



*Serving individuals, families and communities in Canada
efficiently and cost-effectively*

Relying on Francophone and Acadian community organizations and institutions to
meet the Government of Canada's commitments

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

To the Standing Committee on Finance

Ottawa, August 11, 2011

Background

In the June 2011 Speech from the Throne and federal budget, the Government of Canada confirmed that it wanted to balance the budget by 2014-2015, and that it would begin reviewing expenditures and programs this year to earmark annual savings of \$4 billion.

One of the challenges the government will face in its efforts to meet this objective is ensuring that it is able to maintain its commitments to Canadian individuals and communities. The desire to be “here for all Canadians” was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne delivered by the Governor-General on June 3, in which the government committed itself to supporting the families and communities that have been working so hard to help one another, and which described measures designed to make sure “that all Canadians have the skills and opportunities to contribute, to innovate and to succeed.”

Other complementary commitments are made in the Speech to Canada’s minority French-language communities, citizens and families. Under the *Official Languages Act*, the government is committed not only to providing services and communications in French and in English, but also to “enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada, and support and assist their development, as well as encourage and support the learning of English and French in Canada.”

The year leading up to the next federal budget is therefore one in which a balance must be struck between two priorities: putting public finances in order and continuing to be there for Canadians. One way to achieve such a balance is to identify ways of doing more, at lower cost, more efficiently.

Community organizations and institutions as recipients of services and programs

The Government of Canada rightly recognized in the Throne Speech of March 2010, that “the best solutions to the diverse challenges confronting Canada’s communities are often found locally.”

This observation and the government’s stated intent in that Speech from the Throne to establish partnerships with organizations in the field are particularly judicious and appropriate in a context in which attempts are being made to find efficiencies and savings in government spending and programs.

Our community organizations and institutions are attuned to the communities they serve and able to deliver services and programs at lower cost than if they were provided by government institutions or the private sector.

From one end of Canada to the other, hundreds of organizations dedicated to the advancement of minority Francophone communities, develop and deliver programs, activities and services to French-speaking citizens in every aspect of their everyday lives. Whether in health, education, economics, job creation, access to justice, literacy, youth, culture or immigrant reception and

integration services, these organizations address local and regional challenges while at the same time making it increasingly possible to live in French everywhere in Canada.

The funds invested by the Government of Canada in these community organizations, whether through Official Languages support programs (Canadian Heritage), the *Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality* or other programs administered by various departments, produce concrete benefits not only for Francophones but often for the whole community.

Through their active involvement with the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments, and through their familiarity with their own communities, these organizations can make a major contribution to the economic development and growth of the communities they serve. In this respect, there are already many success stories. For example:

- In 2010-2011, British Columbia's Société de développement économique (SDÉ) received 1,200 requests for information, responded to 249 immigrants and 428 tourists, and provided 475 advisory services. Its support helped to create, maintain or improve 230 jobs and 116 companies.
- Each year, tours arranged by Réseau Ontario, the Franco-Ontarian performing arts distribution network, provided more than 700 performances to over 100,000 audience members throughout the province. Through the school network, Salut!, which involves more than 375 schools, Réseau Ontario taught young Franco-Ontarians about Francophone performing artists from Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, thereby strengthening their attachment to the French language.
- In 2010-2011, 240 immigrant individuals and families received reception and settlement services through the immigration section of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE); the work of FANE also led to the official opening of Nova-Scotia's Francophone immigration centre in October 2010.
- In 2009-2010, the Service d'orientation et de formation des adultes (SOFA), administered by the Association franco-yukonnaise, provided assistance and employment services to 160 clients, received 330 enrolments for its professional and personal development services, and provided literacy services to approximately 150 people.

However, these examples only illustrate one of the ways in which funds invested by the federal government in community organizations and institutions produce added value and a return on investment. They also have a very significant leveraging effect.

On the one hand, they generate investment by provincial and territorial governments, the municipalities and the private sector, all of which amplifies the efforts made by organizations and institutions and maximizes the achievement of results. These funds also help to engage citizens in their organizations, institutions and communities. Calculations based on the *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* showed that each dollar spent by the government generated at least \$8 in volunteer contributions.

Creating conditions of success for the communities

In its June 2011 Speech from the Throne, the federal government reiterated that communities “are best placed to overcome their unique challenges, but government can help create the conditions for these communities – and the industries that sustain them – to succeed.”

Relying on the expertise of community organizations and institutions

The Government of Canada cares about the success of Francophone and Acadian communities. It has demonstrated this in various ways, including in its *Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality*. Contributing to successful communities by relying on the expertise of their organizations and institutions is an innovative way for the government to meet its objectives and commitments at lower cost and more efficiently.

These organizations and institutions are solidly rooted in their communities. They understand the economic, human, social and cultural realities of these communities and factor them into their planning. They can rally a community’s key stakeholders to contribute to its development.

At the national level, Francophone and Acadian communities, at the *Summit of Francophone and Acadian Communities* (2007), devised a general development plan for minority French-language communities that addressed demographics, diversity, access to services, and economic, cultural and social vitality. On the basis of this plan, the communities developed the *Strategic Community Plan*, which lists specific concrete outcomes to be achieved by 2017.

Since then, the Leadership Forum, consisting of 42 organizations that play a leading role in community development, has been working with various government and community partners towards a future in which Francophone citizens everywhere in Canada can live and develop in French, and have the collective capacity to take action in every aspect of their development, thereby contributing to Canada’s expansion.

Capacity-building for community organizations and institutions

Although it is clear that partnerships with various levels of government can maximize and increase federal government investments, it must not be forgotten that delivering activities and services to individuals and communities efficiently at lower cost requires capacity-building within the organizations and institutions if they are to carry out these tasks. The resources currently available to them are clearly inadequate to properly meet growing demand for French language services and programs that can meet individual and community needs.

For the vast majority of organizations serving Francophone citizens living in minority communities, core funding has not increased since 1999. Although the government may have provided additional funds for targeted projects over the years, the fact remains that the funds allocated for organizational programming have not taken inflation into account. In constant dollars, funding for Francophone and Acadian organizations has in fact declined over the past decade.

In 2008, studies on working conditions in nine provinces and territories revealed that staff working on French language services in health, economic development, culture, employability, early childhood services, and immigrant reception and integration, are seriously underpaid. As a general rule, pay for Francophone community staff averages between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year below what people are paid in the private and public sectors for the same type of work.

These poor working conditions lead to a high staff turnover rate for community organizations and institutions. In March 2011, a study conducted by researchers Éric Forgues and Sylvain St-Onge¹ demonstrated that more than half (56.3%) of Acadian and Francophone organizations in New Brunswick are experiencing problems in recruiting people. In addition, an overview of community groups published in 2010 by the Observatoire sur la gouvernance de l'Ontario français showed that 65.3% of the organizations studied were experiencing recruitment problems².

This state of affairs weakens the ability of individuals and families to receive the health, education, economic development or immigration services they need; as inflation undermines the finances of these organizations, such services will be eroded. In the end, it is up to the government to support families and communities through the development of those official language minority communities that are at risk.

Recommendations

We therefore wish to make two recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance for the next federal budget:

- **Increasing funding to support official language community organizations and institutions.** At the very least, strategic increases in funding would help to keep these communities at their current level and allow the government to continue to meet its commitments to Francophone citizens in minority communities who require and request services in their own language, at a lower cost. In view of the government's intention to cut programs by 5 to 10%, this increased funding would constitute an important positive measure that complies with Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.
- **Renewing the *Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013*.** This government initiative has been and continues to be of key importance for our communities in terms of creating and expanding services, activities and programs in key areas like health, youth, justice, economic development and immigration. We recommend that the government announce its intention to renew the *Roadmap* for the 2013-2018 period in its next budget.

¹ Forgues, Éric and Sylvain St-Onge, with the collaboration of Josée Guignard Noël, *Portrait de la gouvernance des organismes acadiens et francophones au Nouveau-Brunswick*, University of Ottawa, March 2011, p. 38.

² Cardinal, Linda, Éline Déry, Nathalie Plante and Anik Sauvé, *Volume 1 : Un portrait des groupes communautaires*, Observatoire sur la gouvernance de l'Ontario français, University of Ottawa, March 2010, p. 33.

Conclusion

At a time of financial austerity requiring the responsible and efficient use of public funds, it is important to remember that organizations and institutions serving French-speaking citizens, like others who serve all kinds of different communities across the country, have been doing their share for several years now. They have found innovative ways to deal with increasingly restricted resources and have nonetheless succeeded in achieving tangible outcomes for those individuals and families that wish to live in French—these results are consistent with the government’s commitment to support the development of official language minority communities.

The additional funding that we are recommending, far from being unreasonable in a time of budget restraint, should instead be perceived as a strategic realignment of resources. Cutting funding for community organizations and institutions once again would make it impossible for them to deliver the services that its French-language citizens not only expect, but to which they are entitled. In many instances, this would require the government institutions to identify alternatives, because the government’s commitment to individuals, families, communities and support for the development of official language minority communities remains.

Furthermore, the economic recovery is still shaky. As the Ontario Trillium Foundation has pointed out, it is in small communities – and many Francophone communities fall into this category – that the impact of an economic slowdown is felt most. Additional spending cuts for community organizations and institutions would not only cause a decline in services, but also losses of jobs that would do nothing to contribute to the economic recovery.

Francophone and Acadian organizations and institutions work together with the Government of Canada not only on behalf of their own communities, but for the whole country. At a time when the government is seeking to further consolidate Canada’s competitive advantage by eliminating the deficit and identifying innovative ways of being there for Canadians, we are there to be a part of the solution.