



Government  
of Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada

# Bilingual Offices and Facilities



A Guide for Communications with and Services  
to the Public in Canada's Official Languages

Canada 

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# Forward

This brochure provides you with information for offices and facilities of the Government of Canada that must provide service to Canadians in both official languages.

## Introduction

The first *Official Languages Act*<sup>1</sup> became law in 1969. In 1988, it was modified to include the rights and linguistic principles that were entrenched in the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The Act provides a legislative basis for official languages policies, especially the following:

- service to the public;
- language of work;
- equitable participation of Anglophones and Francophones in federal institutions; and
- the vitality of official-language minority communities.

Part IV of the Act deals with service to the public. This section and its related regulations<sup>2</sup> provides the legal requirements for dealing with the public that apply to organizations that are subject to the Act.

Part IV ensures that citizens can communicate and be served in the official language of their choice when dealing with the Government of Canada and its institutions. By respecting the official language preferences of the Canadian public, we contribute to a healthy, secure and prosperous Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> For the text of the Act and a comprehensive presentation of the Treasury Board of Canada's official languages policies, please consult [www.psagency.gc.ca](http://www.psagency.gc.ca) and click on Official Languages and then Policies.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations*.

# Who Must Provide Services in Both Languages?

Your office or facility must provide services in both official languages and is **designated bilingual** if it meets one of the following conditions:

1. It is a head or central office.
2. It is located in the National Capital Region.
3. Your institution reports directly to Parliament.
4. There is significant demand for services and communications in both official languages (the *Regulations* define “significant demand” based on the size and proportion of the official-language minority community).
5. The nature of your office justifies that both official languages be used in communications and services.
6. Your office provides services to the travelling public, where there is significant demand.

Some facilities — because of their nature or location — must always offer services in both official languages. Some examples are embassies or consulates. Signs related to health, safety and security must always be bilingual.

If your office is designated bilingual, contracted third parties working on your behalf or concessionaires who serve the travelling public must also provide bilingual services.

In March 2006, there were approximately 12,000 offices and facilities providing services to and communicating with the public. Of these, approximately one-third were required to provide bilingual services.

The official directory of offices and facilities can be viewed by clicking at Burolis ([www.burolis.gc.ca](http://www.burolis.gc.ca)). This is also accessible on the Agency’s official languages site ([www.psagency.gc.ca](http://www.psagency.gc.ca) under Official Languages).



*Official Languages Symbol*

## The First Step in Service: Active Offer

If your office or facility is designated bilingual, it must clearly indicate that services are available in both official languages. This is called an **active offer**.

Active offer includes the initial bilingual greeting, either in person or on the telephone. Visual cues, such as signs with written text and the official languages symbol, should reinforce this offer.

Active offer also includes your recorded messages, welcome pages on your websites, signs, notices and anything else that your office uses to provide information about its services.

Together, these forms of active offer inform the client that they are free to use their preferred official language. In all circumstances, whether the active offer is verbal or visual, you must provide service of equal quality in both official languages.

## **Signs**

The signs in your office should be in both official languages. This applies to physical and electronic signs that give direction, identify the facility, or provide special or temporary messages for an event or unexpected occurrence.

If your office has no one greeting the public in person, it is very important that the signs be in both languages.

## **Website and Electronic Communications**

Your office or facility must respect the preferred official language of your public when using electronic forms of communications, such as websites, e-mails, discussion forums, recorded messages, electronic billboards and computer terminals at information kiosks. All of the material and communications that your institution posts must be issued simultaneously in both official languages and be of equal quality.

The Treasury Board policies and directives on the use of official languages on websites and in electronic communications are available on the Agency's website at [www.psagency.gc.ca](http://www.psagency.gc.ca) and click on Official Languages and Policies. These policies also cover communications to employees and include their language-of-work rights and the corresponding obligations of institutions.

## English or French First?

In all cases, from greetings to institutional signature, memos and business cards, the order of language is as follows:

- French appears first or to the left for an office or facility located in Quebec.
- English appears first or to the left for an office or facility located in the other provinces and the territories.

## National Distribution and National Events

All of the material that you distribute nationally is to be issued simultaneously in both official languages. Moreover, if your office hosts or participates in a national or international event, your communications and services need to be in both official languages.



## Communicating with the Public through the Media

Another vital feature of bilingual service to the public is the appropriate use of the media for notices, advertisements and other purposes which is subject to one of two sections of the Act, as follows:

- Section 11: an act or regulation requires that the information you are providing must be made available to the public. This section applies anywhere in Canada, regardless of whether there is significant demand.
- Section 30: all other communications in all other media.

If **Section 11** applies to your communications product, your information must, at the very least, be published in print media with a general circulation. You should determine the targeted region and ensure that the information appears in English in an English publication and in French in a French publication. If this is not possible because there is no publication for one of the official languages, you can use a bilingual text. You must give equal prominence to both official languages.

If **Section 30** applies, you need to assess your target public to determine whether or not you must communicate in both official languages. You can then choose the type of media that will allow you to communicate with the target public in the most effective and efficient way in the official language(s) of their choice, as long as it is justified.

# We take pride

in providing quality service  
in English and in French.

## Feedback from the Public

To ensure that you are always providing excellent service, you must listen to the public's comments and assess your official-language services as an integral part of the overall evaluation of the performance of an office.



## For more information

You'll find lots of useful information and tools at [www.psagency.gc.ca](http://www.psagency.gc.ca) under Official Languages. For the name of your organization's representative, click on Policies and Policy on the Use of Official Languages and scroll down to the end.

## Good Practices: A Checklist

This checklist describes some key practices for offices and facilities offering services in both official languages.

- As a manager or as an employee in a bilingual position in an office or facility designated bilingual, ensure service to both official language minority communities.
- Your office actively invites the public to use their preferred official language by:
  - providing a bilingual greeting;
  - displaying the official languages symbol;
  - posting bilingual notices and signage (even if temporary); and
  - displaying publications in both official languages.
- Your office has sufficient bilingual staff on hand to provide its services in both official languages at all times.
- Third parties acting on behalf of your office actively offer and provide services in both official languages.
- Your office uses a medium that effectively and efficiently reaches the official-language minority community, such as a website, a print media or a community radio.
- At a public event, whether local, national or international, your office presents a bilingual image and provides bilingual services.
- Employees in bilingual positions provide services of equal quality in both official languages.