



What We Heard Report **French Language Services:** **Exploring the Next Steps**

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Background

On November 21, 2022, the Government of Yukon launched a public engagement to inform the next strategic framework for French-language services and communications. This new roadmap will build on the successes of the previous framework and guide our investments to better serve the growing Yukon Francophone community.

Engagement process

The activities, catering to target audiences, allowed us to identify what works well and what could be improved and mainly explore the next steps to help us continue improving access to French-language services and information across the government. The comments and ideas gathered will help us prioritize the actions that will most impact Yukoners using French-language services and their families over the next two years.

The following are the three steps in which we involved and will involve the public and stakeholders to ensure our findings truly reflect the priorities of the Francophone community:

1) Plan

- Met with the Association franco-yukonnaise to discuss the scope of the public engagement, challenges, opportunities and expectations.

2) Engage

- Led public discussions on French-language services, including an online session for people living outside the Whitehorse area.
- Hosted a workshop on the use of inclusive language.
- Met with CSSC Mercier and F. H. Collins Secondary School bilingual students.
- Met with seniors to discuss what matters the most to them.
- Met with the Table des leaders de la Francophonie members to focus on the 4th objective of the current strategic framework: “Foster a vibrant Francophonie.”
- Conducted one-on-one interviews with public members who volunteered to be part of a focus group to measure their satisfaction and set benchmarks concerning accessing French-language services.

3) Evaluate (to come)

- Survey a focus group every year to measure progress.

Results

We've clustered the results by themes under the activities in which they were shared by the participants.

Public meeting on access to government services in French

Active offer and promotion of French-language services

- Services are rarely actively offered. Even when they are, fear of having to wait longer for service in French may discourage people from “accepting” the offer.
- The onus is currently on the users who are requesting the service.
- Service often cannot be provided in French beyond an initial “Hello, Bonjour” greeting.
- Paper documents are available in French but not always offered to people.
- French services should be actively offered at all times at the main offices, both on the phone and in person. It is important that French-language services should be actively offered for transactional services, because they are the fundamentals.
- It would be useful to specify what can be expected when French-language services are actively offered.
- The *Aurore boréale* newspaper is a relevant way to promote services in French. French-language advertising in English-language media could also be used to promote French-language services even more broadly.

Delivery of services in French

- Online services are sometimes not available in French.
- Using an interpreter can be embarrassing. It makes the interaction feel strange and unnatural, slowing down the process.
- Accessing a service through an interpreter is not the same as unmediated interpersonal interaction. Medical services require more personal interaction.

Health care

- The bilingual signage at Whitehorse General Hospital is appreciated (but translation quality sometimes leaves something to be desired).
- Telemedicine is an interesting alternative to in-person health care services, especially for access to specialists.
- There should be more health care services and more bilingual nurses at the Constellation Health Centre.
- It should be possible to have a bilingual family physician, and the most common specialists should also speak French.
- It should be possible to speak to someone in French when calling 911 (federal service).
- Eligibility criteria for reimbursement of medical travel costs should take language into consideration. This would provide access to French-speaking specialists across the country.
- Could there be some form of interprovincial transfers to facilitate access to specialists?
- There have been many gaps at COVID-19 vaccination clinics. Staff seemed unaware that the documents they distributed were available in French.

Legal system

- There is limited awareness of the various legal services that can be accessed in French.
- There are gaps in services. For example, you can pay a ticket in French, but you can't contest it in French.
- All documents and procedures should be available in French, not just communications.

Emergency measures

- It is vital for emergency communications to be available simultaneously in English and French. This is done elsewhere in the country, so it should be possible in the Yukon.
- Front-line responders who are in contact with the public during emergencies such as floods and wildfires should be bilingual.

General comments

- Centralized services (similar to Service Ontario) with bilingual staff could work well.
- It would be nice if the City of Whitehorse offered more services in French. Perhaps the Government of Yukon could have agreements with the municipality (bilingual signage on trails, for example).
- It would be nice to have bilingual signage in territorial parks and at tourist attractions, as this attracts more Francophone tourists.

Discussion with bilingual students at CSSC Mercier and F.H. Collins Secondary School

Use of French-language services

- Students whose mother tongue is English do not feel the need to request services in French.
- Students mentioned switching between languages when searching on yukon.ca, depending on the topic. For example, one young Francophone said that he preferred searching in French when the topic was more technical. Although many students speak English as their first language, they said they sometimes prefer to consult web pages in French, either out of curiosity, to find a translation for an English term, or because they are more familiar with French-language vocabulary on a particular topic, such as education.
- Students who preferred accessing services in French said they use them when they were offered and do not want to ask for them. They gave the following reasons for not wanting to request services in French: not wanting to wait longer, being comfortable enough in English, simply not thinking of it, or not wanting to create an awkward situation if the person's French is not as good as their English.
- One person mentioned feeling some pressure from a parent who wanted them to use services in French, but this person said they still choose English.
- The hospital is the most important place for youth to be able to access services in French.
- Bilingualism is seen as a source of pride, cultural wealth and family heritage, as well as an advantage in certain situations, such as jobs. There is also a desire to maintain the language beyond school.

Recruitment and retention of bilingual youth

- A government job could be interesting if the job itself is interesting. Youth had no preference for language of work.
- One respondent expressed a preference for a job where he could speak French.
- The vast majority of youth consulted expressed a desire to leave the territory when they finished high school and were not particularly interested in building a career here. Isolation and a lack of opportunities seemed to be the main reasons for this.
- Youth think that the Yukon government should focus on the territory's natural attractions, good wages, quality of life, population growth and the vitality of the Francophone community in order to recruit bilingual staff.

Workshop on bilingual government communications

Inclusive writing

Participants agreed on the need for government writing to be inclusive in French. They discussed the different techniques suggested by the Government of Canada's French-language inclusive writing guidelines and commented on their preferences. Key points that arose out of the discussion:

- Some people would like an “absolute” solution but recognize that the context, the document and the communication objectives must always be considered.
- Alternating between masculine and feminine subjects was not a popular solution.
- Doubling, which consists of using both the masculine and feminine form of a noun, pronoun or adjective, is effective but can quickly make a text long and wordy.
- Using plurals, collective nouns, gender-neutral terms and reformulations was popular, but sometimes these solutions can alter the meaning (more vague writing).
- Abbreviated doubling, or using a typographical symbol such as a middot or slash to combine the masculine and feminine form of a noun, pronoun or adjective was generally well received. They present some difficulties, especially for more complex constructions.
- Using inclusive punctuation seems to fit into the principles of plain language. However, it is important to be aware of accessibility issues. The middot is not yet recognized by screen readers, and abbreviated doubling could make texts more difficult for people with dyslexia, for example.
- There is a lack of consensus about putting a statement on the website to explain the approach used (if you have to explain it, you are not communicating effectively).

Yukon Francophonie leaders table

Access to funding

- A fund for new initiatives should be developed in parallel with the Quebec-Yukon Intergovernmental Cooperation Program.
- Government funding exists, but organizations have to find the base funding to access it. A program that is structured but not too complicated is needed for starting new projects.
- It is important that the Government of Yukon's French Language Services Directorate support Yukon Francophonie Day initiatives.
- Would it be possible to offer micro-grants for implementing bilingual projects (a quick grant application) to non-profit organizations that receive subsidies from the Yukon government?
- The Quebec-Yukon Intergovernmental Cooperation Program works well, but what about creating agreements with other provinces and territories?
- New organizations depend on volunteers. Writing grant requests takes a lot of time. Non-profit organizations generally lack resources.
- The Government of Yukon is a government of proximity, providing services directly to citizens. The government should be flexible, helping to access to federal funding.
- Could the Government of Yukon provide one-time assistance?
- The specific reality of the territories must be considered. This is a big issue for minority media, which are "too small to get in the game." Could the Yukon government have a role to play?

Visibility of the Franco-Yukon community

- Share the community's activities and successes.
- There has been great improvement on social media.

Complaint resolution process

- A formal complaint resolution process is needed.

Outreach and visibility

- The Government of Yukon's French Language Services Directorate has a single contract for government advertising with l'Aurore boréale. There has been a small increase in ads, but not much. How can we properly communicate processes and guidelines for bilingual services and communications?
- Better promotion of government services and programs available in French.
- Should more efforts be made to raise awareness about the Francophone in English?
- Statistics and positive information should be communicated more effectively.
- Would it be possible to create a partnership with the Government of Yukon to offer to Anglophone public servants the online Francophonie course developed by the Association franco-yukonnaise (AFY)?
- Recognition in the Legislative Assembly is appreciated.
- News releases should be issued simultaneously in English and French.

Francophone immigration

- The government supports the recruitment and retention of Francophone immigrants. How can we increase this number and reach people who lost their French two or three generations ago?

Services provided by non-profit organizations and funded by the Government of Yukon

- Non-Francophone organizations cannot afford to provide services in French.
- Government funding should include language clauses and create an obligation to communicate in French.
- The government should have mechanisms in place to ensure that services and communications are offered in French.
- Priority needs include health and safety, women's groups, Hospice Yukon and the Whitehorse Food Bank.

- How should the organization be accountable about the services and communications provided in French?
- The Francophone perspective should always be included.
- Subsidies should be improved for the bilingual component (a separate fund, no parallel service).
- How do we ensure that there is no redundancy with Francophone organizations? The focus should be on specialized services (e.g., Les Essentielles do not have a crisis intervention mandate).
- We need to think in terms of programs: What is the impact of the request and what are the criteria?

One-on-one meetings with community organizations

Organizations:

- Association franco-yukonnaise (l'AFY)
- Aurore boréale
- Les Essentielles
- Francophone Health Network (PCS)

Key ideas discussed:

- We appreciate the increased number of documents available in French on the government website and social networks, as well as efforts made during the pandemic to release information almost simultaneously in English and French.
- Online services allow Francophones, even those in rural and remote areas, to access services in French (e.g., renewing a driver's licence, a fishing or hunting licence, etc.).
- Advances have been made in bilingual signage, particularly for health care and the legal system. However, improvements still need to be made.
- The government and community organizations work well together to raise awareness about certain services and events.
- Partners are satisfied with the relationship with the Government of Yukon (openness and acknowledgement).
- The Government of Yukon's French Language Services Directorate conducts timely follow-up when problems arise.

- There are still inconsistencies in terms of the communications and services available in French within different government departments, suggesting that success is linked to the individual efforts of employees who are more aware of French-language services and not to a systemic process.
- Although paper documents are available in French, they are not always offered to French-speaking clients.
- French-language perinatal services appear to be rare or non-existent.
- Many questions were raised regarding the Francophone perspective in the community vitality component and the possibility of creating funds specific to Francophones.
- When it comes to funding not-for-profit organizations providing services that complement Yukon government services, two scenarios emerged. For general services (e.g., awareness and referral), it is recommended that funding is provided to Francophone community organizations recognized for their expertise and area of intervention. For highly specialized fields and services (e.g., assistance for abused women), it is recommended that English-language organizations be funded to develop their ability to offer services in French.
- Community organizations and the Yukon government could work together to develop strategies for recruiting bilingual staff.
- One suggestion was to better promote successful Francophone community projects funded by the Government of Yukon.
- Since the Aging in Place initiative is in its infancy, the government should establish a Francophone component in partnership with the community.
- Improvements would need to be made in terms of relationships with the Francophone media at press conferences.

Meeting with seniors

- It appears that staff members who speak French are refusing to be identified as such for fear of ending up with more work.
- There should be a clear, recognized complaint process with regular follow-ups.
- There was no awareness of bilingual mental health and support services.
- The simultaneous interpretation service was very much appreciated when it was tested during a public consultation on electoral reform. However, it is difficult to use because of the unreliable Internet connection.

- It's more useful to have the option of simultaneous interpretation for expressing yourself, rather than for understanding someone else.
- There is no quality assurance for interpretation. It is difficult to have full confidence in this system.
- Interpretation is seen as a less helpful solution than having a bilingual care worker.
- Seniors may be intimidated by technology. Direct human contact is preferred.
- For privacy reasons, some people may be uncomfortable having an interpreter-companion present during a medical service. Talking to someone about their problems is difficult to start with. Having an interpreter present complicates matters even more.
- In a crisis situation or when you are in a position of vulnerability, it becomes even more difficult to speak your second language, which staff do not seem to understand.
- There is a lot of staff turnover in the health care centres. We often lose contact with French-speaking staff. Service in French is never guaranteed.
- In a long-term care home, an employee was told that the language of work was English and therefore he had to speak English with the patients.
- It is difficult to find bilingual paramedics and nurses.
- There are a few people who speak French in home care, but you can't ask for them. It depends on their workload.
- There are some physiotherapists who speak French in private clinics, but you may not be reimbursed.
- Psychiatry services are only available in English.
- It's important to think of how to make the telehealth process easier for seniors who are uncomfortable with technology. Would it be possible to have a dedicated room at the Constellation Health Centre with a nurse on site who would facilitate the process?
- Telemedicine depends on people and what their health problems are, but if it is possible to do it with specialists in British Columbia, why not with Francophone specialists?

Public meeting with people in rural and remote regions

Online services

- Online services are useful (e.g., booking and paying for a campsite).
- It is convenient to have them available at all times.
- The links are not always obvious, and you sometimes have to click on more than one link to get to the service. Sometimes the information is different in the English and French versions.
- People living in Dawson City may have different interests than people in Whitehorse.

Priorities

- For families where both parents are not Francophones, it is important to have books in French at the library for language transmission, as well as early childhood activities.
- There is a need for better visibility of early childhood activities offered in communities to ensure that Francophone families are aware of them.
- Priority areas: emergency communications, road closures, health, public health advisories, family services.
- For hospital services, it depends on the department. Staff should be advised who to talk to.

Interpretation

- There is a lot of tourism in Dawson City, and interpretation may be necessary depending on the circumstances.
- The time it takes to access interpretation is a barrier.
- Interpretation would be appreciated in health care and the legal system.

Documentation

- Someone was offered the fishing guide in French when the employee heard his accent.
- Long reports are not translated, but some people would have liked to have access to them in French.

Feedback received via phone and email

- Service is not consistently actively offered in French; it depends on whether the employee is bilingual.
- Staff do not always seem to be aware that they should be actively offering French-language services. It would be nice if the government offered *Languages Act* training for new hires.
- Documents in French are often published much later than the English version. For some seasonal activities, this can have a direct impact.
- The Yukon government should rely on the federal government's criteria for the level of French required to provide services in French.
- Extracurricular programs in French would be great (preschool, daycare, after-school programs, summer camps, weekend workshops).
- An effort should be made to allow people in remote areas to participate in online events in Whitehorse.
- The Department of Education has several shortcomings, as do all departments when it comes to emergency communications. For example, Department of Education emails are only in English, as are urgent communications about COVID-19, vaccination and other critical topics.

Next steps

We will design the third Strategic framework for French-language services and communications 2023-25 with input from this public engagement. This two-year roadmap is instrumental to guide our actions and decisions; It will help us focus our efforts and invest the funding provided by the Government of Canada to support the planning and delivery of government services in French where it matters most.

We will also survey a focus group during the period covered by the strategic framework to measure our progress and adjust our strategies if needed.

Contact

For more information about this public engagement process or results, email French.communications@yukon.ca or phone 867-667-8260.