



Adding French to Your English Event

A resource produced by the Health Promotion French Language Services Capacity Building Committee and written by Alexandra Tropea, Consultant.



The Health Promotion French Language Services Capacity Building Committee routinely included French in our conferences, workshops and events. This resource is based on what we have learned. We hope to give you tools and tips on how to plan events that successfully and easily include a second language – even if you only speak English!

Why should I include French in my event?

Many organizations must provide services in French.¹ Currently 4.8% of Ontario's population is Francophone, while this does vary from region to region.² Francophones in 25 designated areas across Ontario have the right to demand and receive services in French from provincial and federal government offices³ and certain organizations that are funded by the Ontario government.¹

Even if you aren't required to offer French services, there are other benefits to including French in your

events. If your goal is to include people from all over Canada (or beyond), consider that over 220 million people in the world speak French. French is the most widely learned language after English. Online, French is the 3rd most used language after English and German.⁴ Adding French to your event may help meet the needs and wants of your audience and your organization. You could attract a new audience, fulfill an initiative, or broaden scope by breaking the language barrier. And you can do this without speaking French yourself.

Planning a bilingual event

First, you will define your event goals and objectives, which will help you decide where French integration is needed. By outlining what your organization expects to gain from hosting a bilingual event or incorporating French into your

event, you will be better able to decide points such as what needs to be translated or adapted, how many bilingual staff you will need, and how you will communicate with your Francophone audience.

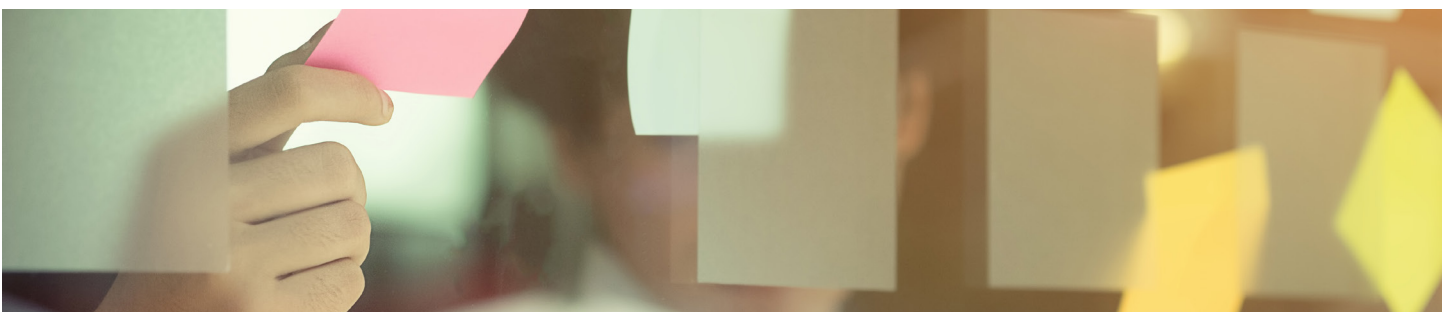
Why host this event?

Are you presenting research or findings? Is it a learning activity? Is it providing networking and information exchange opportunities? Conducting a situational assessment⁵ may be useful to help you determine the purpose of your event. These questions, adapted from the University of Waterloo,⁶ can help you to clarify your vision for the event.

- What is the purpose of this event?
- What are my topic areas and do they work well with one another?
- Is there a demand for the topic or information I wish to share?
- Do I have the resources to host this event?
- Have there been similar events hosted in my area?

- Do I have enough time to plan and publicize an event of this size?
- How many people should ideally be there?
- Will information be gathered from the audience?
- Should the event be formal or informal?
- Where will the event take place?
- When will the event take place?

Next, you can think about your audience. If you are delivering French services at your event, defining your audience and the reasons they might attend is key to attracting the right people.





Who is your audience?

Effective events are planned with the audience in mind. Events that fail often did not have clearly defined audiences⁷. While catering to all audiences may sound more inclusive, your organization and your participants may find it more rewarding if your event is tailored to a specific audience.⁷

If you are not sure what proportion of your audience is Francophone/bilingual, you can add questions to event registration forms that ask which official Canadian languages they speak, how much of their work is done in each language, and which language they prefer to communicate in.

Audiences can be based on demographic, geo-

graphic, economic, cultural, and social characteristics⁷. To attract a francophone audience you will need to design your event in a way that will speak to them, and you will need to promote your event through the social channels where they are most active.

Why will Francophones come to your event? Perhaps the event topic affects Anglophones and Francophones equally, in which case providing translation or interpretation could be ideal. However, some topics may be of greater importance to a Francophone community than to an Anglophone community. This could be an opportunity to deliver customized content for this audience.

What Francophone stakeholders can you consult?

A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or who is affected by your event.⁸ Involving Francophone stakeholders when developing your event will ensure that your event will be of value to them. Consider who your Francophone stakeholders are and how your event relates to their work and interests.

Your stakeholders may include:

- Francophone community groups
- Francophone organizations that you currently partner with
- Francophone organizations that may be interested in your event topic
- Bilingual professionals in your field
- Francophone educational institutions specializing in your field
- Funders, including governments.

One way to engage Francophone stakeholders is to establish an advisory committee to provide advice, expertise, experience and perspectives on Francophone communities in your area. An advisory committee can facilitate communication and serve as a liaison between your event planning team, local partners, and Francophone community members. They can provide a mechanism for engagement and information exchange⁹ by providing connections to other Francophone communities and groups as well as access to communications opportunities.



Delivering a bilingual event

How can we deliver a bilingual event?

Does your organization have the resources needed to deliver a bilingual event? What other resources will you need?

Consider:

- **Staff:**
Do you have bilingual staff to support your event?
- **Communications:**
Can you create and review French communications? Can you respond to questions about your event in French?
- **Content:**
Can you create and review event content (such as website content, signage etc.) in French?
- **Translation:**
Do you have translators in-house or will you need a professional translator?
- **Interpretation:**
Do you have interpreters in-house or will you need professional simultaneous interpretation?
- **Support:**
Do you have partners who can support your communications, content, translation, and interpretation?



What are the opportunities and challenges?

Identify the potential opportunities and challenges of delivering a bilingual event. Then, prioritize them based on what would be most meaningful to your audience and what you can deliver. Conducting a SWOT analysis (looking at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) for your event

may help you focus on specific elements that you may not think about every day. This process will help pinpoint parts of your event where including French might have the most impact for the least cost.

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
List things your organization does well.	List things your organization is missing.	How can your event make an impact in your community?	Identify competitors – similar organizations receiving funding in your field and region.
List qualities that separate you from competitors – such as relationships or community connections, services you provide that no one else can, identity and recognition.	List things your competitors currently do better than you – this could include things like social media, outreach, perks offered at events, quality of promotional material.	What is the need for the information your event will deliver? Why would your audience benefit from attending? – This could be access to new information/ research, networking opportunities, etc.	Some information is time sensitive. If you are presenting research, draw key conclusions and recommendations from it that will increase the longevity of its importance.
List internal resources that can support you and your event – this could be bilingual or knowledgeable staff or partners.	List the limitations of your resources – for example, you could have talented staff, but with limited time to support your event.	Obtain media coverage by hosting a media launch. Send press releases to publications and news outlets that would be interested in your event.	Realize the threat of potentially negative press and media coverage that could come from your event topic or if French services are poorly integrated.
List tangible assets such as intellectual property, research/ resources you've produced, technology available, location, proximity or accessibility to your audience or of your event venue.	Identify which of your key messages are currently unclear to your audience.	Identify your competitors. Few in your area means an opportunity to become the primary organization providing these services.	List ways in which your event could negatively change audience attitudes towards your organization if your event doesn't deliver on expectations.
List what your organization or company excels at that would be useful to a Francophone audience.	List where your company is less able to provide bilingual supports.	Identify how including a Francophone audience will increase your audience and prominence in the community.	Consider how you might encounter negative feedback from Francophones. E.g. too few French resources, poor quality translations, or content that did not speak to them.



How can I communicate with Francophones? Am I missing anyone?

You will need to connect with Francophones where they are most active, and event promotions sent to Francophones will need to include audience-specific content. To help you design Francophone tailored content and decide where and how to send it, you could:

- Ask Francophones or bilingual people in your audience base what they look forward to most at your event
- Profile a few elements of your event that would spark interest by a Francophone audience
- Connect with partners who have a larger Francophone audience
- Become active in social groups online or in person to connect with more Francophone community leaders
- Reach out specifically to Francophone communities with your save-the-dates, invitations, and updates

How much French can I include?

You don't need to include all of these elements in order to pull off a successful bilingual event. Determine what's most important to your audience, and where you can start successfully. Think of French integration as a continuum from none

at all through to a fully bilingual event. You can begin by incorporate some French elements in your events, and increase the level of French over time.

Consider these elements:

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- French speaking project manager and/or conference coordinator
 - Francophone Advisory Committee to help guide conference planning
 - Consultations with Francophone stakeholders/partners
 - French-specific communications/invitations highlighting French programming
 - French website content
 - Emails and correspondence in French
 - Registration forms in French
 - French blog posts before, during, and after the event
 - Bilingual event staff on site during the event
 - "Je parle français" buttons to let French-speaking participants self-identify and meet one another
 - Conference signage in French
 - SWAG includes French content
 - Conference packages available in French
 - French included in opening and closing remarks (consider starting with French first to get the audience used to hearing French)

- Presentation materials (PowerPoint decks, handouts) in French
 - Evaluation forms in French
 - French presenters and workshops
 - Simultaneous interpretation
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Start where you are and aim to move further along the continuum as your ability allows and as the needs of your Francophone audience require. Then ensure success by making sure you have the proper resources, materials and staffing on hand to be able to deliver the services you've planned to incorporate. Good luck!

Case Studies

Ophea Conference

Over the years, through the Ophea Conference, we learned the value of starting small, developing relationships first and then building upon initial successes. When we wanted to enhance the professional learning opportunities we were providing to our Francophone delegates, we added several French workshops to the Conference program all at once. However, we quickly realized that more right away isn't always better. We didn't have enough Francophone participants to fill the new sessions, which left both the knowledge sharing and networking expectations of delegates and presenters not fully met. Taking a more balanced, sustained approach, we engaged Francophones in planning workshop topics, formats, and numbers as well as their timing within the Conference program. Given the professional learning goals of this audience, quality definitely had the advantage over quantity.



HC Link Conference

We have found that building relationships with our Francophone clients and stakeholders was key to offering bilingual events that met the needs of our French speaking audiences. It is very easy to make incorrect assumptions about what stakeholders might want. For example, we provided simultaneous interpretation at our 2015 conference, both as an example of Active Offer of French services and because we believed our Francophone clients wanted or needed interpretation. However, the interpretation service was barely used. When planning our 2017 conference, we consulted with our Francophone stakeholders very early in the planning process. On their advice we offered a Franco Pavilion, Francophone networking opportunities, and French workshops – but no simultaneous interpretation. Our stakeholders stayed involved in the conference – some co-facilitated sessions or presented workshops. By actively engaging with Francophones to shape the content and format of the conference, we were able to better meet their needs.

Resources

Celebrating Canada: A guide to a successful bilingual event

Tips from the Office of the Commissioners of Official Languages for holding bilingual community events. Much of the content applies to planning general events. [French version.](#)

PHO's Focus On: Six strategic steps for situational assessment

Public Health Ontario outlines a process to gather, analyze, synthesize and communicate data to inform planning decisions. [French version.](#)

The Ultimate Event Checklist to Foolproof Your Planning

A useful checklist from Eventbrite.

How to Engage Francophones...When you don't speak French!

Explores practical ways to meaningfully engage Francophones even when you do not speak French. [French version.](#)

How to Create a Functional, Effective Advisory Committee

This basic guide will help community organizations use best practices for creating advisory committees as an element of supporting community engagement. [French version.](#)

References

¹ Government of Ontario. Regulation 284/11: Provision of French Language Services on behalf of government agencies. Available from <http://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110284>

² Bodkin, A. and Delorme, P. First Steps to FLS Planning. HC Link, 2016.

³ Government of Ontario. French Language Services Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. F.32 Available from <http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90f32>

⁴ France Diplomatie: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. *17 good reasons for parents and school principals to choose French.* Available from <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/francophony-and-the-french-language/promoting-french-around-the-world-7721/article/17-good-reasons-for-parents-and>.

⁵ Public Health Ontario, 2015. Focus On: Six strategic steps for situational assessment.

⁶ University of Waterloo. *Event Planning.* Available from <https://uwaterloo.ca/community-relations/campus-event-planners/event-planning>

⁷ Economic and Social Research Council. *Defining your audience.* Available from <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/public-engagement/public-engagement-guidance/guide-to-public-engagement/defining-your-audience/>

⁸ Government of Ontario, 2006. The Health Planner's Toolkit, Module 5, Community Engagement and Communication.

⁹ Kalda, R. and Bodkin, A. How to create a functional, effective advisory committee. HC Link, 2017.

The Health Promotion French Language Services Capacity Building Committee (HP FLS CBC) comprised of a number of provincial health promotion resource centres who provided services in French to clients across Ontario. For more than fifteen years, committee members worked to build relationships with Francophone stakeholders and increase services delivered in French.

The HP FLS CBC was funded by the Government of Ontario from 2002 to March 2018 and was administered by Health Nexus. The members of the HP FLS CBC were:

Best Start Resource Centre	Health Promotion Capacity Building –
CAMH Health Promotion Resource Centre	Alcohol Policy
Curriculum and School Based Health	Nutrition Resource Centre
Resource Centre	Physical Activity Resource Centre (PARC)
HC Link	Ontario Injury Prevention Resource Centre
Health Promotion Capacity Building (HPCB)	Youth Advocacy Training Institute

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For more than 30 years Health Nexus has been working with diverse partners to help create healthy, equitable and vibrant communities where people of all ages can thrive. Health Nexus is a bilingual organization that offers services and programs in English and in French.

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