

1.0 Executive Summary

Background

Given the critical role that CSIS plays in the Government of Canada's national security efforts, it is important to ensure the Service is able to enjoy a healthy workplace renewal through the recruitment of younger employees. To ensure that its current recruitment activities, messages and channels are appropriate and effective in attracting young Canadians, CSIS hired DECODE to consult with young Canadians who might be ideal CSIS candidates and compare their responses against those of recent hires.

Objectives

The chief aims of this study are to understand and document the attitudes of young Canadians towards CSIS recruitment using qualitative research among the target audience and recent CSIS hires. Findings will be used to develop strategic and specific recommendations for improving CSIS's recruitment efforts.

Methodology

DECODE used its Online Dialogue methodology to consult with the target audience. Online Dialogues took place on DECODE's password-protected bulletin board with 8-10 participants on each board.

The dialogues were held with the following groups:

- 2 external English groups of Canadians aged 18-25 within 2 years of university graduation
- 1 external French group of Canadians aged 18-25 within 2 years of university graduation)
- 1 group of CSIS personnel hired within the past 1-2 years

In all, 26 people not currently working for CSIS and 7 recent CSIS hires took part in the research.

Note that due to the qualitative nature of this sample, the findings listed here cannot be considered statistically representative of the broader population.

Findings

- Respondents in the target audience say they talk with a variety of influencers and use a variety of resources when looking for work. Those with the most influence are described in terms of their credibility as sources of information and not in terms of their social proximity.

- For university students, the “ideal job” is usually described in terms of salary, job security, interesting/challenging work, and work-life balance. Some respondents appear to gravitate towards jobs that offer opportunities to travel. Few respond to more detailed messages about career advancement, training, or workplace values.
- Respondents use a variety of resources when looking for work and are reluctant to invest time and energy in mass recruitment efforts, such as general recruitment websites and large career fairs. The importance of developing a diverse personal network of mentors and experts is seen as key to their job search efforts.
- The overall level of awareness of CSIS’s mandate and its recruitment offerings is low. Few participants can recall seeing CSIS’ advertising. Of those who do recall seeing CSIS’ recruitment efforts, the activities recalled included outreach within their university’s departments and at career fairs.
- Almost no participants are disinclined to consider CSIS due to impressions left by news coverage, or specific security incidents. Many are, in fact, curious as to which opportunities CSIS offers, and are open to receiving more information.
- While respondents find CSIS’ website to be mostly well organized, they say that its job descriptions and background information do not convey enough specific information about the day-to-day life of CSIS employees. Recent CSIS hires believe the website and other recruitment efforts should say more about the demanding nature of the work.

Contract No. 30001-080008 001 CY
Contract Date: 2009.03.05
POR No. 094-08

**“Attitudes of Canadian Youth:
CSIS Recruitment Evaluation
Outline of Key Phases”**

March 31, 2009

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Canadian Security Intelligence Service

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Background

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In all, 26 people not currently working for CSIS and 7 recent CSIS hires took part in the research.

Note that due to the qualitative nature of this sample, the findings listed here cannot be considered statistically representative of the broader population.

Findings

- Respondents in the target audience say they talk with a variety of influencers and use a variety of resources when looking for work. Those with the most influence are described in terms of their credibility as sources of information and not in terms of their social proximity.

- For university students, the “ideal job” is usually described in terms of salary, job security, interesting/challenging work, and work-life balance. Some respondents appear to gravitate towards jobs that offer opportunities to travel. Few respond to more detailed messages about career advancement, training, or workplace values.
- Respondents use a variety of resources when looking for work and are reluctant to invest time and energy in mass recruitment efforts, such as general recruitment websites and large career fairs. The importance of developing a diverse personal network of mentors and experts is seen as key to their job search efforts.
- The overall level of awareness of CSIS’s mandate and its recruitment offerings is low. Few participants can recall seeing CSIS’ advertising. Of those who do recall seeing CSIS’ recruitment efforts, the activities recalled included outreach within their university’s departments and at career fairs.
- Almost no participants are disinclined to consider CSIS due to impressions left by news coverage, or specific security incidents. Many are, in fact, curious as to which opportunities CSIS offers, and are open to receiving more information.
- While respondents find CSIS’ website to be mostly well organized, they say that that its job descriptions and background information do not convey enough specific information about the day-to-day life of CSIS employees. Recent CSIS hires believe the website and other recruitment efforts should say more about the demanding nature of the work.

2.0 Background and Objectives

Background

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) plays a leading role in protecting the national security interests of Canada by investigating and reporting on threats to its security. Guided by the rule of law and the principles of human rights, CSIS works within Canada's integrated national security framework to provide advice to the Government of Canada on these threats.

As part of the critical role that CSIS plays in the Government of Canada's national security efforts, the Service needs a healthy workplace renewal through the recruitment of younger employees. To learn whether its current efforts to that end are resonating with young people, CSIS hired DECODE to consult with young Canadians who might be ideal CSIS candidates about its recruitment activities, messages and channels.

Objectives:

In particular, CSIS identified a need to

- understand and document the perspectives of young Canadians towards CSIS recruitment; and
- develop strategic and specific recommendations for improving the program.

Some key questions to be answered were:

- What impressions do members of the target audience have of CSIS, and what are the roots of these impressions?
- What other kinds of federal government recruiting efforts have they encountered and what are their reactions?
- What are the key messages, outreach efforts and channels for communicating with young Canadians about a career in CSIS?
- What is the experience of those working with various recruitment programs to hire young Canadians vs. hiring through other routes?
- Does the CSIS hiring process result in the hiring of the right students for the jobs?

3.0 Methodology

Online Discussions

DECODE used its Online Dialogue methodology to consult with the target audience. Online Dialogues took place on DECODE's password-protected bulletin board with 8-10 participants on each board.

The dialogues were held with the following groups:

- 2 English groups - external (young Canadians aged 18-25 in university within 2 years of graduation)
- 1 French group - external (young Canadians aged 18-25 in university within 2 years of graduation)
- 1 group of recently-hired CSIS personnel (past 1 or 2 years)

In all, 26 people not currently working in CSIS and 7 recent CSIS hires took part in the research.

First, DECODE recruited participants using a short screening checklist. To qualify, participants had to be within two years of graduation from a university degree. Participants were selected so as to be representative in terms of gender, region, area of study, and cultural diversity. The recruitment sample was obtained through an internal DECODE Network of over 600 people.

DECODE worked with CSIS to develop dialogue guide to probe on questions of interest.

It is important to note that this project was designed to provide qualitative feedback, and that, as such, remarks ascribed to participants of certain backgrounds cannot be considered statistically significant.

As per MRIA guidelines, DECODE ensured that

- at least half of participants polled had never participated in any form of market research;
- no participants had participated in a focus group, online discussion or in-depth interview on the subject of recruitment, hiring, or national security in the last two years;
- no participants had participated in a focus group, online discussion or in-depth interviews on any topic in the past 6 months;
- no participants had attended more than five focus groups, online discussions or in-depth interviews on any topic in the past five years;

- no participants worked in, or have family who work in, advertising, public relations, or the media.

The internal CSIS group was selected by CSIS project managers based on similar demographic considerations. Given the need to protect the identities of CSIS employees, DECODE did not have any direct contact with internal respondents. CSIS staff managed password access and internal recruitment.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Influencers

External Groups

In dialogues held with members of the target audience, participants voiced a range of opinions about who they talk to when discussing possible future employers and career paths. Parents, friends already in the workforce, teachers, professors, recruiters and career counselors are all cited by participants as having influence on different aspects of their career planning.

Trust in the expertise and experience of the people giving advice was seen as central. Regardless of the position a given person holds in their lives, participants described assessing whether that person is qualified to be giving career advice. For this reason, the social proximity of the given influencer was, for many, not an important consideration. Many respondents were uncomfortable relying on ill-informed parents, guidance counselors, and professors for career advice. In instances where these influencers were thought of as being well informed, they were cited as having value.

Interestingly, some participants said they were reluctant to rely too much on the advice given by employees of organizations interested in hiring them. These participants reported being suspicious as to whether organizational representatives they met at career fairs could be considered trustworthy.

Internal Group

Similarly, recent CSIS hires reported a variety of types of people as being influential to their careers, and also stressed the importance of personal comfort with their decisions. One participant reported taking a pay cut to join CSIS. This decision was one to which the participant's parents were initially resistant. Ultimately, personal considerations about quality of life and work were deemed to be more important than external influencers.

Implications for CSIS:

- Those involved in outreach and recruitment for CSIS should continue to focus on establishing personal credibility with participants. There is some suspicion of recruitment professionals at career fairs.
- Parents and friends, while influential for some participants, do not appear to have a determining influence over participants in this stage of their lives. Individual decision-making is important to all participants.

4.2 Job Attributes

External Groups

Participants were given a list of job attributes and asked to describe which of the ones offered were most important. The offered attributes included:

- Job security
- Job variety
- A career I will have for rest of my life
- A job that will let me work outside Canada
- Interesting work
- Good pay and benefits
- Working for an organization that links up with my values
- Work I can feel proud of
- Career advancement
- Organization with a good reputation
- Training and development
- Work life balance
- Diverse employee base

Of the attributes listed, those related to good pay and benefits, interesting work, and work-life balance were most likely to be selected. The importance of being able to work outside of Canada was of high interest to some respondents, especially those in the French-language groups. Attributes related to organizational values, career advancement opportunities, diverse employee base and training and development were less likely to be selected. Several participants noted that perceptions of careers and jobs change as people progress through their careers. Upon graduation, issues related to security and good pay are most important. As one spends more time in the workforce, attributes about training, advancement, and workplace values become more important.

Internal Group

Interesting work, job variety, and work that inspires pride were almost universally cited as a desired job attributes by recent CSIS hires. Attributes related to diversity in the workforce, work-life balance and career advancement were less likely to be selected. It is also important to note that travel opportunities were not cited as being extremely important to the consideration about desired job attributes.

Implications for CSIS:

- Young people about to graduate appear to think of career decisions in mostly personal terms, referring to salary, quality of work, and work-life

"As far as the rest of the decision making factors are concerned, I think that the ones I will consider in choosing the company or organization I work for are the pay and benefits they offer, job security within that organization.

The factors that will influence my career path decision and my overall job satisfaction are to be doing work that I am proud of, being able to maintain a strong work-life balance and the opportunities that the organization provide me with to continue training and development within my field." – External group

balance. When communicating to general audiences, CSIS should emphasize the personal benefits of security and salary and demonstrate the interesting work opportunities CSIS offers. Those who currently work at CSIS may be more interested in travel, and taking pride in their work, than the general population.

- More “high-level” messages about career advancement, organizational values and diversity of workforce are therefore less likely to resonate for those in this life-stage, though this may change as they progress through their careers.

4.3 Where jobs are found

External Groups

Personal networks were overwhelmingly cited as the most important sources for learning about tangible career opportunities. Many participants expressed a cynicism about mass recruitment efforts through general job posting websites, newspaper advertisements, and career fairs. Some noted that this feeling may well reflect a generational shift, as their parents were more likely to believe that by simply applying for as many jobs as possible through whatever mass portals were available, real job leads would emerge. General career websites such as Monster.com were often described as being too cluttered and impersonal as to be realistic avenues for employment. Participants were more likely to prefer applying to jobs directly through an employer’s website.

For some participants, university career centres had some appeal, despite the lack of direct connection to employers. Among participants who rated these sources as being useful, the desire for personal connection was realized in the one-to-one interactions they reported having with career centre staff.

Many expressed a disappointment with career fairs as meaningful sources of real job leads. Some participants spoke of feeling that career fairs were mostly useful for general information about employers, and that further networking was required to realizing tangible job opportunities. Many say they attended these fairs with the expectations that they would be able to build their network, and yet many expressed doubts as to the ability of staff at career centre booths to help them to do so.

“Les emplois que j’ai eu jusqu’à date on été trouvé par le bouche-à-oreille. Malgré que parfois j’aie envoyé des courriels à quelques employeurs via leurs site-webs parce que je trouvais leur travail très intéressant, je n’ai pas eu à postuler ma candidature. Je trouve la bouche-à-oreille, et/ou un dialogue avec l’employeur important parce que ça me permet de voir si les facteurs que j’avais soulignés comme important pour la question 2 sont présent.” – External Group

As a result, participants reported having few expectations when applying for jobs in situations where they had not been first able to make a personal connection with those responsible for hiring decisions. Personal networking, through family friends, professors, and those already employed was therefore widely seen as a necessary skill in today's job market.

Internal Group

Having a diverse personal network was also seen by internal respondents as the key source for meaningful job information. Interestingly, participants also said they paid attention to the federal government's recruiting websites.

Implications for CSIS:

- While mass recruitment tactics are likely effective for generating general awareness of CSIS as an employer, CSIS can improve its recruitment tactics by creating more opportunities to connect with university students through personal outreach. Participants are most eager to cultivate a diverse network of professional contacts.

"This job sounds really cool and important but I can't say I'd like to work with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service because I don't know anything about them. I don't know anyone that is involved with this organization, nor have I heard of them before. I'd like to see some visual evidence of what they do... I have other goals at this point, however, if the right offer came around I would consider it. "
– External Group

4.4 CSIS as Desired Employer

External Groups

Participants were asked to respond to the statement "I would love to work for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (or CSIS)". The question was asked to test overall awareness of CSIS as a possible employer and probe for positive or negative reactions to the service.

Most participants said they lacked the information they needed to be able to answer the question. While some had a general idea that CSIS performs a function similar to better-known American counterparts like the CIA or FBI, many expressed ignorance as to what individuals working for these agencies do. When discussing CSIS specifically, these participants said they were not aware of CSIS's mandate, or of the types of jobs available and the general areas that CSIS works in. Most said they were curious about receiving more information about the service and the opportunities it offers young people. Others said they doubted whether the skills they had would be appropriate for what they imagined would be required at CSIS. A smaller number said they had the impression that a CSIS job might be boring or excessively bureaucratic.

Only one participant was not at all interested in pursuing opportunities at CSIS; this person was not comfortable working in an environment that required secrecy. No participants mentioned having a bad impression of CSIS due to its role in specific cases or issues.

Internal Group

When participants were asked about the impressions they had of CSIS before becoming employees, responses were split between those who had very little idea of what kind of opportunities CSIS offered and those (particularly federal government employees) who said that CSIS had some mystique within the federal civil service. One participant noted that CSIS was awarded the distinction of being a “Top 100” employer in Canada by Monster.com.

Several participants said that while they were initially largely unaware about the quality of work opportunities CSIS offered them, the lengthy recruitment process served as an incentive. For these participants, the competitive nature of the CSIS recruitment process instilled the message that the service has a premium-quality offering to recruits.

Implications for CSIS

- CSIS should consider targeting its recruitment messages to different professional fields. Participants are looking for possible connections to the fields of study they have pursued in school, and have difficulty seeing how their education might relate to CSIS’s work.
- CSIS should consider offering more detail about the types of jobs they offer so respondents can better visualize the day-to-day working environment, and how it differs greatly from a normal federal government job.
- CSIS could consider emphasizing the demanding and challenging nature of the jobs so as to better distinguish its job offerings from those of other government departments.

“Since I did not know much about CSIS before I started the recruitment process, the same could be said about the careers available. Therefore, I would be surprised (sic) if people from any other field of expertise (tech, admin, any other academic background) would put a career at CSIS near the top of places to work because in my opinion, people just don’t know.” – Internal Group

4.5 Capability of being a CSIS employee

External Groups

Participants were subsequently asked to describe whether they felt capable of being a CSIS employee.

Again, a variety of types of responses are observed. Some participants say that they feel they could be capable of working for the service, and described developing an awareness of other unique employers (such as the Department of National Defense) as they approached graduation. While unaware of specific jobs or skill sets needed, these participants said they would consider pursuing career options if they had more information. Others, however, say that, because of their lack of awareness, they assume that they would not be qualified.

One participant expressed a need for a better understanding of the moral and ethical codes guiding CSIS's work before they could answer the question. Overall, however, this type of response was rarely observed in the groups.

Internal Group

As with those in the external groups, recent CSIS hires reported having a low level of awareness of what different careers in CSIS involved. Respondents said they assumed they were incapable of working for an organization like CSIS before they were approached with specific information or had begun the recruitment process. Some participants noted that even when applying for a job at CSIS, they were focused on the specific job requirements of their position, and not particularly aware of their fit within the organization as a whole.

Implications:

- Given the overall low level of awareness of CSIS as an organization and a possible employer, it will be difficult to engage new recruits through messages about the organization as a whole. Focusing job recruitment messages on the specific skills needed by the organization will likely have more success in attracting new recruits.

4.6 Evaluation of CSIS Web Site and Career Section

External Groups

Participants were asked to conduct research online about CSIS from the perspective of someone interested in applying for a job with the service. All participants were able to access the CSIS website through online search engines, though a few participants also reported reading entries on CSIS on general information sites like Wikipedia.org. Overall, the website appeared to leave a favourable impression for the perspective of ease of use, accessibility and clarity of navigation. Very few participants reported visiting sections related to CSIS's history or mandate.

"Le site n'explique pas tellement le travail d'un agent de renseignements. Ça l'aire come un travail de recherche et ecrivant des papiers de recherche come dans ecole. Ça m'interesse pas." – External Group

Most participants reported first visiting the career and employment section of the CSIS website and said that it had a very inviting tone from a recruitment perspective. Many reported being excited about learning that CSIS hires graduates in a wide variety of fields.

However, many participants reported initially finding the use of models and pictures to be ineffective, meaningless, and ultimately a distraction from the key messages. Whether this message was retained over the duration of the visit to the website appeared to be dependent on whether participants found specific opportunities appropriate for them. For those who were able to find jobs they would personally qualify for, the favourable overall impression of the site was retained. Those who were unable to find specific jobs they were qualified for voiced frustration about the disconnection between the inviting tone of the website and the subsequent lack of opportunities. More specifically, some participants expressed frustration with the fact that they had to read individual job postings in their entirety before coming to an understanding of whether they were qualified.

Moreover, some participants questioned the purpose of the “immediate career opportunities” section, noting that the closing date for many job postings was December, 2009. This fact created the impression that CSIS is simply collecting resumés on an on-going basis as opposed to truly posting real job opportunities. Among those who had this impression, this served as a disincentive to offer an application.

Internal Group

Internal sessions largely reconfirmed complaints that many participants in external groups had voiced. In addition, however, many recent CSIS hires said that the website created the impression that the service was desperate to recruit. Many participants said they felt that CSIS’s main recruitment challenge likely has to do with finding people who can handle the rigours of the job. As a result, many participants felt that the CSIS web presence should do more to convey the demanding nature of the work, so as to allow potential recruits more of an opportunity to screen themselves out.

With regard to career descriptions, some participants felt that the website did not convey enough information about the subject matter and the broad areas of security that the service works in.

“To attract competitive people, the challenge needs to be made clear up front, leaving the reader with the question ‘can I take this on?’ as opposed to CSIS saying about what a fantastic employer it is. I truly feel that CSIS should market itself based on the (IO) job itself and what it actually entails (i.e. up and leaving at the last minute, no control over your relocation time or destination, late night meetings, polygraphs etc.) so that people apply to the Service knowing the demands (expectations) that are set. I really would not apologize for this (for example, delete all superlatives like “exciting” as the job should be ‘exciting’ without the website stating as such).” – Internal group

Implications for CSIS:

- The CSIS website needs to ensure that those unable to find specific job posting are encouraged to continue monitoring the site for more opportunities.
- CSIS should consider providing firm and realistic deadlines for its job postings, as having open-ended applications leaves the impression that it is simply collecting resumés (and not offering real opportunities).
- CSIS could consider giving broad information about current issues and subjects that it works on.

4.7 Awareness and Perceptions of CSIS recruitment efforts

External Groups

Participants were asked if they recalled ever seeing anything related to recruitment at CSIS. Among members of the external groups there was almost no recall of either online or offline advertising for CSIS' recruitment efforts. One participant recalled seeing an advertisement in a brochure related to public sector employment, one participant reported seeing a television advertisement, and one recalled seeing a poster in her department at university. This latter respondent said the poster in question was text-heavy, and was too general to interest peers in the specific field of study. As a result, even after reading the text, the respondent was not compelled to visit the website or submit an application. Some participants said public advertising about jobs in the federal government is not particularly effective. Participants said they are cynical about these efforts because they assume that the hiring process is too time consuming and difficult.

When asked where CSIS should consider focusing possible advertising dollars, participants said CSIS should focus on purchasing advertisement space near or on university campuses, particularly in areas near career centres.

In terms of outreach, some participants said they recalled receiving departmental e-mails about job opportunities at CSIS, or seeing a CSIS booth at a career fair. Perception of the quality of these career booths was mixed. Some participants noted that the CSIS booths are not distinguishable from those of other federal government departments. Others complained about the helpfulness of the staff they encountered at these booths.

“Le kiosque avait l’air de presque tous les autres emplois gouvernementaux comme les forces canadiennes, la Gendarmerie royale du Canada ou le ministère des Finances. Il semblait que les emplois qui étaient là pour encourager des gens ne s’intéressent trop à parler ou convaincre des gens de mettre leur application à SCRS.” – External Group

When asked which areas of outreach CSIS should focus on, participants recommended that CSIS should aim to develop larger presences at career fairs. This finding is interesting given that many participants' previously voiced cynicism about the career fair experience. Despite this, participants appear to believe that good career booths, staffed by knowledgeable and enthusiastic representatives with real experience would drive greater awareness of, and interest in, applying for jobs at CSIS.

Internal Group

Among CSIS employees, most respondents were able to recall encountering at least some form of advertising or outreach. In terms of advertising, recall of posters and newspaper advertising was observed, though there was some debate as to whether these efforts drove interest. Participants were also able to recall seeing CSIS booths at job and career fairs. A few participants also said they recalled being approached through an e-mail circulated in their department. Other participants said a friend or family member referred them to the service.

Implications for CSIS:

- While CSIS' current public advertising does not appear to drive the desire for consider applying for a job, CSIS appears to have made a much better connection through targeted outreach efforts, especially departmental e-mails.
- There is an opportunity for CSIS to distinguish its presence at career fairs from those of other federal government departments, particularly as concerns the expertise of the career booth staff.

4.8 Internal Job Satisfaction

Internal Group

Recent CSIS hires were asked about their level of job satisfaction and whether or not the recruitment process delivered on their expectations. All participants in internal groups said they were highly satisfied with their current job positions, citing the interesting and challenging nature of the work, the integrity and values of co-workers and management, and the sense that work done at CSIS performs a valuable function in Canadian society. While most participants said they would recommend a career in CSIS to friends or peers, they noted that jobs with CSIS, particularly in the "Intelligence Officer" category, are highly demanding and not for everyone.

One participant noted that the quality of the French language training was not particularly high. Almost all participants said the recruitment and training process was long and demanding, but acknowledged that the time spent was crucial to finding effective employees.

One participant suggested that CSIS consider communicating a bit more about job specifics during the recruitment process, so as to better prepare potential hires for the demands of the job.

Implications for CSIS:

- Once recruited, participants feel strongly that their decision to join CSIS was the right fit. There are some small complaints observed about particular training needs.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- Messages: CSIS should emphasize the interesting and challenging nature of its employment offerings, as these messages appear to have strong appeal. Messages related to long-term career development do not seem to resonate with young people in this stage of their lives, though they acknowledge that what they'll want out of their careers will change over time.
- Influencers: It is important that all professionals involved in public recruiting efforts present themselves as trusted advisors who are legitimately interested in helping young people develop their personal networks. Impersonal outreach professionals convey the wrong image and are not trusted.
- Advertising vs. Outreach: Mass advertising does not appear to catch the attention of most participants. Among those who have seen CSIS's mass advertising efforts, few have been motivated to consider a career with the Service. If investments in advertising are to be made, participants recommend targeting these materials in spaces where university students typically seek career information. Targeted outreach efforts (such as e-mails circulated within specific departments in universities) appear to have made a much more distinct impression on participants.
- Information Needs: Overall, participants have a low level of awareness of CSIS's mandate and its reputation as an employer. Most importantly, however, young people have trouble visualizing what tasks CSIS employees perform in their day-to-day work. It is important that CSIS consider offering more information about the tasks and roles that various employees take on, so as to counteract the stereotype that CSIS employment is no different from employment in other areas of the federal government. This also means targeting information to specific academic fields of study, as opposed to a general audience. Recent CSIS hires believe this can be done without compromising CSIS's activities.

- Online Presences: While providing more detail about specific job areas, the CSIS website also needs to encourage respondents to return to the site if they do not immediately find job opportunities appropriate to their qualifications. There were several concerns voiced that the website creates the impression that the Service is simply collecting resumés and not offering real job opportunities.