

Facilitating the Use of Multiple Languages in Our Organizations



Thanks to TobiasMilk for the illustration

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Introduction

Purpose of this document: 1) To introduce a few practices that have been used to create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for multiple language use, practice and learning within Quebec community groups and organizations. 2) To name some challenges faced by Quebec community groups and organizations within the context of language practices.

This is a living document - a point of departure: It is by no means comprehensive, and as such it will be subject to ongoing development, hopefully with the help of those who read and engage with it. It is informed by an understanding of the social context of language politics in Quebec, which may be useful to read before returning to this document, and can be found here (www.coconet.org/en/publications). As such, these practices should be understood as a point of departure from which to innovate; the diverse scales and demographic make-up of our groups and organizations do not allow for any one-size-fits-all recommendations. We hope that groups/organizations will be able to use the sample questions and examples to initiate or continue their own discussions about their language priorities and practices.

Rationale: Organizations' internal language practices is a complex topic, since language is used constantly within organizations in multiple ways, between multiple people and for multiple purposes. We recognize that people who speak the dominant language do not have to think about language every day, or even very often, whereas people who speak non-dominant languages have to think about it all the time as part of their everyday lives. We also recognize that language is a powerful site for both conflict and collaboration in Quebec. Language practices and politics are inextricably linked to issues of race, class, gender, and other sites of power relations, particularly in Quebec. Although this project focuses specifically on language, we must always keep these complexities and intersections in mind.

We thank the the Department of Canadian Heritage for it's financial contribution on this projet.

For more information and tools on bilingual organizations consult <http://www.pch.gc.ca/guide/>

Format and Process

We decided to approach organizational language practices through the lenses of:

- 1) organizational language priorities (both formal and informal)
- 2) hiring and recruitment processes for staff/board/volunteers/members
- 3) organizational language environments

We categorized Quebec organizations into four general language groupings:



A) Predominantly bilingual francophone-anglophone groups/organizations



B) Predominantly unilingual francophone groups/organizations



C) Predominantly unilingual anglophone groups/organizations



D) Allophone groups/organizations in which neither French nor English are the predominant languages.

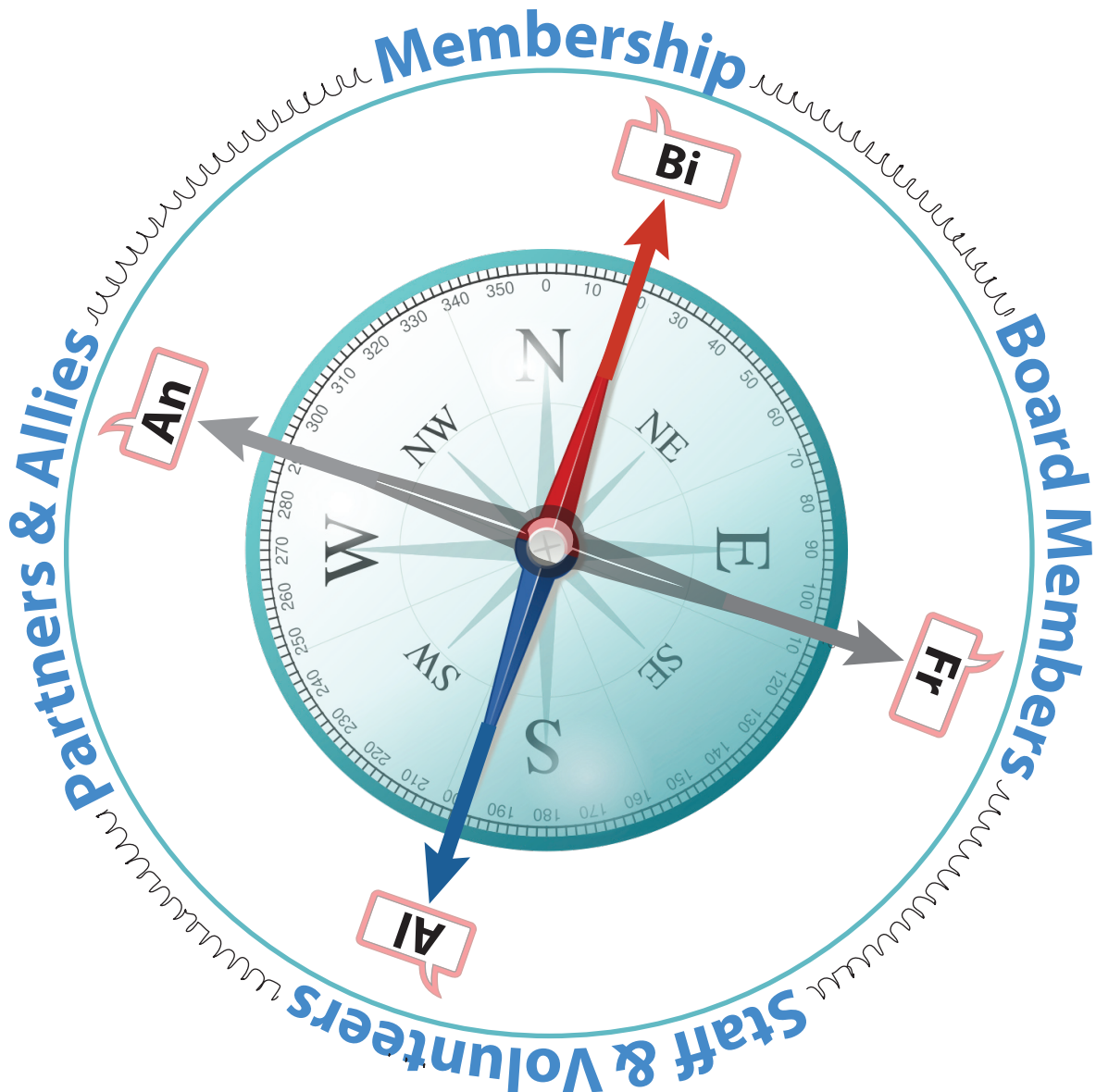
We then informally asked several organizations that represented the four categories to give us examples of language priorities and practices, which we have outlined in the following pages. The organizations have been kept anonymous, due to the informal nature of the conversations.

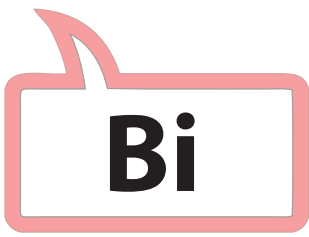
At the end of this document, after reviewing the four categories listed above, we have also included a section on language as it relates to movement- and coalition-building.

Linguistic Orientation

How you identify linguistically as an organization may or may not be obvious to you. Your organization may have a unified perspective, or on the other hand, staff, board, volunteers and members may have diverging views on the matter. It is a good idea to start engaging with these issues by holding a discussion in your own organization around language. This could take form as a discussion group, a working session, a survey, or any other form of self-assessment.

Get oriented to the linguistic identity of your organization. Think about the different stakeholder groups within your organization, how do they each identify linguistically?





A: Predominantly bilingual francophone-anglophone groups/organizations

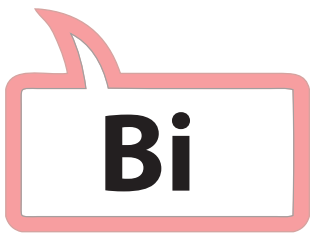
1) What is/are the main priority/ies with regard to language practice within your group/organization? Do language practice priorities differ within and between staff, board, volunteer and client* groups?

- 👉 To meet the French/English needs of all staff/members/volunteers/clients
- 👉 To ensure that the organization continues to represent its community by remaining bilingual
- 👉 To ensure that staff and board meetings contain an equal balance of French and English
- 👉 To ensure that wider membership/public events (e.g. AGMs, public assemblies) are conducted in both French and English
- 👉 To provide whisper translation in French and English to participants at all organizational events, such as AGMs, community discussions, and volunteer orientations
- 👉 To make all organizational policy documents (e.g. Human Resources policy, Decision Making policy, Anti-oppression policy) available in both French and English
- 👉 To ensure that all internal mass emails (i.e. to staff and board) are written in both French and English
- 👉 To interact with volunteers and clients in the either French or English, depending on the language in which they are most comfortable
- 👉 To ensure that the membership and the wider public can access all important organizational updates and documents in both French and English (on the website, on Facebook, through mail-outs and newsletters, through mass emails, etc.)

**We acknowledge that "client" is not always the preferred term for the people served and represented by organizations, as it delineates a binary service producer/client relationship; however, it is a commonly used term for many service-oriented organizations and we are using it for purposes of clarity in this sheet.*

2) What hiring and board/volunteer/membership recruitment practices are used by your group/organization, specifically around language?

- 👉 Bilingual postings, targeted to relevant, high-traffic employment sites in both francophone and anglophone communities
- 👉 Posting job offers, and board and volunteer call-outs widely, with the awareness that staff and board teams often become fairly homogeneous due to the role of friendships and personal networks in hiring and recruitment
- 👉 Conducting hiring interviews in a mix of French and English; asking that the candidates answer at least one question in their second language/the language that they are less comfortable using
- 👉 Requiring all employees and board members to have a working grasp of (or even fluency in) French and English, and/or willingness and potential to learn the other language
- 👉 Bilingual volunteer orientations, or orientations with whisper translation



3) How does your organization create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for first and second (and other) language use and practice?

Meetings and other interpersonal interactions:

- 🦋 Creation of and adherence to a “Safe Space” policy that includes language diversity (e.g. that names mockery or exclusion based on language as discriminatory and unacceptable)
- 🦋 Active encouragement of second language learning (e.g. providing a small stipend to each staff member who is interested in taking language classes)
- 🦋 Conscious day-to-day effort to prevent/mediate conflict that arises from language differences
- 🦋 Alternation of language in every other meeting (i.e. if the meeting is in French this week, it will be in English next week)
- 🦋 Simultaneous translation of meetings, using two facilitators, one speaking French, the other English
- 🦋 Having staff/board meeting facilitators maintain an awareness of language use; they can raise a process point if they notice that language use is skewing too strongly towards French or English and request that participants try to regain the balance while continuing to present/discuss agenda points
- 🦋 Creation and maintenance of a culture and/or policy of openness and acceptance toward first-language use, as well as whisper translation when necessary

Documents:

- 🦋 Documents in both languages when possible; when not possible, due to time or resource constraints, creation and maintenance of a culture of openness and acceptance toward “franglais” (a mixture of French and English within one document)
- 🦋 Use of translators, either paid or volunteer, to translate longer documents that staff do not have time to translate (keeping a “living list” of volunteer translators who have stated their interest and availability is really helpful)

Note - Organizations in this category have pointed out that bilingualism is not an organizational state that maintains itself innately, and therefore it is important to maintain an ongoing dialogue or at least organizational awareness of the language environment: What bilingual practices are working? What are the challenges? How does language continue to be related to balances of power within the organization and/or the community?



B: Predominantly unilingual francophone groups/organizations

1) What is/are the main priority/ies with regard to language practice within your group/organization? Do language practice priorities differ within and between staff, board, volunteer and client groups?

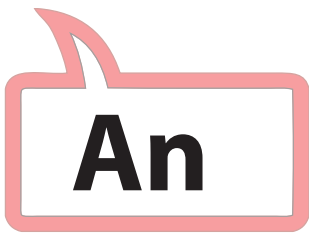
- 👉 To continue working primarily in French, while building capacity to reflect more deeply on organizational language practices and whether there is the need to work/offer programming in other languages
- 👉 To work primarily in French, while ensuring that certain outreach documents are translated into English, and/or other languages, for members or potential members who do not read French
- 👉 Some organizations have actually transitioned from using English as a primary language to using French as a primary language, in order to meet the changing needs of the community/membership

2) What hiring and board/volunteer/membership recruitment practices are used by your group/organization, specifically around language?

- 👉 Job postings list comfort communicating in English as “an asset”
- 👉 Prioritizing hiring and other forms of recruitment that support a “by and for the community” approach, rather than prioritizing bilingualism

3) How does your group/organization create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for first and second (and other) language use and practice?

- 👉 Organizational reflection and awareness of how to maintain an environment of equality within a community of diverse language use
- 👉 Emphasizing French as the collective language of the organization, while making space for people to express themselves in their first language, if necessary, in staff meetings and decision-making processes
- 👉 Ensuring that documents for the membership are translated into multiple languages, if necessary, depending on the language practices of the membership at particular times
- 👉 Recognizing the reality of the “two solitudes”: the language context in Quebec.
- 👉 Maintaining a safe space for clients/program participants who do not speak French, who may wish simply to be in the presence of other people, even if everything they hear or say cannot be translated



C: Predominantly unilingual anglophone groups/organizations

1) What is/are the main priority/ies with regard to language practice within your group/organization? Do language practice priorities differ within and between staff, board, volunteer and client groups?

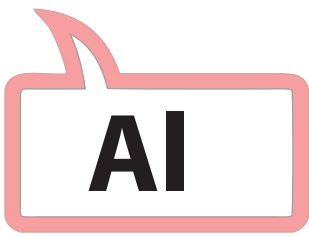
- 👉 To continue working primarily in English, while ensuring that staff and membership can express themselves in French when they feel more comfortable doing so
- 👉 To work primarily in English, while tailoring the language practices in different programs to match the language needs of clients/participants (e.g. recruiting volunteers for certain programs who speak languages spoken by clients/participants who do not feel comfortable communicating in English)
- 👉 To make all events accessible to people who do not speak English, by having translators present and letting people know that ahead of time
- 👉 To seek out staff and board members who speak other languages in addition to English, while giving priority to hiring and recruiting staff and board members from a diversity of cultural and class backgrounds
- 👉 To build organizational capacity to work in languages other than English, in order to meet the demands of a bilingual city

2) What hiring and board/volunteer/membership recruitment practices are used by your group/organization, specifically around language?

- 👉 Posting all job offers and board call-outs in English and French, emphasizing that comfort speaking in French and a high level of fluency in English, both spoken and written is necessary
- 👉 Hiring staff who are fully bilingual so that they can communicate easily with non-anglophone clients/community members/members of other organizations/government workers, while maintaining an anglophone culture within staff meetings and interactions
- 👉 Deciding to specifically recruit francophone board members when there is a large anglophone majority on the board
- 👉 Hiring some bilingual summer students each year, or even students who have translation experience

3) How does your organization create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for first and second (and other) language use and practice?

- 👉 Recognizing that when working towards a common goal with other people, language differences becomes secondary
- 👉 Creating an organizational environment that is not threatening in a linguistic sense (i.e. does not ridicule, punish or exclude people based on language ability); attempting to depoliticize language as much as possible
- 👉 Being open to and proactive about finding program volunteers who can communicate with/translate for clients/participants who are not comfortable in English (or English/French)
- 👉 Running staff meetings mainly in English, but creating space for staff members to express themselves in French if they feel more comfortable doing so
- 👉 Making all documents for members and the public available in English and French, unlike internal documents which are available only in English
- 👉 Making a continuous and conscious effort to make more documents and services available in both English and French
- 👉 Keeping an updated list of translation volunteers/paid translators on hand
- 👉 Having staff funds available that can be used for language classes



D: Allophone groups/organizations in which neither French nor English are the predominant language

1) What is/are the main priority/ies with regard to language practice within your group/organization? Do language practice priorities differ within and between staff, board, volunteer and client groups?

- 🦋 To serve/provide programming for people in marginalized language communities
- 🦋 To ensure that clients/participants/members can communicate and be understood in the language in which they are most comfortable
- 🦋 To provide outreach materials to the public in French and/or English in order to fight the isolation that organizations operating mainly in another language can face
- 🦋 To create and maintain space in which people in marginalized language communities can feel comfortable expressing themselves in their own language
- 🦋 To provide language workshops to people in marginalized language communities so that they can gain language skills in French and/or English

2) What hiring and board/volunteer/membership recruitment practices are used by your group/organization, specifically around language?

- 🦋 Requiring staff and board members to speak the common language of the clients
- 🦋 Reaching out to anglophone and francophone students for volunteer involvement, especially for volunteer translation, or for communicating with the government

3) How does your organization create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for first and second (and other) language use and practice?

- 🦋 Maintaining the organization's space as a welcoming, non-judgmental, informal environment, in which people can be at ease and speak in the language they feel most comfortable in
- 🦋 Offering language workshops in French and English that focus on spoken language (as opposed to written), run by volunteers
- 🦋 Offering language workshops in the language(s) most commonly used by clients/participants/members (not French or English), so that organizational members can better understand what is happening "on the streets"
- 🦋 Establishing community alliances based partly on language, so that when clients need to communicate in a language not known by staff or volunteers, allied organizations who are familiar with that language can help translate
- 🦋 Offering workshops in a variety of languages, including but not limited to French and English
- 🦋 Organizing campaigns with different groups in a variety of languages
- 🦋 Understanding the importance of body language in communication, especially when people do not share a common language
- 🦋 Offering cultural popular theatre workshops that put body language at the centre of communication, and make space for participants to express themselves in new ways



Movement Building

The issue of connecting with other groups across language divides is an important one. Here are some questions raised by groups that do not work solely or primarily in French yet wish to connect with francophone community groups and networks in Quebec.

- 🦋 How does our individual relationship to language affect the sorts of communities we envision and create? (You need to have this reflection as an organization before deciding what kinds of collaborations you want to create with other groups)
- 🦋 How do groups and individuals who don't primarily identify as anglophone or francophone groups connect to this divide? How does this connect to notions of community?
- 🦋 How does language connect to deeper emotional issues? How can we discuss this considering there can be a lot of unnamed shame and guilt around language use and ease, both for individuals and for entire organizations?
- 🦋 How can groups that operate in different languages connect to each other in meaningful ways?
- 🦋 Do organizations with different language practices sometimes work in parallel without ever connecting over very similar work/missions?
- 🦋 What kinds of collaboration/knowledge-sharing/coalition building opportunities are being missed/overlooked due to language differences between organizations? It is sometimes simply about groups not being aware of each other?
- 🦋 How can groups deal with the reality of limited resources: e.g. not having the translation resources to communicate, even though we are working on the same issues? How can we constructively engage with colleagues who are not interested in bridging linguistic divides even when it is not an issue of limited resources?
- 🦋 Assuming that the ultimate goal of many community orgs/groups is to create resistance/social change, and that those goals are more easily met with the collective action of more than one organization, how would groups' work be strengthened through these collaborations across language divides?