



In this issue ...

Introduction 1

Rationale for Delivering French Language Services 1

Steps to Building a Bilingual Organizational Culture 2

Conclusion 6

References & Resources 7

Ce document traduit est disponible dans sa version originale en français sous le titre *Comment développer une culture organisationnelle bilingue*

Creating a Bilingual Organizational Culture

BY ANDREA BODKIN, HC LINK COORDINATOR

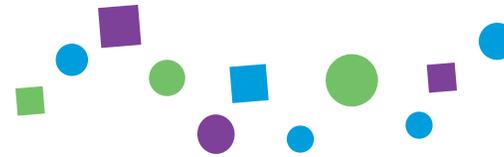
Introduction

Many organizations who seek to deliver services and programs in French focus solely on the service delivery component of French language services. Equally important is creating an organizational culture which supports the delivery of French language services – a bilingual organizational culture. HC Link’s 2011 resource, [*Work Together with Francophones in Ontario: Understanding the Context and Using Promising Practices*](#), was developed to support organizations that are planning to deliver services in French. This issue of **in depth** draws upon that resource to provide an overview of different aspects to consider to successfully develop a bilingual organizational culture.

Rationale for Delivering French Language Services

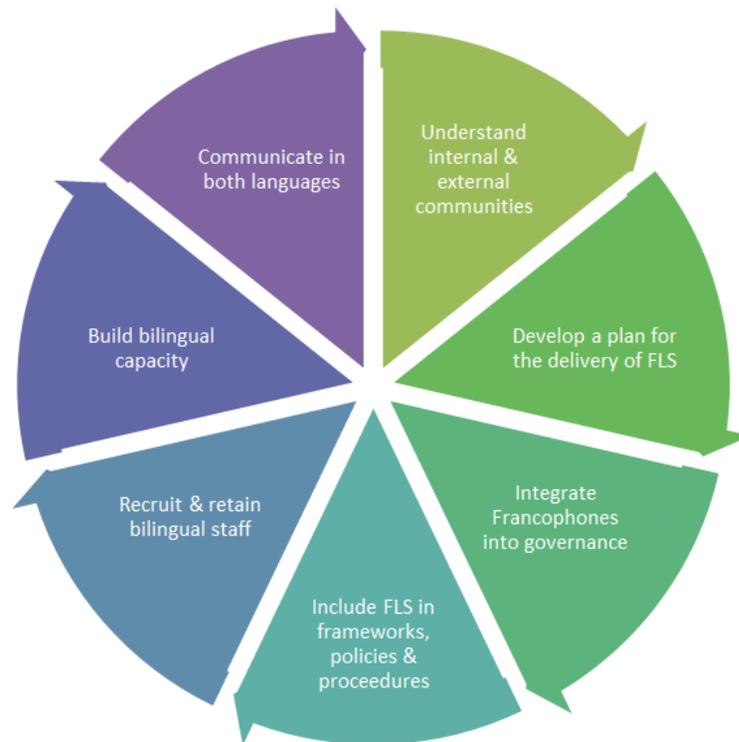
Why should we strive to offer services in French? From a legislative point of view, Francophones in Ontario have the right to request and receive services in their own language under provincial and federal law, though this right may vary according to the area of the province where they live and the type of services involved (French Language Services Act, 1986). In addition to legislative requirements, evidence strongly suggests that clients who receive services in their first language follow health advice and instructions more closely, have less need for hospital services and stay healthier (Bowen, 2001).

Delivering services in French also benefits the organization providing the services. Service-providers that offer services in French have a better understanding of their Francophone clients and can offer higher quality services that are more closely suited to their needs. Being bilingual allows organizations to reach more of their target audience, develop closer links with the community and put into action their organizational commitments to equity (HC Link, 2011).



Steps to Building a Bilingual Organizational Culture

HC Link has developed a seven-step model for developing a bilingual organizational culture. As with many models, the steps are not always linear and don't necessarily happen in order. Part of your preliminary planning should include when and how to do each step. Of course, there may be additional considerations that are particular to your organization, client group, and type of services that you deliver.



Seven Steps to Creating a Bilingual Organizational Culture
(FLS = French language services)

1. Understand internal and external communities

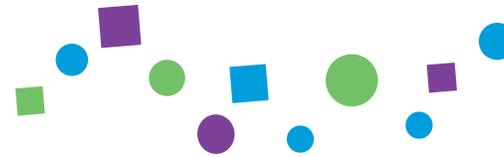
To best serve the communities you are trying to reach you must understand the communities themselves and the contexts that they are operating in. It is important to find out about the Francophone communities in your area; who they are, where they are and what they need. Keep in mind that there is no one Francophone community; there is great diversity in ethnicity, culture, religion, economic and social status, physical and mental ability and sexual orientation amongst Francophone populations (Office of Francophone Affairs, 2009).

Also observe what French services already exist and what networks, associations and businesses support life in this community. Consult Francophones through discussion groups or survey questionnaires, seek out the expertise of staff members who work with Francophone clients, and consult the knowledge and experience of other organizations serving Francophones, including your partners. Be careful not to consult for the sake of consulting. Be clear how you will use the information and follow up with how you used it. Finally, examine the capacity of your organization (be realistic!) and then study the gap between the existing capacity and the resources you will need in order to adequately serve your Francophone clients.

Did you know?

- In 2013, Ontario will begin a two-year celebration of 400 years of Francophones in Ontario! [Read more details](#) from the Ontario Heritage Trust.
- 4.8% of Ontario's population are Francophone - the largest Francophone population outside of Quebec.
- Franco-Ontarians come from approximately 30 countries where French is spoken.

To learn more about Francophones in Ontario, visit the [Ontario Office of Francophone Affairs](#).



2. Develop a plan for the delivery of services in French

Certain areas of the province are designated as bilingual and therefore the provision of French language services is covered by legislative requirements. Refer to our previous resource [Working Together With Francophones in Ontario: Legislation and institutional support](#) for more information.

However, there is often a need for French services in non-designated regions and, as stated in the introduction, delivering these services can be beneficial to your organization and your community. Your French language services delivery plan should consider all aspects of work carried out by staff and other members of your organization: human resources (including unions), policies and procedures, customer service standards, promotions as well as internal and external communications. You may also want to include your community partners in developing and implementing the plan, especially if you regularly refer clients to other service providers or if you work with clients who have been referred to you from partner organizations.

Likely the most challenging part of delivering French language services is determining what specific services to deliver in French. For instance, will you deliver all of your services in both languages? Will you provide all resources and materials in French as well as English? Another approach is a more targeted one: making specific services and resources available according to need, demand and/or interest. This is where the information you have gleaned in the previous step, as well as your relationships with partners, will be helpful.

3. Integrate Francophones into governance structures

Including Francophones in decision-making processes ensures that needs, contexts and experiences of Francophone communities are reflected. This may include (but is not limited to) having Francophones on your board of directors. Francophone representatives who sit the board of directors should reflect the surrounding Francophone

community, as well as provide the necessary expertise in helping the organization make progress. You may reserve positions on the board for Francophones as several organizations such as the Children's Aid Society of Sudbury and Manitoulin, the Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre and Health Nexus have done. In the case of the CHIGAMIK community health centre, a trilingual organization, the board is comprised of four Francophones, four Aboriginals and four Anglophones. (Read more about this organization's perspective in the accompanying story below.)

Community Story: CHIGAMIK Community Health Centre

The Centre de santé communautaire CHIGAMIK Community Health Centre ([CSC CHIGAMIK CHC](#)) is a trilingual organization. The Anglophone, Aboriginal and Francophone communities in North Simcoe Muskoka joined forces to create a critical mass that would attract the attention of the Health Minister, resulting in funding for a community health centre. Key to their success in creating a trilingual organizational culture is the make-up of their board of directors: four of the 12 members are Francophone, four are Aboriginal and four are Anglophone. All governing structures are in English and French, though there are still some policy documents that need to be translated.

The Executive Director of CSC CHIGAMIK CHC, David Jeffery, who is currently working hard to improve his own French skills, offers these tips for creating a multilingual organizational culture:

- When hiring staff, strive to make personnel at each level within the organization – from administrative and support staff to various types of service providers to senior level positions – reflective of the community. When clients enter the centre, they should hear their language being spoken.
- When working in a multilingual environment, remember that English may be a second (or third) language for many staff. Take time to make sure that you – and all colleagues – understand what is being said and what is being intended.

Having a French language services planning committee in your organization is also a way to include the Francophone voice in your service planning and delivery. Obviously you will want to have Francophone and bilingual staff on the committee, but may also be useful to include non-French speaking staff too as this presents an opportunity to build capacity and understanding amongst your Anglophone colleagues.

4. Include French language services in frameworks, policies and procedures

French language services should be incorporated into your organization's existing accountability frameworks such as the strategic plan, operational plans and monitoring frameworks. You may also need to adapt existing or implement new policies relating to human resources, customer service, program delivery and communications. The [French Language Services Commissioner](#) and other relevant entities strongly recommend that organizations adopt a complaints policy on services provided in French. Having such a policy keeps organizations accountable and helps to improve quality of French language services.

Health Nexus created a French Language Services Committee to ensure that French services are maintained by Health Nexus and that the quality and permanence of these services meet the provincial designation guidelines. The committee consists of two members from the Board of Directors, two client representatives and two to three staff members.

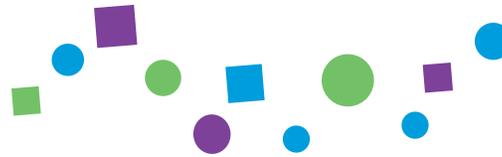
Objectives for the committee include: propose policies and procedures that support Health Nexus in the delivery of French services; ensure an effective organizational structure that allows information about French services to easily flow to the Board of Directors; and act as an advisor and consultant to Health Nexus staff to facilitate and promote active provision of French services.

Community Story: Catholic Family Services of Durham

In 2003, the Ministry of Community and Social Services approached Catholic Family Services of Durham (CFSD) and asked them to be a French Language Service provider for violence against women programs. CFSD experienced some difficulties in achieving this goal until 2009 when a French language services coordinator was hired. The decision was made that 50% of the coordinator's time would for direct service delivery and 50% would be for community development and consultation. With that position in place, CFSD was able to consult and engage the community, thereby identifying the needs of the community and determining how to meet the need for culturally-appropriate and relevant services for Francophones.

Through this process, CFSD learned what is acceptable in Francophone culture and what isn't, including how to "frame" programs and services for the community. For example, Francophone families were hesitant about identifying children who were affected by domestic violence, but when the program was reframed as one to build 'self-esteem and healthy relationships' it became more acceptable.

CFSD subsequently applied for a Health Canada grant to develop services and programs to address the needs assessments and consultations as well as a Trillium grant to translate/adapt all necessary materials into French. Now, CFSD has three French-speaking members on its Board of Directors and two bilingual administrative staff, in addition to the full time French language services supervisor. It has become a collaborative community group that helps inform French language services and provides a model for other agencies seeking to deliver services in French.



5. Recruit and retain bilingual staff

Being able to provide French language services requires having enough competent personnel at all levels of your organization – from administrators and supervisors to front-line employees and volunteers. Develop a human resources strategy and plan which specifies the positions that will offer services in French as well as the level of French proficiency required to fulfill the duties of the position. Your organization may consider designating bilingual positions. Read how Catholic Family Services of Durham developed their French-speaking personnel in the community story on the previous page.

When recruiting bilingual candidates, make the job description available in both languages and post in both English and French media outlets, websites and listservs. Ask your French partners to distribute the job posting. Creating good working conditions for bilingual employees will assist your organization in retaining bilingual staff.

‘Good working conditions’ for Francophone employees:

- Working primarily in French with French-speaking clients.
- Having the French language tools and resources they need to do their job well.
- Recognizing that bilingual staff need to be familiar with your organization’s work in both language, so that they understand the context of the services they deliver.
- Being encouraged to speak French in the workplace.
- Having opportunities for training and continuing education in French.

For more information on creating positive conditions for bilingual staff, please read pages 39-40 of HC Link’s 2011 resource [Work Together with Francophones in Ontario](#).

6. Building bilingual capacity

In addition to recruiting bilingual staff, you can also enhance your organization’s existing capacity to provide French language services by:

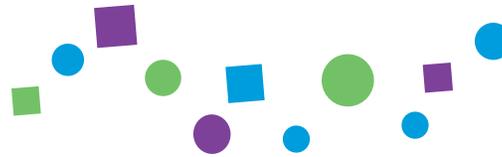
- Developing the French skills of your existing employees through French language training and continuing education;
- Offering internships/placement opportunities to French-speaking students in your field; and
- Investigating the possibility of sharing human resources among different programs in your organization or even with another organization in your region that offers French language services.

Non-Francophone and non-French speaking employees also play an important role in your organization. Ensure that all employees are aware of your services offered in French and know what to do when in contact with Francophone clients. Consider developing a protocol to assist non-French speaking staff.

7. Communicate in both languages and adapt your message

It is vital to be able to communicate well in French. For all of your communications materials, including your website, consider what should be published in French for the general public, your clients, your staff and partners. Establish a policy with clear guidelines about what should be translated, and consider standards such as releasing French and English resources at the same time.

Avoid the temptation of translating websites/applications and use professional translators with experience in your field. High quality resources will build your organization’s reputation whereas poor quality translations will undermine it. Some resources and programs may need to be adapted for a Francophone audience rather than simply translated. Draw upon your organization’s internal expertise to determine when adaptation versus translation is required.



Once your organization is able to effectively deliver services in French, promote active offer of services. “Active offer” means that French services are made available without having to ask for them. The purpose of the active offer is to:

- Ensure that the public is aware that service in French is available; and
- Make the public feel comfortable communicating in the language of their choice, either French or English.

The Regional Health Authority of Central Manitoba has created a policy on active offer. Under this policy, bilingual services are provided as an active offer to the public:

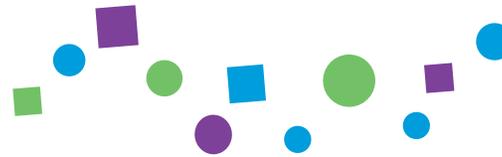
- Through oral, written and electronic communications
- At a comparable level of quality to those offered in English
- In a manner that is:
 - » **Evident** – Facilities, services and staff offering French service are well identified to the public.
 - » **Readily available** – Service is maintained at appropriate levels to meet demand when and where needed.
 - » **Easily accessible** – People should receive little to no delay in service.

In other words, it means informing the client at the first point of contact that services are available in both official languages.

Conclusion

A bilingual organizational culture is one that values language, culture and diversity, respects the rights of Francophone to receive services in French, engages the community, provides quality services and has a visible presence in Francophone communities. Having a culture that supports bilingualism is the foundation of effective delivery of French language services, and provides benefits to the organization itself in addition to its clients.

Supporting organizations in delivering French language services and developing a bilingual culture is a cornerstone of HC Link’s work. To learn more, please see our list of resources and to request a service, please visit us at www.hclinkontario.ca.



References

Bowen, Sarah (2001). [Language Barriers in Access to Health Care](#), Health Canada, Ottawa.

Government of Ontario (1986). [French Language Services Act](#).

HC Link (2011). [Working Together with Francophones in Ontario - Part 1: Understanding the context](#), Toronto.

Office of Francophone Affairs & Ontario Trillium Foundation (2009). [Profile of Francophones in Ontario](#).

Resources

[Making your organization bilingual](#), Heritage Canada Website

[Work Together With Francophones In Ontario: Understanding The Context And Using Promising Practices](#), HC Link, 2011

[Working Together with Francophones in Ontario - Part 1: Understanding the context](#), HC Link, 2012

[Working Together with Francophones in Ontario - Part 2: Legislation and Institutional Support](#), HC Link, 2012

[How to Engage Francophones...When You Don't Speak French!](#) HC Link, 2012

[Community Engagement @ a glance](#), HC Link, 2012

[Engaging Francophone Communities](#), Heart Health Resource Centre, 2010

[The French Language Services Act: An overview](#), Office of Francophone affairs, 2010

HC Link
Your resource for healthy communities

HC Link works with community groups, organizations, and partnerships to build healthy, vibrant communities across Ontario. We offer consultations, learning and networking events, and resources in both English and French. Our services are funded by the Government of Ontario and are provided free of charge where possible.

This document has been prepared with funds provided by the Government of Ontario. The information herein reflects the views of the authors and is not officially endorsed by the Government of Ontario.

To learn more about HC Link or request a service, please visit HCLinkOntario.ca or contact us at 1-855-847-1575 or info@hclinkontario.ca