

Federal institutions must send their mass communications in both official languages

Section 22 of the *Official Languages Act*

The *Official Languages Act* requires federal institutions to send mass communications to the general public in both official languages. The purpose of this obligation is to give Canadians easy and timely access to information in either official language.

Mass communications are an exception to the rule of personalized communication

The best option is always to identify the preferred official language of every recipient and to communicate with them in that language. Sometimes it is impossible to know the preferred language of recipients because the target audience is simply too broad. In these cases, federal institutions must send the information in both official languages.

Not all federal institutions are subject to this obligation. Only the following offices must send bilingual mass communications:

- The head or central office of federal institutions
- The offices of a federal institution located in the National Capital Region (Ottawa–Gatineau)
- The offices of a federal institution in a region where there is significant demand for services in the official language of the minority, in Canada or abroad

Mass communications must be bilingual

Sending a bilingual message is the only real way to respect the obligation to communicate with everyone in the official language of their choice.

In a few exceptional cases, it may not be possible for a federal institution to send a single bilingual message (for example, if a document is very large and the cost of sending it is too high). In such cases, the institution can consider other options:

- **Have a version available in the official language of the minority:** The federal institution can send a version in the official language of the region's majority population and clearly indicate that a version is also available in the other official language. The federal institution must also explain how to get the other version (for example, by providing a toll-free telephone number people can call to ask for that version).
- **Send two versions at the same time:** The federal institution can send an English version and a French version in the same mailing. This approach is encouraged in areas where there is a significant linguistic minority (for example, in New Brunswick, the greater Montréal area or Sudbury).