



**Government of the Northwest
Territories Response to
Recommendations from the**

***Audit of GNWT French
Language Communications
and Services***

Government of
Northwest Territories

INTRODUCTION

In 1984, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) adopted the *Official Languages Act of the Northwest Territories* (OLA). The OLA recognizes official language rights in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and provides official language status to English, French, and nine Indigenous languages of the NWT.

Following complaints from the *Fédération franco-ténoise* (FFT) in October 2005, a trial was held at the Supreme Court of the NWT regarding French language services in the NWT. In April 2006, Madame Justice M.T. Moreau of the Supreme Court of the NWT issued a ruling on the case. The Court's decision concluded that the OLA requires most GNWT institutions to provide services to the public in French. Madame Justice M.T. Moreau also issued several orders with which the GNWT and the Legislative Assembly must comply.

In 2006, the GNWT appealed the Supreme Court ruling. The NWT Court of Appeal rendered its decision in 2008. In 2008, the GNWT and FFT filed applications for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC). On March 5, 2009, the SCC decided that it would not hear the appeal of the GNWT and the FFT.

As a result of the SCC's decision, the GNWT started the implementation of the orders that were issued by Justice M.T. Moreau, as modified by the NWT Court of Appeal which included the drafting of a comprehensive implementation plan for French language communications and services under the OLA in all government institutions.

In 2010, the GNWT and the FFT established the Comprehensive Plan Consultation and Co-operation Committee (the Committee). The mandate of the Committee is to facilitate consultation with the community on the GNWT's drafting, implementation, administration and promotion of a strategic plan. Terms of Reference were signed by both parties.

The GNWT developed the GNWT Strategic Plan on French Language Communications and Services (Strategic Plan) as a means to improve communications and services delivery to the public in French across the Government, including all GNWT institutions as outlined in the Government Institution Regulations. The Plan outlines three broad frameworks for implementation, namely the legislative and regulatory framework, the administrative framework, and the operational framework. The Strategic Plan was approved by the Cabinet in 2012. Since 2012, the Committee has focused their meetings on the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

The operational framework calls for the development of multi-year and annual plans as well as processes for developing, approving, implementing and monitoring the plans. The legislative and regulatory framework is in place under the existing OLA. Regulations around "significant demand" and "nature of the office" were developed and approved by the GNWT in 2013. Also in 2013, the GNWT approved the Standards for French Communications and Services (the Standards) after consulting with the FFT, providing a further guide to departments and institutions designated under the Government

Institution Regulations outlining expectations on minimum requirements and consistent standards across the GNWT.

The Strategic Plan indicates the quality and adequacy of Government policies, plans and actions with respect to French language communications and services and progress towards planned goals and objectives were required to be evaluated during the final year of the Plan (2017-2018). The results of the evaluation are required to be made public. The Strategic Plan also included the requirement for systematic audits of French language communications and services.

In 2015, the Francophone Affairs Secretariat developed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability (MEA) Plan for the Strategic Plan that directed the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The MEA Plan's purpose was twofold. First, the MEA Plan established a strong accountability structure between funding bodies and recipients. The accountability

requirements of the GNWT are fulfilled within the data collection and reporting guidelines of the MEA Plan. Second, the MEA Plan provided a platform for the GNWT to identify and showcase successes in French language communications and services. Ultimately, the MEA Plan contributed to the on-going improvement of French language services in the NWT.

In 2016, the GNWT engaged a firm to conduct a stakeholder assessment with Francophone community representatives to identify and prioritize opportunities for improvement to further enhance French programs and services. The report **GNWT French Stakeholder Assessment – March 7, 2016** was completed in March 2016.

As of the 2017-2018 fiscal year, all GNWT Departments, the Legislative Assembly, boards and agencies (including School Authorities and Aurora College) have developed their multi-year (5 year) Operating Plans to implement the Strategic Plan.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1: Service Delivery (Risk Level: Moderate)

- The service in French was received in 81% (38 out of 47) of points of public service, in-person, on the telephone and via email.
- The length of time for the auditor to be serviced exceeded the expected waiting time of 2 minutes in 16 out of 25 tests

2: Active Offer (Risk Level: Moderate)

- The compliance rate for in-person active offer was 71%.
- However, the audit found lower compliance rates for active offer telephone greetings (47%), voicemail (62%) and email signatures (56%).

3: Signage (Risk Level: Minor)

- Directory signage in government buildings was found to be 92% compliant with this requirement. It was also noted that most Yellowknife locations complied with the signage standards.
- However, wayfinding and outside signage compliance rates were 43% and 50% respectively.

4: Display of Public Information (Risk Level: Minor)

- The audit found that 73% (11 out of 15) of points of public service websites were mostly available in French.
- However, the audit found that for all social media pages tested, a French translation did not exist.

Compliance Audit of GNWT French Language Communications and Services for select points of service in four significant demand communities

Recommendation	Response
<p>The front-line employees should leverage the existing tools, templates and training available, for example, the “French Language Communications and Services – Management Series” to help provide more efficient services if French Language Service Coordinators (FLSC) are busy.</p>	<p>The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>While staff may already regularly use existing templates and tools, it is important to note that it may be necessary for departments to modify them as required. The Francophone Affairs Secretariat (Secretariat) is available to assist French Language Service Coordinators (FLSC) with this work.</p> <p>The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) Yellowknife Region has begun its own capacity development program that includes financial support to employees who wish to pursue courses to advance knowledge in French and a series of conversational lunches for French speaking employees to maintain and develop skills in areas of health/social service specific terminology.</p>
<p>The GNWT should reinforce the importance of issuing French alerts to the public via radio stations and social media. This could be achieved through contract clauses or incentives to help promote the importance of French services within the community.</p>	<p>The GNWT agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) provides all public safety alerts in both French and English, including all postings to the GNWT’s Public Safety Notices webpage. During the audit, an issue arose in their coordination with broadcasters which caused the French language alert not to be broadcasted. MACA is working with broadcasters and is confident that this issue is not likely to occur again in the future.</p> <p>In addition, tweets such as Public Health Advisories issued by the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) and Road Closure Alerts issued by the Department of Infrastructure (INF) are provided via social media in French.</p>

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<p>Points of public service should leverage the services, tools and templates offered by the Francophone Affairs Secretariat to help improve compliance with active offer requirements, specifically in regard to telephone greetings, voicemail and email signatures.</p>	<p>The GNWT agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>The Secretariat will continue to play a role in training the FLSC of government institutions, who in turn train staff at points of public service in significant demand communities.</p> <p>The GNWT will strive to achieve greater compliance on telephone greetings, voicemail and email signatures through refresher training on the necessity of the active offer and providing translation (through the Secretariat) for voicemail and email signatures where required.</p>
<p>Point-of-service management should coordinate with facility operators to help ensure signage meets the French language requirements. This could be achieved through stipulating this requirement in lease agreements with property owners.</p>	<p>The GNWT agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>INF is generally responsible for ensuring signage at all GNWT offices and buildings meet French language requirements. Many departments and agencies are working to make their signage compliant. The Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission (WSCC) ensures that both its internal and external facing signage meets French-language requirements.</p> <p>FLSC should coordinate with point-of-service management to assess the need and possibility of providing signage in French, in discussion with property owners as required.</p> <p>One challenge noted is that, in many cases, Indigenous languages are required for internal/external signage, and as such GNWT departments and agencies can run into difficulties finding translators which can delay signage projects.</p>

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Recommendation	Response
<p>Managers of each point of public service should leverage the translation services provided by the Francophone Affairs Secretariat to ensure all documents requested by and published for the public are available in French. This standard should be applied especially to critical locations such as hospitals, as the information published can have a high impact for the public.</p> <p>According to the Action Plan for French Language Services, “additional [translation] resources will be provided to meet the demands” of growing use of social media. Once these additional resources are provided, management of each point of public service should ensure all messages and announcements posted on social media accounts are being posted in compliance with the Standards, i.e. simultaneously.</p>	<p>The GNWT agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>As public engagement increases, social media will be the option of choice to reach our audience. Corporate Communications is developing GNWT-wide guidelines for social media usage. The Francophone Affairs Secretariat is also undertaking a review of the GNWT Standards for French Language Communications and Services and will include increased wording around social media.</p> <p>The Secretariat is looking at ways to provide additional support to departments for social media translation.</p>