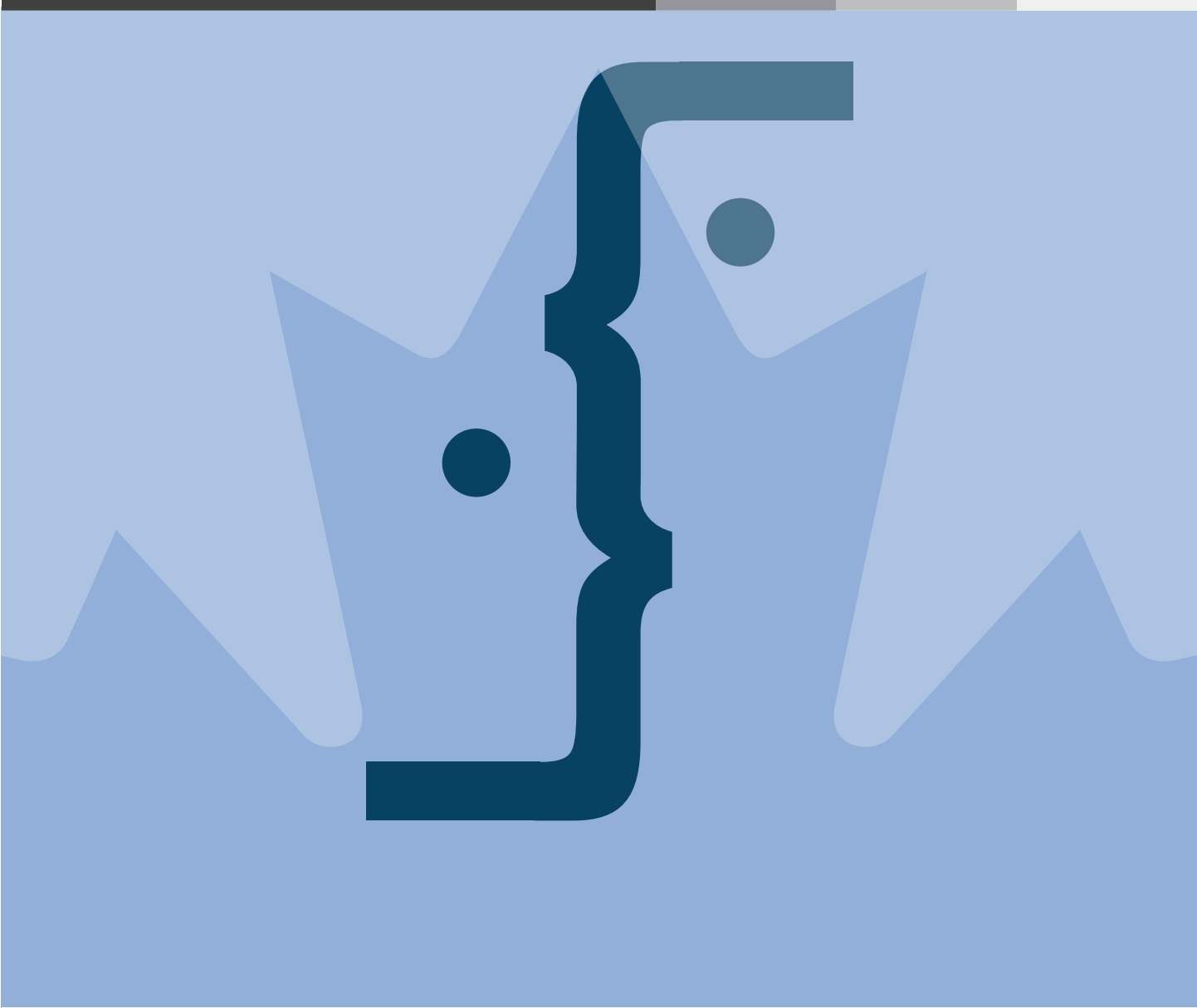




Government
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**Framework for the Vitality
of Official-Language Minority
Communities (OLMC)**
Official Languages Branch

Background

- Since the adoption of the 1988 *Official Languages Act* which sets out the commitment by the federal government to enhance the vitality of the official-language minority communities, this vitality has been the focus of a great deal of discussion. The diversity of interpretations corresponds with myriad related activities that could cause ambiguity in the design or implementation of policies and programs for the official-language minority communities (OLMC).
- Interest in the concept of “vitality” has grown steadily, for both the OLMCs themselves and the public policy and research community, since modifications to the *Official Languages Act* in 2005 made enforceable the commitment for the federal government to enhancing the vitality of OLMC. Federal institutions are required to take positive measures to this end. It is therefore essential for federal institutions to be more open to questions about vitality and work horizontally to better grasp its dimensions.
- We have wide range of studies and data on factors that contribute to the communities’ vitality and use of the minority language in various situations. Based on these studies, the Official Languages Branch at Canadian Heritage has developed a framework on vitality factors to guide its interventions.
- The vitality models developed to date by researchers demonstrate the complementarity of the approaches that are specific to their fields of study, including statistics, language sociology, social psychology or ethnography.
- Although numerous models for capturing vitality have been developed in academic communities, the practical application of these models has yet to be established in terms of policy development and the delivery of official language support programs. Based on our review of the literature, we are presenting the broader dimensions or features of vitality that we have compiled. We examined the relevance of these factors and the most meaningful way to define the expected outcomes. For example, are we interested in economic development because the English speakers (or French speakers in Canada) have less wealth or are more frequently unemployed than the majority linguistic group? In terms of health and justice, are we taking action because services in the language of the minority community members are less accessible? If we no longer have a “deficit” or “inequality” between the two linguistic groups, should we prioritize other sectors? If the deficit is no longer the starting point, how do we justify our interventions? By the importance of maintaining the gains?
- The factors of vitality we are presenting play an important role in the development of each official language community. They provide a shared language to help us better understand the issues in the various communities and the differences between them. With this framework, we can better direct our interventions to maximize opportunities that have a sustainable impact on the use of the minority language, to encourage transmission of the languages or demographic renewal, or to reduce persistent inequalities between the minority and the majority in a given region (e.g. access to public services, demographic renewal).
- Certainly, the vitality of communities is a complex phenomenon in which expressions and political and social context vary greatly from one community to another. For example, although the rural communities of Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec share some of the same challenges in terms of demographic renewal or access to certain services, they differ in other aspects of their development, such as the ties they have with the majority.

Based on the factors compiled, vitality is expressed by:

- ✓ **Individuals who have a sense of belonging to the language community, who have linguistic aspirations and relevant practices.**
- ✓ **A community that has a collective leadership and an ability to mobilize its people and its community organizations.**
- ✓ **An environment that: offers the possibility of receiving an education in your own language; provides recreational and cultural activities in your own language; includes the presence of institutions and a provision of services; allows for the possibility of participating in the economic and social expansion of the community; and encourages the visibility of language.**
- ✓ **Relationships with the majority that lead to support and cooperation between the two linguistic groups, recognition and respect of language rights, and influence and authority within the majority institutions.**
- ✓ **Demographic and demolinguistic renewal through natural population growth, immigration, and language practices that ensure the retention and transmission of the language.**
- ✓ **Lastly, the communities' ability to participate in a wider linguistic environment.**

- Once this framework has been established, we can determine who can play a role in enhancing the vitality of the communities. What share of the responsibility and natural limits do the various federal institutions have? Do our current interventions produce the expected results? Are the issues submitted to us relevant to the vitality of the communities? Are they clearly set out and supported by evidence (e.g., database, research, statistics, collaborative efforts and others)? Are the interventions aligned with the issue described, and will they have an effect on one or more factors of vitality? In the end, will the initiative enable the use of the minority language in a variety of contexts?
- The initiative strives to promote interventions that have greater potential to impact the vitality of communities, taking into account the needs to be fulfilled and the issues raised.

How can this tool be used?

The Framework's main objective is a common understanding of what is meant by "the vitality of an official language minority community". It is a tool that can be useful to various stakeholders who seek to better understand vitality issues, to better guide interventions and to explain their relevance. It can be used, among other things, to guide federal institutions in taking positive measures under section 41 of the *Official Languages Act*, in public policy development, program management, or accountability exercises.

The Framework is not a substitute for communities' knowledge of their own needs. On the contrary, measuring indicators of vitality must be supported by community knowledge. This framework could also inspire communities as they reflect on their needs.

Framework

In order to foster the use of the minority language in diverse situations, we need to act on the factors that contribute to the vitality of communities. These factors can be expressed as follows:

Individuals that have ...

- **A sense of belonging to the language community:**
Closely linked to the cultural expressions it enables. Helps attract immigrants, retain youth, affiliation.
- **Linguistic aspirations and relevant practices:**
Allows us to verify that the language has a sufficiently valued status. Refers to the desire to learn and use the language in everyday life.

A community that has...

- **A collective leadership:**
Contributes to the creation of institutions that are considered essential today. Contributes to welcoming communities.
- **An ability to mobilize:**
In a minority situation, a community must be mobilized and informed, and able to choose and carry out actions.

An environment that provides...

- **Education in the language of the minority:**
This is a fundamental element in the development and transmission of language and identity.
- **Recreational and cultural activities:**
Provide opportunities for practice and openness in the language communities for youth, immigrants, etc. Provide means for being heard, sharing history and voicing concerns.
- **Presence of institutions and provision of services:**
It is essential to have and to access to public and institutional spaces in which the minority can express its language to optimize the transmission of the language and achieve its full potential.
- **Visibility of the language:**
Refers to the media and linguistic landscape. Role is informative and symbolic:
 1. Demonstrates possibilities of language use
 2. Reveals the relative status and power of the minority group.
- **Economic and social integration:**
Offers the possibility of participating actively in the community's economy; enables the retention of its members and the integration of newcomers.

Relationships with the majority that lead to...

- **Support from the majority and dialogue/cooperation between the two linguistic groups:**

Awareness and openness to official languages are not a given. Cooperation between the two linguistic groups remains essential to reinforcing the coexistence and development of the two communities.

- **Recognition of and respect for language rights:**

They have played a crucial role in community development. In addition, recognition fosters a sense of belonging and linguistic security among the minority.

- **Influence and power within public institutions:**

The more a group controls its institutions or holds power in important social organizations, the stronger the group's vitality will be and the greater the likelihood that the language will be used.

The ability to subscribe to a wider linguistic environment that allows...

- **An alignment with a larger and stronger Francophonie:**

Contributes to both an upsurge of French speakers pride and the establishment of bridges and common points of reference.

- **To balance the needs of both linguistic groups in Quebec:**

The relationship of Quebec's English-speaking communities with the majority is unique: the majority French-speaking population in Quebec is a minority within Canada and is concerned about the future of its language. The goals of each community must be achieved through a scenario where all are satisfied.

These factors refer to the actual sources of official bilingualism and the related policies and legislation, including the "social contract" between the two larger language communities in Canada.

A renewal of the community through...

- **Demographic factors :**

Include numbers, geographic dispersal, density, immigration, rural exodus, families formed by parental minority-majority relationships;

- **Linguistic practices:**

Include linguistic transfer, language transmission, additive or subtractive bilingualism, and bilingualism of the majority that helps expand the "linguistic space" of a minority community.

Framework: Checklist

Vitality is expressed by...

Individuals with...

- ✓ a sense of belonging to the linguistic community
- ✓ linguistic aspirations and relevant practices

A community with...

- ✓ collective leadership
- ✓ mobilizing capacity

An environment that offers...

- ✓ minority-language education
- ✓ cultural and leisure activities
- ✓ the presence of institutions and a provision of services
- ✓ minority-language visibility
- ✓ economic and social integration

Relationships with the majority that lead to...

- ✓ support from the majority and dialogue/cooperation between the two linguistic groups
- ✓ recognition and respect for language rights
- ✓ influence and power within public institutions of the majority

The ability to be part of a broader linguistic environment that allows for ...

- ✓ an alignment with a broader and stronger Francophonie
- ✓ the recognition of the needs of the two linguistic groups in Quebec

A community that renews itself...

- ✓ demographically and through linguistic practices

The Framework helps to:

1

Identify issues

2

Guide discussions and actions

3

Identify desired outcomes and missing data