

Active offer

“Hello! Bonjour!”: Federal institutions must actively offer services in both official languages – Section 28 of the *Official Languages Act*

Federal institutions have an obligation to “actively offer” their services in both official languages. Each federal institution must clearly indicate to the public that they can communicate with the institution and receive services in the official language of their choice.

The obligation to actively offer services in both official languages is important to protect the rights of linguistic minorities across the country. In fact, when federal institutions do not clearly indicate that their services are available in both official languages, service requests in the minority language decrease.

The institution must offer its services in both languages as soon as you come into contact with it

The federal institution must offer you the choice to communicate in either official language *from the moment* you come into contact with it. A federal institution is not respecting its obligation if it interacts with you for 10 minutes before offering service in both languages.

The federal institution can select what measures it puts in place to offer you this choice. Some contexts will require the institution to put several measures in place, while only one measure might be sufficient in another context. One example is a context of authority. If you are arrested, a police officer should specifically mention that you can speak in English or French to fulfill their obligation to offer services in both languages.

The measures will vary depending on the context and how the institution comes into contact with the public.

In person

The federal institution must take measures to make it clear that its services are available in both official languages. Here are some examples:

- Bilingual greetings (“Bonjour! Hello!”)
- Posters and documentation available in both official languages (for example, a poster that describes the services or the procedure for obtaining the service)
- The active offer symbol or another sign in the reception area indicating that the services are available in both languages.

Active offer symbol in Quebec



Active offer symbol elsewhere in Canada



On the telephone

Here are some examples of measures that the federal institution must set up to make it clear that its services are available in both official languages.

- Bilingual greeting (“Bonjour! Hello!”)
- Bilingual voicemail message

On a website

Here are some examples of measures that the federal institution must take to make it clear that its services are available in both official languages.

- A domain name in each official language if the name of the government institution is not bilingual (for example, www.securitepublique.gc.ca and www.publicsafety.gc.ca)
- A bilingual domain name and a choice of language on the homepage if the name of the government institution is bilingual (for example, www.justice.gc.ca)
- For additional examples of measures that federal institutions can take, please see [the active offer guide](#).

Should federal employees address you in both official languages if they already know your preferred language?

It all depends on the situation.

A federal employee can use only the language of your choice if you have already expressed that choice

If you are in an ongoing relationship with an institution, the employee does not have to ask you which language you prefer each time. However, if the service changes, the institution must again actively offer you the service in both languages.

For example, if you are speaking with several employees from Canada Revenue Agency during the same call, they will not each ask you to select a language. However, if you contact the Agency at another time for another question, the institution will again offer to speak in either official language.

An institution may also ask you in a form to indicate in which language you would like to receive future communications. In this context, the institution can use your answer for your future communications. The institution should give you the option to change this choice.

A federal employee may not presume the language in which you want to be served

For example, an employee cannot assume that you want to be served in English simply because you say "Hello." The employee must actively offer the service in both official languages and let you choose.

You are not required to choose your own official language. You have the right to choose either official language, as you prefer.

Who must actively offer services in both official languages?

Not all offices of federal institutions need to be bilingual. The obligation applies to:

- the head or central office of federal institutions,
- the bilingual offices of these institutions, in Canada or abroad, and
- third parties who offer services on behalf of these institutions.

All federal institutions must inform you about available bilingual services and where to obtain them

All federal institutions, in Canada or abroad, must inform you about services that are available in both official languages and where you can obtain them.

This obligation applies to:

- the head or central office of federal institutions,
- all offices of these institutions, including those that are not bilingual, and
- third parties acting on behalf of these institutions.

Specifically, this obligation involves taking the following measures:

- Regularly informing the linguistic minority that bilingual services are available
- Posting or publishing in a variety of telephone directories the telephone numbers to obtain service in both official languages
- Ensuring that offices that are not bilingual can direct people to other offices that are