

July 2018

# RECRUITING TALENT TO PEI [Survey]



UNIVERSITY  
of Prince Edward  
ISLAND



Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning  
Government of Prince Edward Island

Institute of Island Studies  
University of Prince Edward Island

**BUILD A  
CAREER.  
CREATE  
A LIFE.**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Individuals who have lived on or visited Prince Edward Island (PEI) previously but now live elsewhere represent an important component of a comprehensive population strategy.

In order to develop effective, evidence-based policy that supports the repatriation of these individuals to PEI, it is important to better understand why these individuals moved away and what they see as the opportunities and possible barriers to returning to PEI.

The results of the survey described in this report, entitled *Recruiting Talent to PEI Survey: Build a Career. Create a Life.*, provide some of this evidence. The report and survey of these Islanders was completed under the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island.

The survey was designed and administered in partnership with the *Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning*. It consisted of **26 questions** and was sent electronically to alumni from the *University of Prince Edward Island, Holland College and College de l'Île*. The link to the survey was also posted to the WorkPEI Facebook page and the Institute of Island Studies digital newsletter. For the purposes of this survey, an Islander was defined as *"someone who has lived or visited the Island but currently does not live on PEI."* By the March 15th 2018, cutoff date, 683 responses had been received.

Detailed responses and interpretations of the results are contained within the body of the report.

**The following provides some highlights of those results:**

- Despite living away now, the lives of participants often intersected in multiple ways with Prince Edward Island, including growing up here, going to school and working here (Q1).
- The most significant reason for leaving PEI, selected by almost 70% of participants, was to search for work (Q3).
- More than **80% of respondents expressed an interest in moving back to PEI**, with one-quarter saying they were “extremely interested” in moving back. This suggests a strong motivation for returning if the conditions were right (Q4).
- Lifestyle (**79.3%**) and **finding a better work-life balance (48.5%)** were the main reasons for a potential move back to PEI. Family reunification was also important at 60.5% (Q5).
- For those who expressed an interest in moving back, **20% said they anticipated this move within the next year**, while almost half of the respondents said it would be more than five years from now (Q6).
- A total of **83% of respondents said that employment-related reasons were impeding their return to the Island**. The significance of this response is strengthened by the fact that respondents could have chosen multiple answers to this question, but none of the other options were selected by more than 20% of the participants (Q7).
- When those who had expressed an interest in moving back to PEI were asked more specifically about how they could be assisted in making this move, economic reasons were still important (e.g., **a job offer at 80.3% and salary considerations at 70.7%**), **but housing was also selected by more than 40% of the respondents (Q9)**.
- A total of **16.5% of all respondents had either applied for or been contacted about a job on PEI** within the past year (Q10).
- Almost everyone (**97%**) **who participated in this survey still feels connected in some way to PEI** with almost **70% saying that they feel either fairly or extremely connected to the Island** (Q12). They stay connected primarily by visiting during the summer (72.1%) or communicating with family on the Island (78.9%) (Q13).
- The majority of respondents had been away for more than **10 years (55%), are female (59.2%) and are at least 45 years of age (33.7%)**. Interestingly, the second largest group of respondents (20%) fell in the 25 to 29 year age cohort (Q15, Q16).
- Most of the respondents were highly educated, **with 38% having obtained a Master's or PhD degree** and another **46% indicating that they had obtained a Bachelor's degree (Q18)**.
- Most participants (**69.7%**) **were currently employed full-time and only 7.4% were retired (Q19)**. Of those employed, the main occupations were white-collar (e.g., education, law, social, community or government services, health, and business/administration) (Q20). Household income levels were relatively high in comparison to the average in Canada and PEI (Q21).
- Most of the respondents were from Ontario, with **34.2% being from Toronto or the rest of southern Ontario**. Alberta was the second largest group of respondents at 15.3%, with Nova Scotia being the third largest group at 15% (Q22).

Two open-ended questions allowed respondents the opportunity to fully express their opinions about why they might want to move back to PEI (Q23) and what might be preventing them from making this move (Q24).

*“ The air.  
The love.  
My family.  
His family.  
Our son’s family.  
Quiet.  
Fewer chains/  
more mom and pop  
shops.  
Red earth.  
Gentle breezes.  
Home.  
Always and forever.”*

As suggested in some of the closed-ended questions, the predominant reasons for a possible move back to the Island revolved around family and lifestyle. Many raised the sentiment that PEI was a good place to raise a family and had a pace that allowed for a better quality of life, a better work/life balance and lower stress levels. The lower cost of living or affordability was also an important theme.

When asked to provide more details about what might be preventing them from moving back to PEI, respondents most often cited a lack of suitable, well-paying jobs and how it is difficult to compete with Islanders already on PEI for the jobs available. Some respondents cited a concern about adequate health care and others felt that an attitude of parochialism and lack of tolerance to diversity were impeding their decision to return.

The duality regarding a possible return is expressed by this respondent: “The things that make PEI so appealing are also obstacles to moving back. I love that PEI is small and rural, but that also means fewer job opportunities in my field.”



***I miss the pace of life.  
I'm seeing all the great  
things happening in arts  
and culture, economic  
development and  
infrastructure. I'm sad  
to be missing out on it!***



# INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Individuals who have lived on or visited Prince Edward Island previously but now live elsewhere are a critical group to account for in a provincial population strategy. In order to develop effective, evidence-based policy to encourage the repatriation of these individuals to PEI, it is important to better understand why they moved away and what they see as the opportunities and possible barriers to returning to PEI. The Institute of Island Studies was contracted by Prince Edward Island's Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning to undertake a survey of this group of Islanders. For the purposes of this survey, an Islander is defined very inclusively as **"someone who has lived or visited the Island but currently does not live on PEI."** The results of the survey will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of Islanders who might be considering a move back to Prince Edward Island. This builds on a background of population research already undertaken by the province as well as prior foundational work undertaken by the Institute of Island Studies, for example through the **"A Place to Stay?"** (2000) document and strategy.

# METHODS



The survey questions, possible responses and format were developed in partnership with the staff in the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning. The survey, consent form and recruitment letters were approved by the UPEI Research Ethics Board (certificate number available upon request) and the REB's counterpart at Holland College. As noted above, in the Consent Form an Islander was defined as anyone who had lived or visited PEI but was not currently living on the Island. Those who did not fit this definition were thanked and asked not to participate in the survey.

# 26

closed and open-ended

## QUESTIONS

# 683

## RESPONSES

The survey consisted of **26 closed and open-ended questions**. Because of the skip question logic associated with some questions, very few respondents would have answered all 26 questions. These questions included a group that asked about attitudes and perceptions to a possible move back to PEI and a set of socio-demographic questions (e.g., gender, age, educational attainment, occupation). The average response time was approximately seven minutes.

The survey software application SurveyMonkey was used to design and collect responses. URL links were embedded in the recruitment letters that directed participants to the consent form and survey.

The recruitment letters were sent out March 2<sup>nd</sup> by the University of Prince Edward Island's (UPEI) Department of Development and Alumni Engagement and Holland College's Office of Alumni Relations and an invitation to participate was posted to the WorkPEI Facebook page and the Institute of Island Studies digital newsletter at the same time. A French-language version of the survey was sent to alumni from College de l'Île on March 9<sup>th</sup>. In all cases, potential participants were asked to respond by March 15<sup>th</sup>. A reminder notice was sent out on all of the sites on March 13<sup>th</sup>. By the close of the survey on the morning of March 16<sup>th</sup>, **683 responses** had been received. Seven of these were in French. We wish to acknowledge the cooperation of UPEI, Holland College and the College de l'Île for their cooperation in accessing participants for this project.

**6,600**  
**EMAIL ADDRESSES**

**4,006**  
**INDIVIDUALS**

**117**  
**EMAIL ADDRESSES**

**1,000**  
**SUBSCRIBERS**

It is difficult to be precise regarding the total population of possible participants who received this survey. Holland College sent the link to the survey to a list of **6,600 email addresses**. These were identified as alumni and others who currently do not live on Prince Edward Island. UPEI sent it to a similar group of **4,006 individuals** who are listed in their database as not currently living on PEI. *College de l'Île* had a more limited alumni database but sent it to **117 email addresses**. The survey link was also sent out on the Institute of Island Studies digital newsletter

with more than **1,000 subscribers**. This total does not distinguish between PEI and non-PEI residents. Finally, WorkPEI posted the call for participation on the WorkPEI Facebook page. There are *13,383 followers* to this page. However, as with the Institute of Island Studies newsletter, this page does not distinguish followers on the basis of their current location, nor are we able to estimate the number of times the message may have been shared with others.

This is a non-parametric sample where respondents self-selected in order to participate. Therefore, caution should be taken in generalizing the responses discussed in this report to the larger population of those who had lived or visited PEI but do not currently live on the Island. Despite the large number of total responses, and as described above, we do not know the total possible population that was eligible to fill out the survey. In addition, the sites used for the distribution of the survey (i.e., primarily post-secondary educational institutions) consist of populations that may differ from the general population in several respects, including level of educational attainment, household income, current employment and occupation. This same group of respondents has also had an influence on the specific responses to some of the attitudinal questions. For example, **more than 75% of the respondents to the question, "What is your connection to Prince Edward Island?" answered that they went to university or college on the Island**. This is undoubtedly a higher response than would otherwise be the case if this went out to every possible person who has ever lived or visited PEI.

# ANALYSIS

Both the English and French language responses were downloaded from the SurveyMonkey survey links in a format compatible with the statistical application Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS (for closed-ended responses) and in Excel spreadsheet format for open-ended responses. Histograms (bar charts) are provided for the numerical responses, together with a short interpretation of each response. A number of these closed-ended questions included an "other" response option. Short summaries of the responses to the "other" options are provided for those questions.

The two main open-ended questions are Q23 (Do you have any additional thoughts you might want to share with us about why you might want to move back to PEI?) and Q24 (Do you have any additional thoughts you might want to share with us about what might be preventing you from moving back to PEI?). These were analyzed thematically using word and phrase counts. Summaries of the most significant themes are provided in narrative format later in this Report.

# RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Q3

Q13

Q1

Q2

Q11

Q5

Q8

Q6

Q7

Q10

Q4

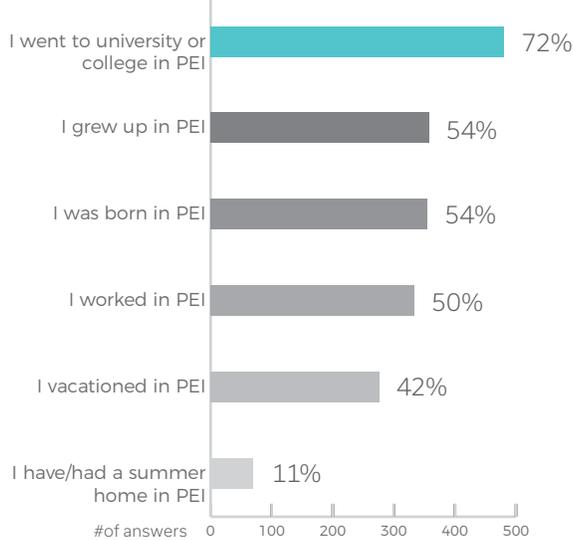
Q9

Q12

# Q1

## WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND?

(please check all that apply)



Answered: **663** | Skipped: **13**

This is one of those questions where participants could provide multiple responses. The most prominent response **(72.4%)** was that respondents went to a university or college on PEI. This is not surprising given the source of the samples. Five of the six closed-ended responses were checked by more than half of the participants. In addition to going to school here, it was not uncommon for people to have been born here, grown up here and/or worked here.

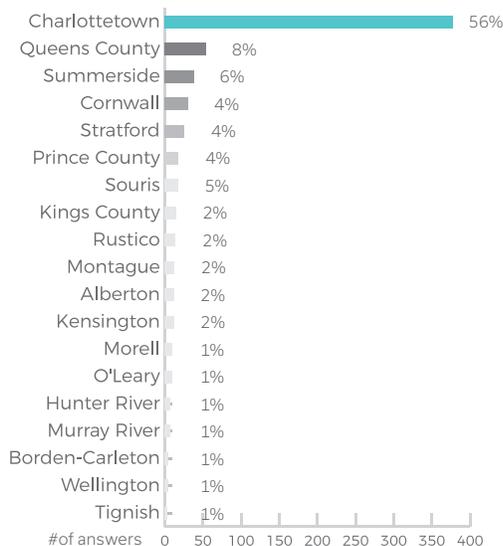
Of the 66 responses to "other," 30 mentioned their connection to family members (parents, grandparents, extended family) who still live on PEI; 11 mentioned that their spouse was from PEI; and 5 had visited grandparents every summer. Other connections included attending a conference, attending a two-week course at UPEI over two summers and owning land upon which the respondent wishes to build.

One cited the power of the Island's attraction: "Visited the first time in 2017. It was a 'gift' vacation. It is now my life goal to move there."

## Q2

### CHOOSE THE ONE PLACE OR REGION YOU MOST CLOSELY ASSOCIATE WITH YOUR TIME IN PEI.

(please check only one)

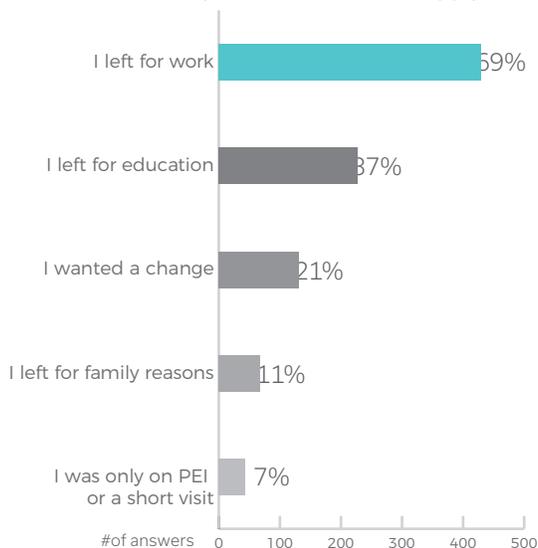


Answered: **673** | Skipped: **3**

## Q3

### WHAT WERE THE MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUR DECISION TO LEAVE PEI?

(please check all that apply)



Answered: **619** | Skipped: **57**

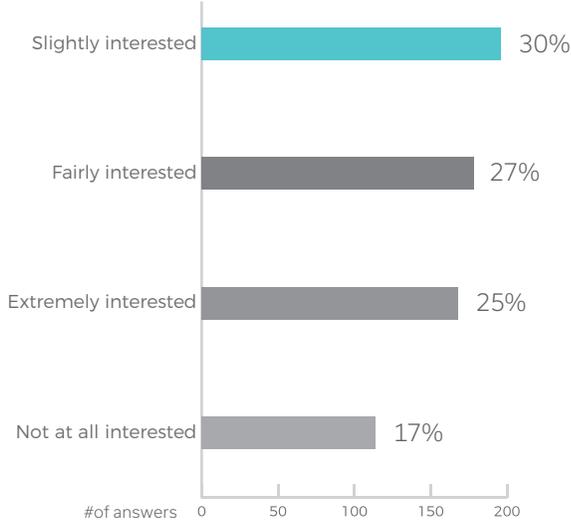
When asked about the one geographic place or region that respondents most closely associate with during their time on PEI, the result was very urban-centred, with more than half of the respondents choosing Charlottetown. More than 8% indicated Queens County in general and almost 6% specified Summerside. None of the other 16 communities or regions listed was chosen by more than 5% of the respondents and most were below two percentage points.

At **69.5%**, **"I left for work"** was the main factor chosen in the decision by the participant to leave PEI (Q3). Leaving for education was the second most common response (36.8%). Almost one in five respondents provided a written "other" response to this question. Of the 88 responses to "other," the answers can be categorized as either "pushed" or "pulled." In the "pulled" category, some left to accompany a partner or family member for work or education, while others left to experience "living away," "to see the world," "to get a fresh start" and "to gain skills and experiences in hopes to return and building something here to sustain myself." Many who answered "other" stated that they went back to their home province upon completing school because of a work opportunity. In the "pushed" category, some left because of negative experiences, but most said they left because of a lack of a job or the wish to find a better-paying job.

# Q4

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR INTEREST IN MOVING BACK TO PEI?

(please check only one)



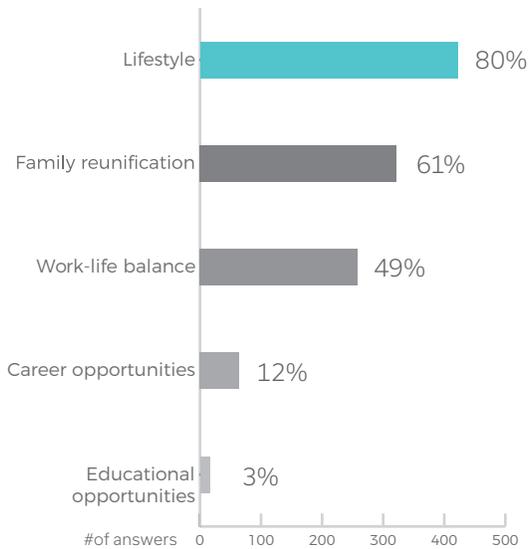
Answered: **656** | Skipped: **20**

The response to Q4 is a very positive sign for a program to repatriate Islanders who are currently living away. More than 80% of the 656 respondents to this question expressed some interest in moving back to PEI and one-quarter of all respondents indicated that they were extremely interested in a move. This response suggests that motivation, at least in general, is not a barrier to welcoming Islanders who currently live elsewhere.

# Q5

## WHAT IS IT ABOUT PEI THAT MAKES YOU INTERESTED IN MOVING BACK?

(please check all that apply)



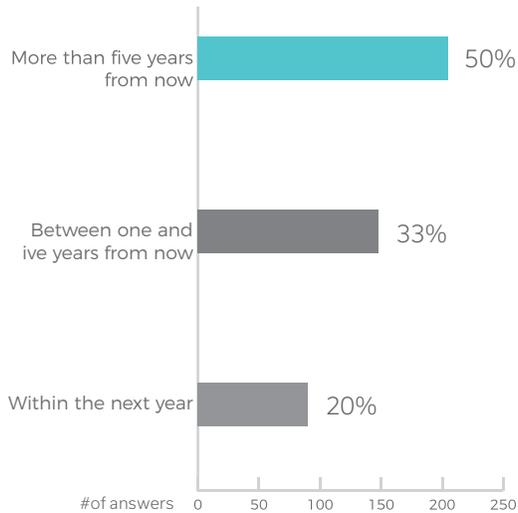
Answered: **532** | Skipped: **144**

For those who did express an interest in moving back to PEI (Q5), the overwhelming reason (79.3%) was "lifestyle." It could even be argued that "work-life balance," selected by almost half of the respondents, is a kind of lifestyle choice. There are also strong family ties involved in motivating Islanders to eventually move back to PEI; 60% of the participants chose "family reunification" as one of the reasons for returning.

A total of 61 people responded to the "other" category. These can be categorized as emotional (27), practical (12) and ties to family and friends (8). Emotional responses included "the ocean," "the beach," feeling "at peace," a "magical place," "home," "the people," "slower pace of life," "the scenery," "island living," "the music" and "the Scottish Gaelic culture." Practical responses included "jobs," "entrepreneurial opportunities," "cost of living" and "cheaper." Family reasons included "our roots are here, our brothers and sisters."

# Q6

## WHEN DO YOU ANTICIPATE RETURNING TO PEI? (please check only one)



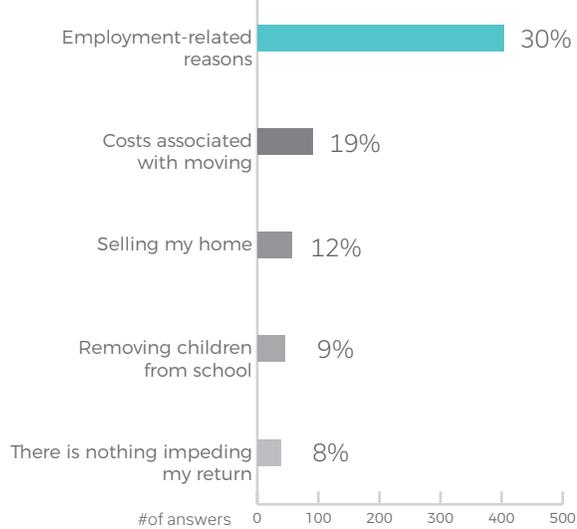
Answered: **443** | Skipped: **233**

Still with the sub-set of respondents that expressed an interest in moving to PEI (N=443), more than 20% of this group anticipates returning within the next year (Q6). For others it is a longer-term goal, with almost half the respondents saying that they anticipate returning more than five years from now. One of the interesting features of this question is that 30% of the respondents provided a comment as part of their answer to this question. Some of this "other" group took the opportunity to explain the conditions they'd return under, which can be sorted into broad categories: employment (30), vacation (26) or retirement (10). A total of 35 said "not sure" and 18 said "never," "maybe never" or "probably never," but many qualified this with a job-related statement. In terms of employment, words included "right career opportunity," "whenever reliable employment could be found." One said: "If I could find a decent job... tomorrow." Five said they were already in the process of transitioning back to PEI.

# Q7

## WHAT MIGHT BE IMPEDING YOUR RETURN TO PEI?

(please check all that apply)



Answered: **458** | Skipped: **191**

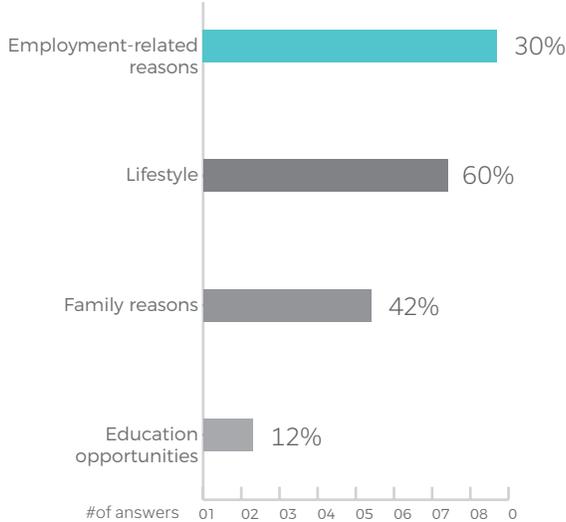
When this group was asked to indicate what might be impeding their return to PEI (Q7), the overwhelming response was “employment-related reasons,” with more than 83% of the 485 respondents checking this box. The significance of this answer is reinforced by the fact that participants could have checked more than one response but none of the other closed-ended responses was chosen by more than 20% of the participants.

More than one-quarter of respondents provided another reason or an additional comment. Most of these were observations were employment related reasons (48), the lack of midwifery services (13), or access to health care (11). Respondents talked about not wanting to move children or leave them or other family members behind (19), spouses not interested (9), or being settled and content in one’s life at present (5).

## Q8

### WHY ARE YOU NOT INTERESTED IN MOVING BACK TO PEI?

(please check all that apply)



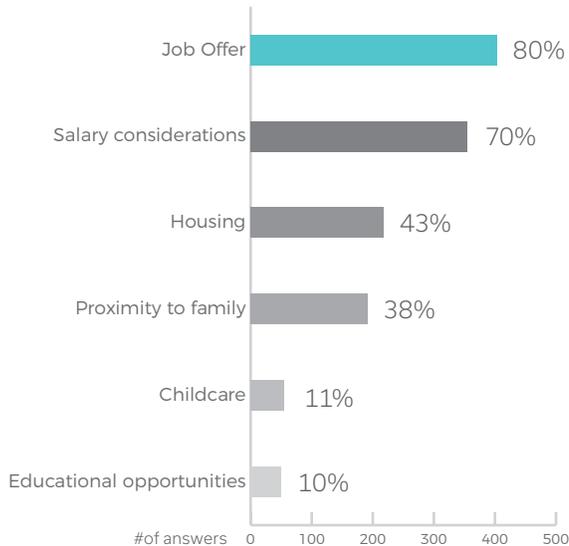
Answered: **106** | Skipped: **570**

Q8 was only answered by those who stated in Question 4 that they were “not at all interested” in moving back to PEI (N=106). Although it is perhaps not surprising that “employment” was one of the most prominent reasons for not returning at over 70% of responses, “lifestyle” was chosen by more than 60% of those who answered this question. Of the 26 responses in the “other” category, reasons included difficulty in getting a specialized or well-paying job, being treated badly because they were “come-from-aways” (5), lack of quality health care or a poor education system.

## Q9

### WHEN CONSIDERING A MOVE BACK TO PEI, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING FACTORS ARE NECESSARY TO ASSIST YOU IN MAKING THIS MOVE?

(please check all that apply)



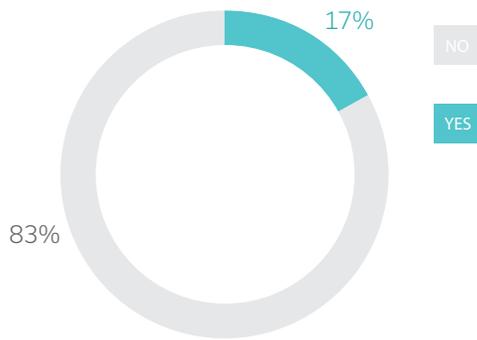
Answered: **502** | Skipped: **174**

Q9 was answered by all those who expressed an interest in returning (N=502). Although the question is similar to Q7, in this case respondents were asked what specifically could be done to assist them in making this move. The economic dimension was still very important, with 80% choosing “a job offer” and more than 70% suggesting that salary considerations were important. Housing and proximity to family were chosen by approximately 40% of those who answered.

Of the 67 who responded to “other,” 11 mentioned improved health care services, including access to specialists and a family doctor. Interestingly, another 11 specifically mentioned access to midwifery care. Eleven respondents mentioned a job, or a job with a high enough salary for travel back to where they currently live. Six mentioned that they were waiting for retirement.

# Q10

**WITHIN THE PAST YEAR HAVE YOU APPLIED TO OR BEEN CONTACTED ABOUT A JOB ON PEI?**  
(please check only one)

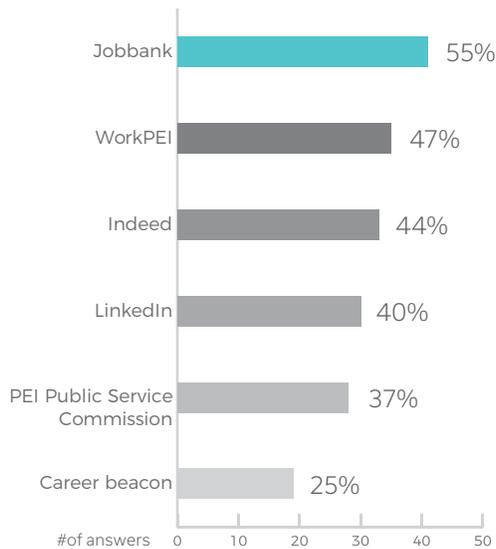


Answered: **636** | Skipped: **40**

Everyone had the opportunity to answer Q10 and 16.5% or 105 people stated that they had either applied for or had been contacted about a job on PEI. Of this sub-group, respondents made use of multiple job search methods (i.e., see Q11 below), with five of the closed-ended options garnering between 37% and 54% of the responses. This suggests that job seekers used many different ways to find jobs on the Island. Thirty-six people responded to the “other” category. The majority (14) were word of mouth and personal connections/informal networking. Others included organizations’ own websites (e.g., UPEI, Federal Public Service Commission, Health PEI), Connections, Monster, CDS Souris and CDS Charlottetown. In seven instances, the employer sought out the respondent directly.

# Q11

**WHICH JOB SEARCH METHODS DID YOU USE?**  
(please check all that apply)

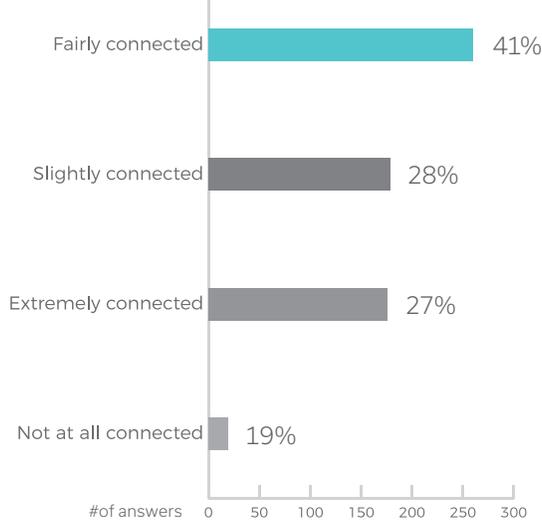


Answered: **75** | Skipped: **601**

# Q12

## HOW CONNECTED DO YOU CURRENTLY FEEL TO PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND?

(please check all that apply)



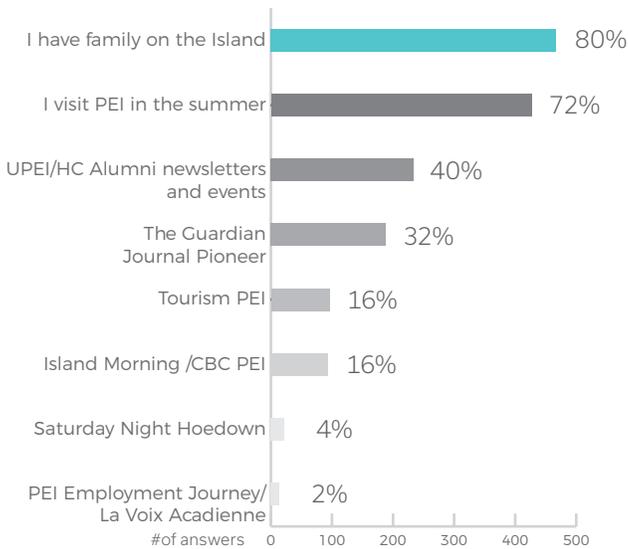
Answered: **633** | Skipped: **43**

Almost everyone (97%) who completed this survey felt some connection to PEI. Almost 28% indicated that they feel extremely connected to the Island and almost 70% feel either fairly or extremely connected to the Island.

# Q13

## HOW DO YOU STAY CONNECTED TO PEI?

(please check all that apply)



Answered: **592** | Skipped: **84**

# RESPONSES TO SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

The survey asked participants a number of questions regarding their personal, socio-demographic characteristics to see if there are any associations or relationships between personal or family characteristics and behaviours or attitudes to moving.

Q15

Q21

Q19

Q14

Q18

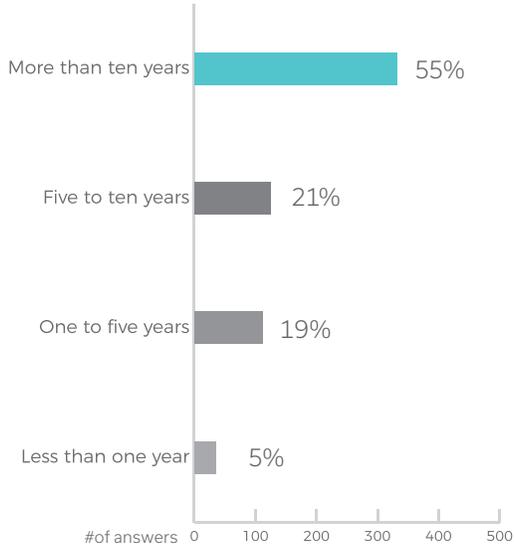
Q20

Q16

Q17

## Q14 HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED AWAY FROM PEI?

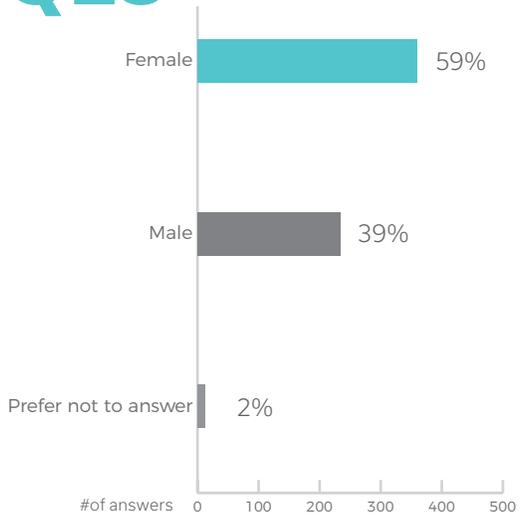
(please check only one)



Answered: **604** | Skipped: **72**

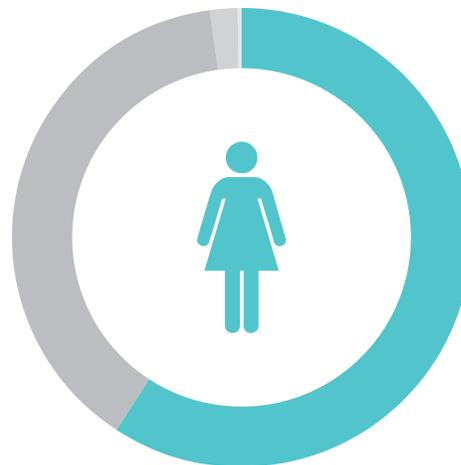
The first of these questions (Q14) dealt with how long they had been away from PEI; 59% of the respondents had lived away from PEI for more than 10 years and less than 6% had been away for less than one year.

## Q15 TO WHICH GENDER IDENTITY DO YOU MOST IDENTIFY?

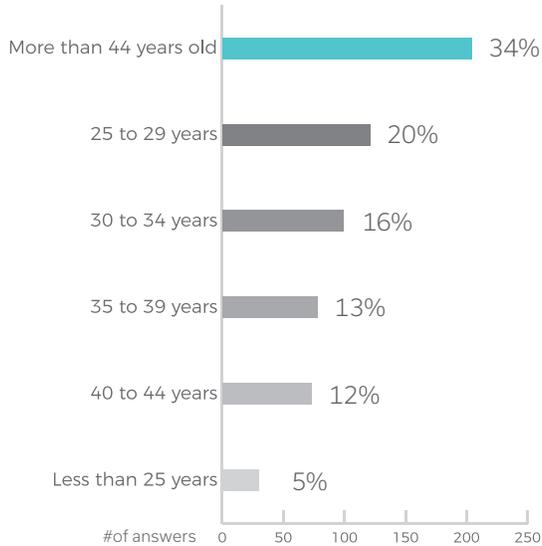


Answered: **606** | Skipped: **70**

Almost 60% of the participants were female (Q15).



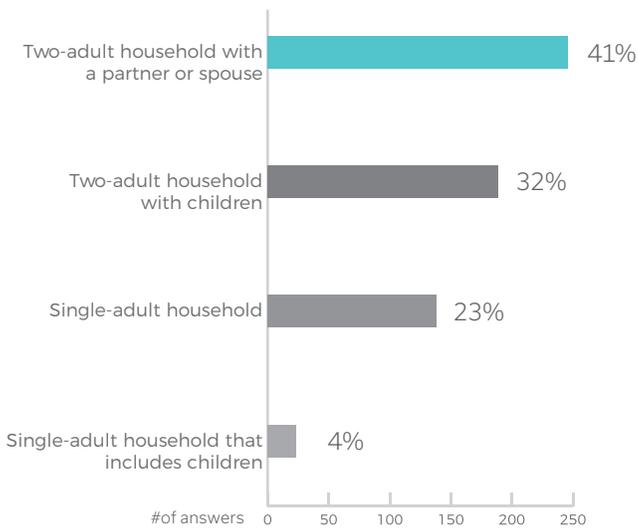
## Q16 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES BEST REFLECTS YOUR AGE?



Answered: **605** | Skipped: **71**

Although the survey had respondents distributed across all age categories (Q15), the largest group at almost 34% was over 44 years old. Interestingly, the 25-29 year age group was larger than the next three five-year age groups (i.e., 30-34, 35-39, and 40-44 years).

## Q17 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST REFLECTS YOUR CURRENT HOUSEHOLD MARITAL AND FAMILY STATUS?

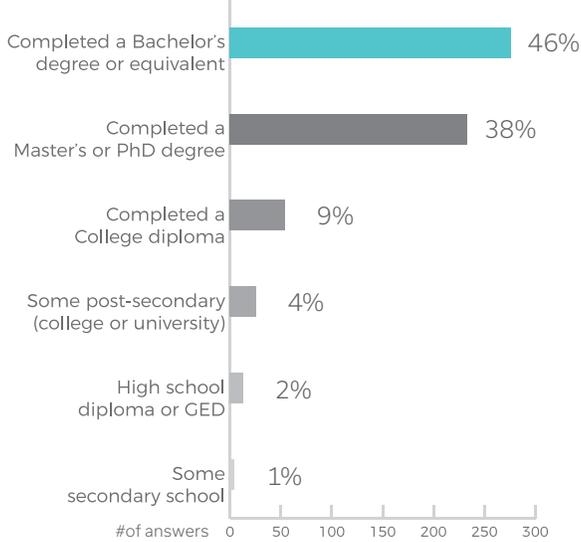


Answered: **605** | Skipped: **71**

More than 40% of the respondents consisted of two-adult households, with another 32% in two-adult households with children. Less than one-quarter of the respondents were in households that consisted of only one adult.

# Q18

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION YOU HAVE COMPLETED?**  
(please check only one)

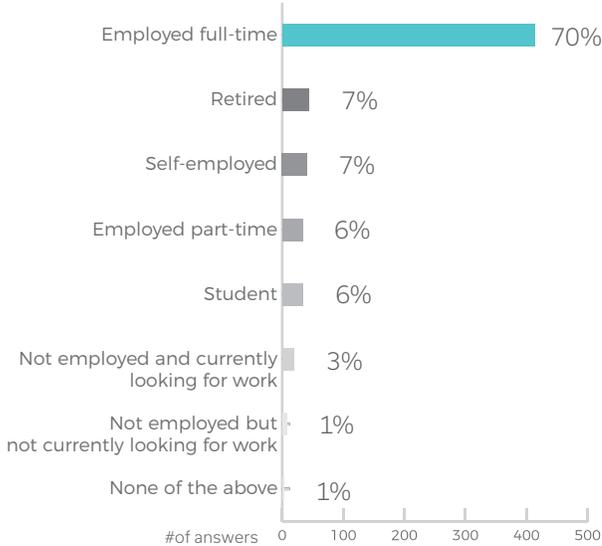


Answered: **606** | Skipped: **70**

Given that Holland College and UPEI alumni databases were the primary sources of respondents, it is not too surprising that almost 46% of the respondents had completed a Bachelor's degree and another 38% had completed a Master's or PhD degree (Q18). This relatively high level of educational attainment is also likely strongly correlated with employment status (Q19), occupation (Q20) and income (Q21).

# Q19

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION?**  
(please check only one)



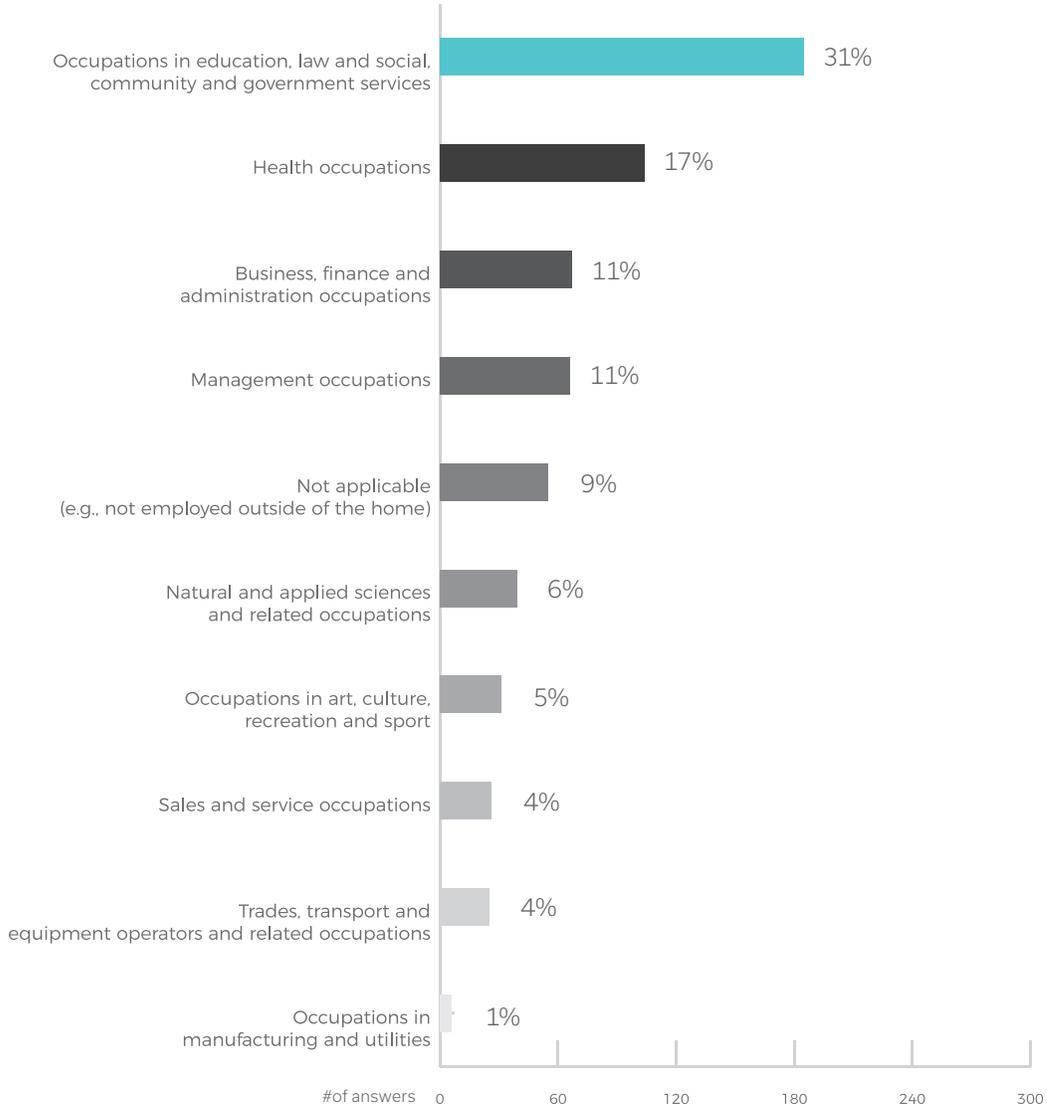
Answered: **593** | Skipped: **83**

When asked about their employment situation (Q19), almost 70% of respondents indicated that they worked full-time. Perhaps a bit of a surprise was that only 7.4% of the participants were retired. Therefore, except for the group that may be planning on retiring shortly, many of those who might be considering a move back to PEI would likely need to maintain some form of employment. Of the 36 who filled in "other," 6 identified as stay-at-home mom/homemaker, while some were variations of the closed-ended options (e.g., semi-retired, long-term disability, on maternity leave).

# Q20

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CURRENT OCCUPATION?

More than 30% of the respondents indicated that they had an occupation (Q20) in education, law, or social, community or government services. The next most significant occupational groups were in health (17%), business/administration (11.1%) and management (10.9%).



Answered: **604** | Skipped: **72**

# Q21

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING COMES CLOSEST TO THE OVERALL INCOME FOR YOUR HOUSEHOLD IN 2017?



Answered: **592** | Skipped: **84**

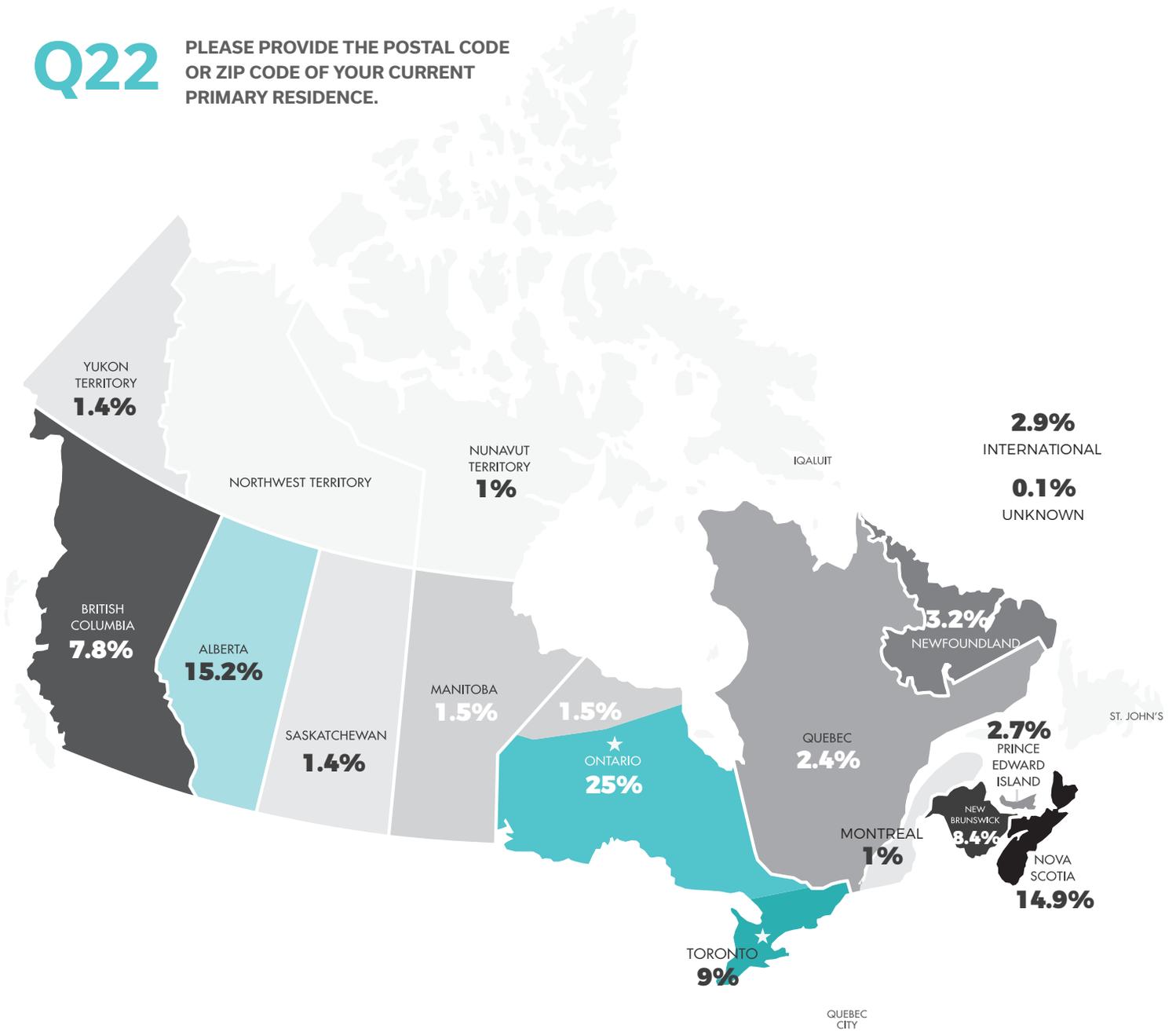
When compared to the median household income in Canada of \$70,336 (2015),<sup>1</sup> the households associated with this survey have a relatively high income (Q21). Almost 30% of the participants indicated that their household income in 2017 was between \$70,000 and \$120,000. More than 40% said that their household income was greater than \$120,000. Interestingly, the median household income in PEI in 2015 was less than the Canadian average at \$61,163.<sup>2</sup>

1. From Statistics Canada "Household income in Canada: Key results from the 2016 census" (accessed on March 15, 2018) <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170913/dq170913a-eng.htm>.

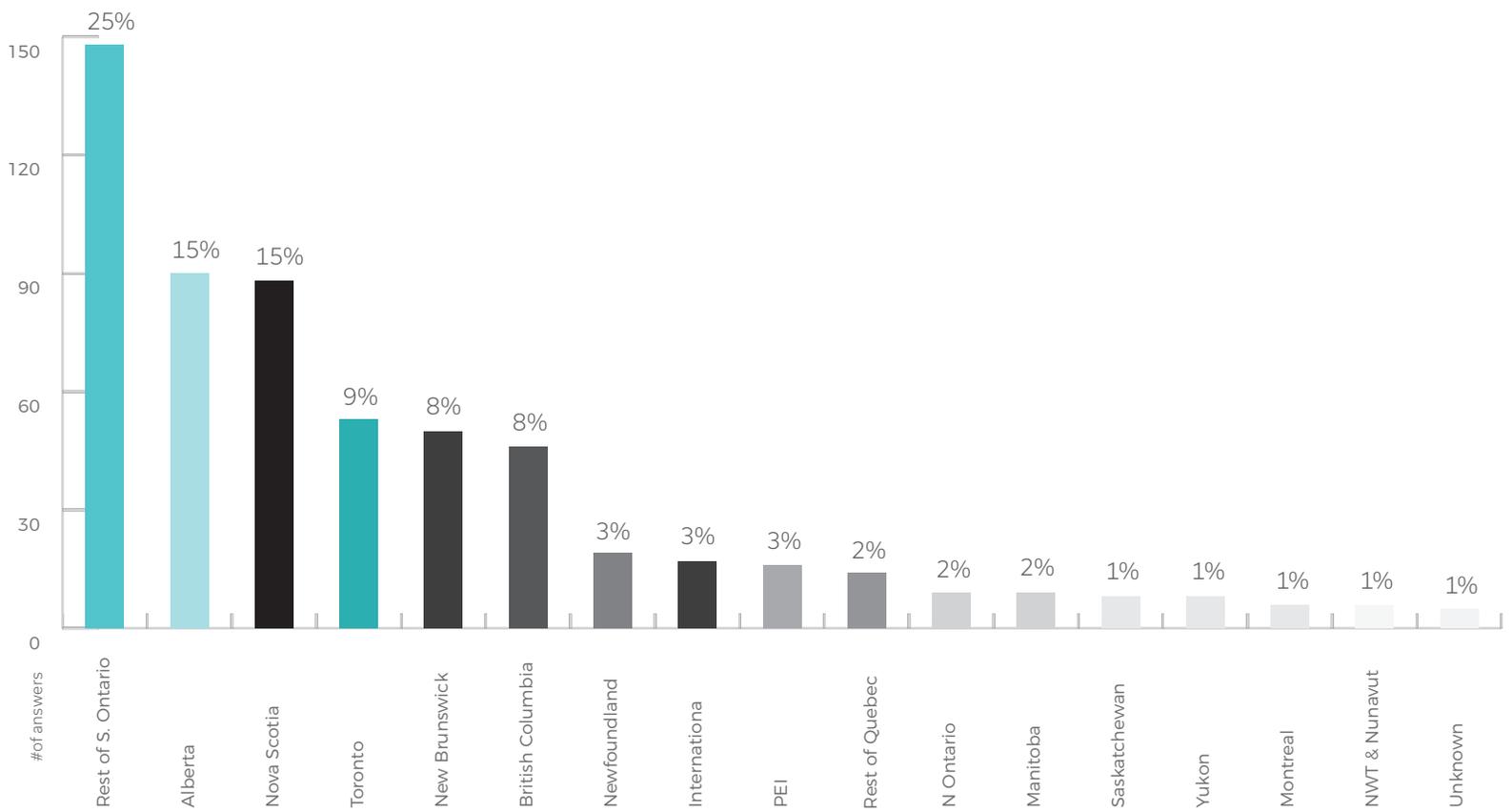
2. Ibid.

# Q22

PLEASE PROVIDE THE POSTAL CODE  
OR ZIP CODE OF YOUR CURRENT  
PRIMARY RESIDENCE.



A total of 592 participants provided a response to this question. These were aggregated into an "International" group (N=17), and then all of the Canadian responses were sorted by the first letter of the postal code. This resulted in the following distribution:



# RESPONSES TO QUALITATIVE, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Two summary questions were posed to participants that allowed them the opportunity to provide completely open-ended, text-based responses.

These questions were:

**Q23 – Do you have any additional thoughts you might want to share with us about why you might want to move back to PEI?, and**

**Q24 – Do you have any additional thoughts you might want to share with us about what might be preventing you from moving back to PEI?**

As noted earlier in this report, these were analyzed thematically using word and phrase counts and summaries of the most significant themes are provided in narrative format later in this report.

# Q23: THEMES

## **Why Participants Might Want to Move Back to PEI?**

### **FAMILY**

The word most often mentioned was family (mentioned by 98 discrete responders), including to be closer to family and aging family, and the Island being a “good place to raise a family.” Maintaining connection to friends and family was important and some expressed the desire to have their children growing up knowing their extended family. Many (26) said they wished to retire here.

### **LIFESTYLE**

“Life and/or “lifestyle” is the next most used word (with 68 discrete responses) perhaps exemplified best by, “We miss the lifestyle that comes with island living.” Many of these respondents cite a relaxed, small-town lifestyle, where they can enjoy a slower pace of life and better quality of life that produces a better work/life balance, lower stress levels, and a “pace and lifestyle of island living [that] is most conducive to overall health and wellness.” As noted by one respondent,

*We have been away from PEI for 14 years now and feel it is time to return to our true home. Work-life balance is more important than money.*

Participants appreciated the strong sense of “community” (23 times), with “friendly” islanders (8 times). For example,

*It's lonely in the big city. I miss having those close connections and a sense of community. It's harder to make close friends in a big city. I also miss the easy access to nature, deeply, and the more relaxed life style in general. Not so “hustle and bustle.”*

To be able to walk everywhere and not spend hours sitting in traffic was mentioned, as were safety and a low crime rate. Strong arts, entertainment and culinary traditions – along with the University – were seen as attractions to returning here to live. Another said, “Charlottetown is a small city with a small town feel to it.” Considering PEI as “home” was prevalent; “home” was mentioned in 42 comments. Said one person,

*I moved to PEI at the age of 19, and lived there for 5 years, I graduated from both Holland College & UPEI. My adulthood began there and I hope to one day move back as I feel it became my home away from home.*

Two people cited the Island’s growing diversity, while three others mentioned that we need more diversity.

## GEOGRAPHY

The Island's geography was also mentioned as being a reason for returning, in particular, access to beautiful, warm "beaches" and "ocean" (mentioned 20 times). The Island's "beauty" (e.g., "breathtaking landscapes") was referenced 24 times, mostly as a descriptor of landscape but more broadly as quality of life: "***I miss a lot of lifestyle and of course the breathtaking landscapes.***" The long, cold winter was mentioned by three respondents as an inhibitor to moving back.

## FINANCIAL OR EMPLOYMENT-RELATED

The word "cost" or "affordability" appeared 13 and 6 times respectively, while 17 found the cost of living lower than other places, making PEI attractive. Selling one's current home to support the family into retirement on the Island was also mentioned: "***The modest cost of housing in PEI would permit us to purchase a comfortable home and free substantial equity from our current home to support us toward the end of our working careers and into retirement.***"

Having a "job" or "employment" (mentioned 24 and 10 times, respectively) was part of the equation; having a livable "salary/wage" was mentioned five times. One wrote,

*Being away is very tough but having a good job that helps pay down my student debt is the best option. I would be under employed if I were to be on PEI and that is not an option I want to consider after having spent many years investing in my education.*

One person cited the "creative and entrepreneurial spirit of PEI" as being a positive, and another said, "***I think there is progress occurring on PEI that I would like to be a part of.***"

*On the negative side, an improved health care system would be an incentive; 11 respondents mentioned they would not come back if there was no access to midwifery services ("midwife," "midwifery"). The doctor shortage or having access to a family physician or specialized services was mentioned by eight respondents ("health," "doctor"). One person wrote "I want to retire to the Island but I am concerned that my access to healthcare will deter me. Otherwise I would come back"*

# Q24: THEMES

## ***What Might be Preventing Participants from Moving Back to PEI***

Responses to the question about what might be preventing participants from moving back to PEI (Q24) were aggregated into six major themes consisting of jobs/employment, health care, cost of living, education, geography and “prevailing attitudinal,” plus a catch-all “other” category. Several people included jobs they were seeking and a list of these jobs is provided in Appendix A. A few respondents made specific suggestions for changes to the system that would enhance their ability to return and these are provided below as well.

### **JOBS/EMPLOYMENT**

Mentioned most often in this theme were “job,” “employment,” “work” (205) and “pay,” “salary,” “wage,” “money” (64 individual responses). Some used adjectives such as “good-paying” or “full-time, not seasonal” or “stable”; others cite low wages as a deterrent to returning (compared to what they are used to in other areas of the country, such as BC and Ontario). Several mentioned specific jobs they feel are lacking on PEI (see list Appendix A). Some thought that Island wages don’t cover their educational investment while others suggested that outsiders have a difficult time competing with Islanders for the jobs that are available. A lack of mentorship opportunities was also mentioned. For example, I love PEI, but I find that it has a very traditional culture. .... I feel like I can’t grow professionally in the ways I want to on PEI. Work either isn’t steady enough (only lasts during the summer) or just doesn’t exist.

### **HEALTH CARE**

PEI’s health care system was the next most cited deterrent to returning (17), with adjectives such as “poor quality,” and “unavailable.” One person cited having to travel off-Island for heart surgery as a limitation; another cited the lack of a neonatal intensive care unit on the Island; two more mentioned lack of specialists. There were eight discrete references to lack of midwifery services; two stated they would only come back and start their families if there were midwives available. Four mentioned inability to get a family doctor.

### **COST OF LIVING**

In order of frequency, a cost of living theme was the next most prevalent category. High taxes (3), food prices (2) and the rising price of housing or inability to find affordable housing (12) were mentioned. Limited public transportation (5), poor bicycle infrastructure (1) and the bridge toll (2) were also seen as deterrents to returning.

## EDUCATION

Lack of childcare was mentioned (4), and one person mentioned lack of supports for children with special needs (in this case, autism). A perception of PEI's educational system being below national standards was mentioned (5). One person cited the lack of a well-established private school as a reason for not returning.

## GEOGRAPHY

Four participants mentioned aspects of the Island's geographical situation as impediments to their return: "It is a bit too isolated from the rest of the world for me," and the high travel costs incurred when leaving the Island (bridge = 2; flights = 1). Others mentioned the distance from family and family support systems, and their children and grandchildren. The weather – and in particular the long or harsh winters – were also mentioned (13).

## PREVAILING ATTITUDES

Several respondents (42) seemed to think that PEI's negative attitudes were discouraging them from returning; attitudes such as a lack of tolerance, parochialism, insularity, lack of diversity; and the existence of an "old-boys' network". One person mentioned that there is an "expectation of the status quo".

Thirty-two respondents mentioned they did not want to leave friends and family behind: "I am well established in Alberta for 20 years, and now with kids in school, business contacts and friends, it would be hard to leave for any reason – but we always look forward to our family vacations there. :)" Related to this, 22 respondents mentioned reluctance at leaving behind the life they have now: "I don't want to move back there but I do love love love PEI (good summer memories as a kid). But I live in Vancouver & love the big city lifestyle." One mentioned how it would feel if a move back to PEI didn't work out: "the fear of moving right back to Alberta due to lack of steady employment/income if my spouse and I don't have a solid plan in place or a large emergency safety net saved."

"Other" Theme: This catch-all category included several who mentioned a perceived high drug/crime rate, did not want to have their children change schools or were unable to leave because of child custody issues. One was worried about a poor Internet infrastructure, and two mentioned that they would need to be debt-free or in a stronger financial position before moving back. One mentioned environmental groundwater issues.

“

*For me, there is an unspoken truth and ease about who I really am and, how I fit in when I'm on the island. As Milton Acorn said when he moved back to the island for good in 1981, "I know where I am here."*

”

“

*PEI is the biggest, most prominent part of me. I love how it molded me into a caring, empathetic, kind person who genuinely loves and appreciates her life. I would choose to grow up on the island every single time given the chance, and that is why I am moving home. I am moving so I can be close to my family, and hopefully meet someone to start a family of my own with so my kids can live as beautiful a life as I have thus far. The island is my home, and I will never leave it again.*

”

“

*The things that make PEI so appealing are also obstacles to moving back. I love that PEI is small and rural, but that also means fewer job opportunities in my field.*

”

**“There is no place on earth better than PEI”**

“

*Every time I am introduced to someone new from back East, the conversation talks about our desire to move home. We all hold on to our identity as Maritimers here.*

”

“

*The air. The love. My family. His family. Our son's family. Quiet. Fewer chains/more mom and pop shops. Red earth. Gentle breezes. Home. Always and forever.*

”

//

*I miss the pace of life. I'm also seeing all the great things happening in arts and culture, economic development and infrastructure. I'm sad to be missing out on it!*

//

//

*There are no words strong enough to adequately express my desire to be in P.E.I. From our first visit... I have never in my life experienced anything like it. I truly 100% believe that I belong there. I feel very unsettled now. We had one week vacation last October... I got emotional the first time we came to the island. Every time now... my heart races when I cross the bridge... and I hate it when I leave... it's like I'm leaving myself behind.*

//

***No place like home – especially when it's an island.***

//

*On an overall basis, and during the course of a year, PEI has pretty much everything anyone could ask for*

//

//

*I love PEI. I love the community and it breaks my heart to have to live away in order to provide a future for our children.*

//

# FOLLOW-UP

At the end of the survey, participants were asked two questions regarding possible follow-up. The first asked if they were willing to be contacted for any subsequent research associated with the topic of this survey, for example, a focus group.

or personal interview) (Q25). A total of 262 respondents provided their email addresses, indicating that they were willing to participate in follow-up research.

This report concludes with the following ringing endorsement for Prince Edward Island from an Islander current living away:

*“ I feel we all would be so much happier and healthier in PEI. Life is meant to be enjoyed to the fullest and you should be where you feel the happiest and PEI does that for my family.”*

# APPENDIX A: SPECIFIC JOBS BEING SOUGHT IN PEI (Q24)

- Military
- Audio engineer
- Master's level psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- IT sector (support/managerial)
- Project management
- Power engineer
- Teaching jobs
- PR in the entertainment industry
- Management consulting
- Acute care hospital work
- Tech jobs
- Speech language pathologist
- Family physicians in Charlottetown area
- Electrician
- Pediatric health care; other specialized medicine
- Forestry
- Medical genomics
- Engineering and technology-related fields
- Graduate studies in history
- Plumber
- Nutritionist
- Ocean acoustics
- Security
- Welder
- ECE teacher
- Polygraph examiner
- Behaviour Analyst

**THANK YOU**