



FÉDÉRATION DES COMMUNAUTÉS  
FRANCOPHONES ET ACADIENNE  
du Canada

*Brief from the Fédération des communautés  
francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada*

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For the Standing Committee on Finance's  
2017 Federal Budget Consultations

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Ottawa  
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## Preamble

In nine provinces and three territories, francophone minority communities are working with determination to live and prosper in their own language. Home to 2.6 million French speakers, Canada's francophone and Acadian communities are known for their resilience, ability to take charge and spirit of innovation. Through their efforts to foster their own development, they also contribute to the social and economic well-being of their surroundings and their country.

However, the realities and challenges facing minority communities are different from those the majority faces. In order to thrive, francophone communities need federal measures that are adapted to their specific needs.

The Standing Committee on Finance's approach to the current pre-budget consultations is fully consistent with this requirement. The Committee is asking for recommendations for federal measures that would help Canadians in general, but also particular groups, maximize, **in the manner of their choosing**, their contributions to the country's economic growth.

It is in this vein that the FCFA submits this brief with its recommendations for the 2017 federal budget.

Established in 1975, the FCFA is the main voice of francophone minority communities across Canada. The FCFA has 20 member groups: 12 provincial and territorial francophone associations and 8 national organizations that represent various clients and spheres of activity. The FCFA also coordinates the Leaders Forum, a group of 42 organizations committed to the development of francophone and Acadian communities.

**Question 1: What federal measures would help Canadians generally—and certain groups in particular—maximize, in the manner of their choosing, their contributions to the country’s economic growth?**

Recommendation 1: Include the funding for the next official-languages plan in the 2017 budget

The priorities set out in the mandate letter of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Mélanie Joly, include the development of a multi-year official-languages plan to enhance the vitality of francophone and anglophone minority communities. Consistent with this commitment, the Minister has begun consultations that will run from June through October.

These consultations are particularly important for our communities. The three major five-year initiatives that began with the 2003 *Action Plan for Official Languages* enabled the creation or consolidation of services and activities in a variety of areas, including education, health care, immigration, early childhood development, justice and economic development.

The next multi-year plan must succeed the *Roadmap for Canada’s Official Languages*, which expires on March 31, 2018. Given the lack of clarity and the implementation delays that have plagued the early years of the current Roadmap, **the FCFA recommends that the government provide the funding required to implement the next plan, for the period from 2018 to 2023, in the 2017 budget.**

Recommendation 2: Include an increase in Canadian Heritage’s funding envelope for francophone organizations and institutions in the 2017 budget

In the introduction, we mentioned that the realities and challenges facing minority communities are unique. The “by and for” development model for francophone minority communities itself stemmed from this uniqueness. Despite being spread over a vast area, these communities came together in organizations and institutions where they could collaborate to meet their needs and create the infrastructure, activities and services necessary to live in French.

To do this work, many of these francophone organizations and institutions receive support from the Community Life component of Canadian Heritage’s Official Languages Support Programs. Yet, since 2005 the program’s funding envelope has been neither increased nor indexed to inflation. Given the increase in the cost of living, this means that the amount of resources provided to these organizations has declined by 30% to 35%, even as they struggle to carry out their work, which remains critical to the survival of the French language in our communities. At the round table consultation held by Ms. Joly in Victoria on July 5, one participant summed up the problem by noting that the arrival of French-speaking migrants and immigrants means that francophone organizations need to develop more programming even as their capacity to do so has been considerably reduced. Many participants also outlined major needs for investment in community infrastructure.

In its presentation to the Finance Committee in February, the FCFA recommended that the funding Canadian Heritage allocates to support the organizations and institutions of these communities be increased, or at least indexed, starting in the 2017–2018 fiscal year. It is absolutely vital that the government takes such action in order to avoid further erosion of the development structure for francophone and Acadian communities. **The FCFA therefore reiterates its recommendation that the Community Life component of the Department of Canadian Heritage’s Official Languages Support Programs be increased, or at least indexed to inflation.**

Recommendation 3: Introduce new support measures for French-language skills development and training

Adult training, literacy and numeracy remain major issues for our communities. The percentage of francophones who read at low levels remains high. According to data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC, 2012), 52% of francophones outside Quebec are in the bottom two levels for literacy.

Yet, over the past few years, the government decided to end its financial support for the national organizations working in the area of literacy and skills development. Since then, the Réseau pour le développement de l’alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC), which is responsible for coordinating learning and literacy initiatives in our communities, has had to cease most of its activities. Provincial, territorial and local organizations still exist, but they receive much less support for their work on the ground. **The FCFA therefore recommends that the government restore its financial support for national literacy and skills development organizations.**

In addition, the recent changes to Labour Market Agreements and Labour Market Development Agreements have jeopardized francophone workers’ access to training in their language. With the arrival of the Canada Job Grant, employers are encouraged to establish partnerships with their province or territory to launch workforce training initiatives. In provinces with large anglophone majorities, employers will tend to favour partnerships with English-language colleges and institutes, leading the needs of francophone workers to be ignored. **The FCFA therefore recommends that the government take measures to ensure that francophones across Canada have equitable access to vocational training in their language.**

**Question 3: What federal measures would ensure that urban, rural and remote communities throughout Canada enable residents to make their desired contribution to the country's economic growth?**

Recommendation 4: Implement measures to promote youth employment in francophone and Acadian communities

A number of francophone minority communities are located in rural or remote areas. They must overcome major challenges respecting employment and youth retention. A report on the mobility of francophone youth prepared last year for the FCFA, Place aux jeunes en région du Québec (PAJR) and the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF) showed that, between 2001 and 2011, substantial percentages of francophone youth left areas such as Tignish on Prince Edward Island (-66%), Chéticamp in Nova Scotia (-47.3%), the Acadian Peninsula in New Brunswick (-33.3%) and the Algoma region of Ontario (-40.4%).<sup>1</sup>

In Budget 2016, the federal government announced initiatives to promote youth employment, including an investment of over \$330 million in the Youth Employment Strategy. Yet, according to the information obtained by the FJCF, only 62 of the 40,000 jobs promised went to youth in francophone and Acadian communities. This example illustrates the point the FCFA made in response to Budget 2016: simply opening a federal program to the entire population and making it available in both official languages in no way ensures that it will benefit francophone minority communities. For such programs to provide equitable benefits, they must have a francophone component and take into account the specific needs of our communities. **The FCFA therefore recommends that the government review the measures announced in Budget 2016 relating to the Youth Employment Strategy to ensure that youth from francophone and Acadian communities can benefit equitably from them.**

Recommendation 5: Establish a community media support strategy

In many areas, community media play a fundamental role in enlivening life in French and enabling residents to stay informed about what is going on around them. Yet these community media do not always have the means to switch over to new platforms. **The FCFA therefore recommends that a community media support program be created to ensure our radio stations and newspapers have the minimum resources required to do their jobs.** This program could also support and assist our community media with the transition to the digital media environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, *Migrations des jeunes francophones au Canada – Sommaire*, p. 20, available at [http://www.fcfa.ca/user\\_files/users/40/Media/migrations\\_des\\_jeunes\\_francophones\\_au\\_canada\\_-\\_sommaire.pdf](http://www.fcfa.ca/user_files/users/40/Media/migrations_des_jeunes_francophones_au_canada_-_sommaire.pdf) [in French only].

## Recommendation 6: Establish a coordinated national strategy for high-speed Internet access

Despite initiatives such as the Connecting Canadians program, a large number of francophone minority communities still face challenges in connecting to high-speed Internet service. This is true of areas such as the Port au Port Peninsula in Newfoundland and Labrador, Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, the rural areas of Northern Ontario and communities in the Arctic like Inuvik and Whitehorse, where many francophones live.

In Budget 2016, the government provided funding to expand broadband access. While these investments are appreciated, the CRTC consultations on basic telecommunications services revealed the existing disparity in high-speed Internet development. The three levels of government, the private sector and community stakeholders play varying roles, depending on the region. As a result, communities where service is inadequate do not know where to turn for a solution. **We believe this situation calls for a coherent, coordinated and truly national strategy that brings the three levels of government, the private sector and community stakeholders together under federal government leadership.**

## **Conclusion**

The official-languages consultations currently underway put a great deal of emphasis on bilingualism and second-language learning by Canadians. However, if linguistic duality can be said to exist in Canada, it is because there are communities across the country determined to live their lives in French. Promoting linguistic duality and protecting our two official languages requires supporting these communities so that they can flourish in their language and equitably participate in Canada's growth and development.

The FCFA would like to thank the Standing Committee on Finance for giving it the chance to take part in these pre-budget consultations. The FCFA would appreciate the opportunity to appear at the Committee's hearings in the fall.