

# Active offer of French language service

A quick reference guide for front-line staff

The Government of the Northwest Territories has committed to make an active offer of services in French and is working to ensure that all departments can provide good quality information and services in French.

As a front-line employee, you play a critical role in the active offer, even if you don't speak French. You can ensure French-speaking clients feel welcome and well-served, by facilitating positive, timely access to the services they need – at the counter, on the telephone, or by email.

This short guide was created to help GNWT employees who are the first point of contact with the public fulfill this important role.

## What is my role in the active offer?

Everyone involved in serving the public has a role to play in the active offer. If you are not designated to provide services in French, your role is to make the "offer", to ensure individuals feel comfortable requesting service in French, and to facilitate access to someone who will be able to provide the information or service they need in French.

### What is an "active offer"?

*The active offer is a way of greeting the public which informs them that they are welcome to communicate with the GNWT in either English or French when seeking information or a service. An active offer can be a sign, a personal greeting or a recorded message.*

## Know your resources, have a plan in place

The best way to ensure you are able to provide the active offer quickly and efficiently is to find out what resources your department/agency has for French-speaking clients and how French requests should be referred. You will want to know:

- the name and contact information of your department's **French Language Services Coordinator (link)**;
- the names and contact information of designated bilingual staff for your department and how they will get back to the client. Can they come right away? Will they call the client to follow up? Is an appointment required? If you do not know how requests for information or service in French will be managed at your point of service, please ask your supervisor or manager to provide that information;
- key documents that are available in French (e.g. program brochures, forms, etc.); and
- web pages that provide information in French.

There is a **sample reference sheet** included at the end of this toolkit which you can use to record key contacts and information.

## Make the offer visible

It is important for the public to know where French language services are offered. Your service manager or your department/agency's French Language Services Coordinator have been provided with tools to make the active offer visible, such as tent cards, posters, stickers and pins. If these tools are not being used in your service area, or if you have questions about how to display the active offer, please ask your supervisor, or contact your French Language Services Coordinator.

## When someone asks for service in French

Whether you provide services to the public in person, over the phone, or by email, you could be approached by someone who wants to access information or services in French. You may wonder if you will be expected to try and understand what they are saying in French or to respond in French.

While all GNWT employees are encouraged to learn and use basic French phrases if they are interested and feel comfortable doing so, this is not a required part of the active offer.

What is required is that you:

- acknowledge the request to be served in French;
- indicate that you will help provide access to someone who can speak French; and
- facilitate that access in a courteous and efficient way.

Someone looking for service in French may address you in French or in English. It is important to communicate through your body language, tone and words that their request is welcome and that you will help them get access to service in their language.

Above all, take care not to make the person feel as though they are “imposing” or to leave the impression they should try to “manage” in English.

Sample scripts are provided in this guide that can be used for counter or phone service. Your department may have developed more specific scripts for your office. Please check with your supervisor or French Language Services Coordinator if you are unsure.



### Generic scripts for counter service

Bonjour. I see you would like service “en français”. One moment please. I will get the bilingual service agent to help you.

Bonjour. I see you would like service “en français”. Please have a seat and I will get a bilingual service agent to help you.

Bonjour. I see you would like service “en français”. One moment please, I will contact our bilingual service agent who can help you by telephone.

Bonjour. I see you would like service “en français”. Here is some information that will help you access our services in French (*if you have a French document that explains how French language services are provided*).

The most important thing to remember is to smile and be courteous. This will go a long way to creating a positive experience for the client. For in-person service, using simple body language can also assist in ensuring that a client who doesn't understand much English understands what you are saying better. For example:

- You may point to a French sign or document that describes how they will be assisted;
- Holding up your index finger is a well-recognized sign for "one moment please"; and
- Motioning to the waiting area can help guide someone to "have a seat" while you get someone who can assist them.

It is also important that the French-speaking client feel they are being treated as an equal priority to other clients. Their request should be referred as quickly as possible and all efforts should be made to avoid undue delays.

Always inform any other colleagues who will be dealing with this client that their official language of choice is French.



### Special considerations for phone service

Depending on how your department's phone service is set up, French-speaking clients may be able to select French as an option right away. However, if you are in a position to receive incoming French calls, it is important to answer the phone by saying: "*Hello/Bonjour*". This is the verbal equivalent of the active offer signs displayed at the counter. It is the signal that tells people they can request service in French.

Even if your phone system allows clients to pre-select a language, it is possible you will receive a French call.

Because you do not have the benefit of signs or body language in a telephone interaction, it is important to maintain a warm and courteous tone of voice, and to provide a quick and easy connection with your French language contact. Please ensure you have referral information close at hand.

The sample scripts provided below are examples of how to communicate with French callers, however, please ensure you check with your supervisor or French Language Services Coordinator to get more details about how your office or department will be dealing with phone service.



## Generic scripts for phone service

I understand you would like service "en français". Please hold one moment. I will transfer you to the bilingual service agent. Merci!

I understand you would like service "en français". Please hold one moment. I will connect you to a French message that can provide more information. Merci!

## Bilingual voice mail

Non-bilingual front-line employees at major points of public contact are required to have a current bilingual voice mail message. Each department's voicemail system is a bit different, so your French Language Services Coordinator can assist with recording a bilingual message. Either English or French can come first in the message.

## Tips for creating a welcoming environment

Having active offer signage inside and outside the office will help create a welcoming environment for the French-speaking public. You are also encouraged to consider the overall impression given by your service location. A client who can see forms, publications, notices, and other French materials will be more likely to feel comfortable asking for service in French.

Here are a few ideas for creating an environment that welcomes French service requests:

- If your service has regular contact with a French-speaking client, make a point of pro-actively offering service and materials in French. Or, try out a few French words with them next time they are in!
- If you have magazines and books in your waiting area, consider including a few French publications.

- If you have a television or radio playing, consider switching to a French broadcast from time to time.
- Encourage French-speaking colleagues to use their language at work. Clients will quickly notice that French is spoken in your workplace.



## **Bilingual e-mail: Signatures and auto-replies**

Non-bilingual front-line staff at major points of public contact and generic email addresses are required to use a bilingual email signature. If you don't already have a bilingual signature, please contact your French Language Services Coordinator for assistance in setting one up.

### **What about Aboriginal language requests?**

Implementation of French communications and services will work towards collaboration with any complimentary standards which may be developed by the GNWT Aboriginal Languages Secretariat, in particular for matters related to active offer and signage.

You may want to contact your Official Languages Coordinator for more information about how you reply to Aboriginal language inquiries in your department.

### **Tools and references**

#### **GNWT Strategic Plan on French Language Communications and Services ([link](#))**

In 2012, the GNWT adopted a strategic plan to guide its departments, boards and agencies in how they develop, provide and offer French language services to the Francophone community.

#### **GNWT French Communication and Service Standards ([link](#))**

Standards were developed to assist departments, boards and agencies in delivering services and communicating with the public in French.

## Services TNO

Services TNO is a French language service centre for the Government of the Northwest Territories located in downtown Yellowknife. This single-window centre provides a variety of information and services on behalf of GNWT departments, simplifying administrative steps and facilitating access to public services in French for citizens. Services include assistance with health card applications, fishing licenses, requests for official transcripts and general information about the GNWT and its services. The office is open from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

## Key contacts



**In person**

5003, 49<sup>th</sup> Street, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Laing Building  
(entrance on Franklin Avenue) Yellowknife



**By phone**

(toll-free line) 1-866-561-1664  
in Yellowknife 867-920-6153



**By e-mail**

[francophone@gov.nt.ca](mailto:francophone@gov.nt.ca)



**Website**

[www.servicestno.gov.nt.ca](http://www.servicestno.gov.nt.ca)

Find out what information Services TNO provides on behalf of your department or agency and whether your department/agency has an arrangement to make referrals to Services TNO.

You have an important role to play in making the GNWT information and services more accessible to French-speaking members of the public. We hope this toolkit helps you play this role with more ease and comfort.

Should you have any questions, your French Language Services Coordinator is a good place to start. You can also contact the Francophone Affairs Secretariat at [francophone@gov.nt.ca](mailto:francophone@gov.nt.ca), or (867) 920-3107.

# Active offer of French language services

## My key contacts and references

My Department's French Language Services Coordinator:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Designated bilingual staff in my department:

Name

Phone

E-mail

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My department has an agreement with Services TNO: Yes No

*Details:*

My department has access to an interpretation service: Yes No

*Details:*

Commonly requested public information documents and forms available in French:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Commonly requested information available on the departmental website in French.

Information type

Web address

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_