



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

COLOMBIE-  
BRITANNIQUE

# French Language Policy

## 1 Preamble

The lands known today as British Columbia have been populated by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. They are home to more than 200 First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous communities, as well as 34 unique Indigenous languages and 90+ dialects.

The Francophone presence in British Columbia and the vitality of Francophone communities have shaped Canada's and the province's history since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. French was the most widely spoken non-indigenous language in the West until the late 1850s as French-speaking Canadians made up much of the fur trade workforce in the province.

French and English languages are enshrined in Canada's Constitution. British Columbia recognizes French and English as Canada's official languages and the government also recognizes the important and valuable contributions of past, present, and future French-speaking residents in the development and prosperity of the province.

In addition to being home to thousands of French-speaking residents, British Columbia welcomes many French-speaking Canadian and international visitors, students, and workers, all of whom contribute to the social, cultural, linguistic, and economic richness of the province.

French language education and transmission is critically important to the Francophone community in British Columbia and there is demonstrable support for French-English bilingualism in the province, as evidenced by enrolment in Conseil scolaire francophone and French Immersion schools.

Providing government information and services in the language of the residents seeking services is part of the government's approach to making services more accessible to British Columbians. In-language<sup>1</sup> information and services can help remove barriers that may limit residents' full participation in their communities, workplaces, and lives while promoting their social, cultural, and economic well-being.

Unlike in some Canadian jurisdictions, where defined geographic regions may be home to a sizable concentration of French-speaking individuals, Francophones in British Columbia are

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'in-language' designates the language used by individuals seeking services.

dispersed and live throughout the entire province. This impacts the provision of select government services in French to the community.

Canada's official linguistic duality requires the prioritization of government services in French in the province beyond what may otherwise be considered necessary based on the Francophone share of its population.

Within this policy, the term 'Francophone' encompasses French-speaking individuals of all cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. The term 'services' should also be broadly interpreted as 'information, communication, and services'.

## 2 Policy statement

The government of British Columbia recognizes the important and valuable contributions of past, present, and future French-speaking residents in the development and prosperity of the province.

The French language policy guides Ministries towards incrementally increasing their ability to serve Francophones throughout the province, based on need and available resources.

Through enhanced engagement, coordination, and planning, this policy will be a catalyst for improved services to the province's French-speaking residents.

## 3 Policy objectives

- I Standardize current elements of Government's French-language service delivery.
- II Provide guidance to ministries to incrementally increase their ability to serve Francophones throughout the province.
- III Ensure ministries engage with French-speaking residents respectfully and meaningfully, so that their needs and priorities are considered in program, policy and service development and delivery.

## 4 Guiding principles

- I Inclusive approach: Ministries shall continue to consider the needs and priorities of Francophones when making decisions, developing programs, and/or delivering services.
- II Incrementality: Implementation of the policy will be incremental as not all services can be made available in French, nor all at once.
- III As resources allow: Services available in French will be based on each ministry's appropriation.

## 5 Scope

This policy applies to ministries whose mandates align with French-speaking residents' priority sectors. Priority sectors are determined through ministry-led consultation and engagement activities with French-speaking residents. The Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat (IGRS) will advise and assist ministries with identifying priority sectors in collaboration with Francophone stakeholders (see Section 8 'Stakeholder consultation').

Ministries external to priority sectors are encouraged to use the policy as a guide to include Francophone perspectives. IGRS will advise those ministries as required.

Ministries retain the flexibility to target and invest language funding in the manner most appropriate for the clients they serve, while maintaining their commitment to service equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Ministries retain the autonomy to decide if this policy should apply to Crown corporations and agencies under their purview. However, ministries shall inform Crown corporations and agencies under their purview – notably those providing a direct service to the public – of the existence of this policy. Where appropriate, and in collaboration with Ministries, IGRS will guide Crown corporations and agencies on the policy.

The policy applies to government communications and public engagement per the Core Policy and Procedures Manual, Section 22 'Communications and Public Engagement'<sup>2</sup>.

The policy does not replace any constitutional or statutory obligations ministries may have with respect to French-language services.

## 6 Indigenous Peoples

This policy does not abrogate or derogate past, current, or future Indigenous linguistic transmission and revitalisation initiatives that may be undertaken in collaboration with ministries or other agencies, including but not limited to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan, sections 4.29-4.32.

## 7 Federal/provincial relations

Ministries shall apply the policy when negotiating and implementing federal-provincial agreements, particularly wherever such agreements incorporate an official-language clause.

Ministries shall consult IGRS during the negotiation of federal-provincial agreements with possible implications for British Columbia's French-speaking residents.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/core-policy/policies/communications-and-public-engagement>

Ministries shall consult with IGRS when negotiating international arrangements (e.g., letters of intent, MOUs, agreements, etc.) with a country where French is an official language (see Section 11 'Role of IGRS').

Ministries shall share all finalised agreements, MOUs, letters of intent etc. containing official-language elements or clauses with IGRS.

## 8 Stakeholder consultation

Ministries are expected to take steps to continually build and nurture relations with Francophone stakeholders by incorporating them in their consultation activities. This will assist ministries in identifying service needs and incorporate Francophone perspectives early on in the development and delivery of applicable policies, programs, and services.

## 9 Translation

In-language government services are more equitable, promote easier access to critical government information, and allow residents to participate more fully in their communities, workplaces, and government.

A French Translation Guide is available to assist ministries with decisions and procedures for the translation of documents into French.

## 10 BC Public Service

Public servants shall not be required or expected to provide translation services – even if the position they occupy is designated French-English bilingual – unless they are a certified translator (see the French Translation Guide for details).

During recruitment activities, ministries should identify positions where oral and/or written proficiency in French would be an asset.

Where applicable, the formal designation of French-English bilingual positions should be considered if it will allow for more effective provision of French-language services.

## 11 Role of the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat-Francophone Affairs

IGRS supports the elected official responsible for Francophone Affairs and the work of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers' Council on the Canadian Francophonie.

IGRS fosters intergovernmental collaboration with domestic and international orders of government to strengthen the provincial and national Francophonie.

IGRS administers the Canada-BC Agreement on French-language services.

IGRS provides advice to ministries, Crown corporations and agencies on how to engage with Francophone stakeholders and on the provision of French-language services.

IGRS helps French-speaking residents and Francophone stakeholders connect with Ministries and government services.

## 12 Implementation

IGRS, in consultation with ministries and Francophone stakeholders, will develop an implementation plan to enhance French-language services in priority sectors. Implementation plan will be developed within 6 months after the adoption of the policy and will be updated as required.

The policy takes effect as of April 1, 2024.

## 13 Accountability

The Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, or their delegated authority, is responsible for the administration of the policy, oversight of its implementation, and annual reporting on priority sectors.

The Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, or their delegated authority, will meet with the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique at least twice annually.

The policy will be initially evaluated 2 years after its adoption and every five years after that.