measurement Framework since 2022 across 7 initiatives and 77 partner organizations. This foundational work over the last 4 years enables COLC to work with partners to move quickly past basic measurement into the harder questions – what works, for whom, where, and why – which is where the real value lies.

COLC's impact measurement research generates two kinds of knowledge: how to design effective engagement (methodological knowledge); and what communities of practice, key initiatives, and campaigns are actually achieving (substantive knowledge). The learning loop ensures **continual integration and application of insights** while the work is underway. Learning is then fed back into shaping and amplifying high impact strategies, engagement frameworks, program design, and future partnership collaborations.

Ongoing public ocean perceptions research on ocean connection and engagement is a piece of the broader impact measurement work, providing real-time pulse checks and a longitudinal view of shifts over time. To date, COLC has facilitated four rounds of public ocean perceptions data collection (2020, 2024, 2025, 2026). This intentional impact monitoring helps COLC understand not just whether ocean literacy is growing, but what is driving and/or preventing that growth.

The same values of evidence, collaboration, and living-lab thinking that shape COLC's work in Canada extend naturally to a global scale. Over the last three years, COLC has played a coordinating role in the OSS initiative internationally, helping to grow a community among country partners (researchers and practitioners) invested in better understanding how people relate to the ocean in their own contexts.

This larger living lab generates collaborative insights that inform and enrich one another, revealing patterns and distinctions across countries, regions, and cultures toward mobilizing an ocean-engaged society.

"A national strategy sets the direction, ocean & society insights help to inform the path, a living lab approach tests the way, and impact measurement ensures integrated learning."

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

**Interested in using
the survey data?**

**Interested in
running the survey?**

Get in touch!

