

Working Together to Strengthen the Voice of English-speaking Quebec

Report on Interviews with
Key Community Leaders

October 2020



INTRODUCTION

A quarter of a century ago, the Quebec Community Groups Network was founded with a mandate to build the understanding and cooperation needed to develop strong, reasoned policy to ensure sustainable growth for English-speaking Quebec. During a strategic planning exercise in 2013, the membership approved an updated mission: The QCGN is a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action on the strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec.

The mission and actions of the QCCN support our Network's vision that English-speaking Quebec is a diverse, confident, recognized, and respected national linguistic minority that actively participates in and contributes to the social, economic, cultural, and political life of Quebec and Canadian society.

For the past 25 years, the QCGN has grown considerably in size and scope, while developing advocacy and communications capacity to effectively represent the strategic interests of English-speaking Quebecers, both nationally and provincially. Today, the QCGN is the sole organization with policy, public affairs, public relations, and community development expertise dedicated to representing English-speaking Quebec in the public space.

Representing a community as diverse as English-speaking Quebec is difficult. Many things may separate us; what region we live in, the colour of our skin, what religion – if any – we profess. But we all share a common experience. We live as a linguistic minority in a society that defines itself by the language of the majority. We have shared interests, and a common purpose.

Prior to the pandemic, the QCGN was close to completing an independent, facilitated process to collect information to guide the development of a strategic community development plan for a stronger and more resilient English-speaking community. This process, which involved interviews, a survey, and multiple town hall meetings, identified the need for stronger advocacy based on improved collaboration and consultation with the constituent parts of Quebec's English-speaking community.

Enlightened by this feedback the QCGN is addressing these findings head-on, setting up a Renewal Committee which has been mandated to propose a renewed vision, mission, and structure for the organization. It in turn has embarked upon an ambitious community conversation on who we are, what challenges we face, who should represent us, and how we can work together to achieve common purpose. This document summarizes the thoughts of leaders from across English-speaking Quebec on these questions. It is part of a wider conversation being led by the QCGN towards a new way of collaborating and speaking with one voice.

KEY FINDINGS

COMMUNITY

The face of English-speaking Quebec is changing. It is no longer primarily white and Anglo-Saxon. This change must be reflected in the leadership of organizations that purport to speak on behalf of English-speaking Quebec.

English used regularly at home is key in defining an English-speaking Quebecer. Other indicators are affinity with or use of English community institutions (hospitals, media, education, arts and culture).

Access to government services in English is the primary preoccupation of English-speaking Quebecers. Primarily, this means access to education, health (including mental health) and social services. Access to other government services, and the ability to speak English to government are also important, principally as a matter of respect.

Another issue that surfaced frequently was the economy and more precisely employment opportunities for young English-speaking Quebecers. It was pointed out that despite having strong French language skills, many young people are unable to find jobs in Quebec.

There is a need for a strong community voice in the public space. But this voice must lead by consensus, and actively listen to the concerns of all communities.

Young English-speaking Quebecers:

- Must be mobilized and engaged with the management and control of community institutions.
- Educated on their rights and the challenges faced by English-speaking Quebec.
- Assisted in engaging with and joining the leadership of Quebec's political and civil society architecture.

THE QCGN

The QCGN must lead through consensus and be more attuned and open to diverse voices. It should be strategic in determining the issues it wishes to champion and at times allow others to take the lead.

Leadership of the QCGN must reflect the community it represents and be open to building partnerships with other community organizations. In particular, it needs to enter into a dialogue with representatives of cultural communities and the regions.

A QCGN strength is its reliance on evidenced-based public policy. This capacity should continue and be strengthened.

The QCGN must do a better job closing the gap between its policy work and public understanding of English-speaking Quebec's challenges.

The QCGN's advocacy focus must continue to be at the federal and provincial levels of government. The QCGN's role in relation to the Official Languages Act was cited as a key reason for having a strong Ottawa presence and as critical for the community's continued vitality. The QCGN needs to reinforce its presence in Quebec City, raise its profile and be more active on social media.

In strengthening its positioning as the voice of English-speaking Quebecers, the QCGN should consider a name change.

THE FUTURE

Participants maintain that the English-speaking community and QCGN in particular need to brace themselves for the following:

- The short-term agenda of the current Quebec government and its interest in launching a language debate.
- The same challenges the English-speaking community has faced in the past will be there in the years ahead. Austerity measures that will result from the COVID-19 crisis will make accessing services even more difficult.



INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

METHODOLOGY

The QCGN's Renewal Committee conducted 59 interviews in August and September. The interviewees are community leaders in a variety of fields, from academia to business and from the religious community to the aboriginal community. In addition, the QCGN board members were interviewed. Please see Appendix 1 for the list of participants.

A questionnaire guided the discussion, (see Appendix 2) framing the conversation while allowing interviewees to focus on their particular areas of interest. The discussions covered three main themes:

- Quebec's English-speaking community
- The organizational framework of the QCGN
- The future of the English-speaking community in Quebec

Each interview was conducted by a QCGN staff member and a member of the Renewal Committee.

This report is a consolidation of the interviews. It aims to identify common themes for each of the sections of the interviews without delving into the details and verbatim of each interview.



PART I - THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY TODAY

HIGHLIGHTS

- The English-speaking community in Quebec is multi-faceted and difficult to define. It is a community of communities with the English language being the common thread
- The community has the capacity to speak with one voice, but work is needed to bring the competing voices together.
- The future of English-language school boards, access to English-language health care services, minority rights in general and employment opportunities are of most concern to the English-speaking community. Unity and strong, collaborative leadership are needed.

DIVERSE AND MULTILINGUAL



The English-speaking community in Quebec is not a monolith. It has evolved over the years and today is made up of people of many different cultures and background. No longer is it defined as those having a common Anglo-Saxon culture. Today, Quebecers who identify as English speakers may not even consider English as their first (or even second) language. The community is fluid with the English language as the common link.

Key points include the following:

- One interviewee argued that the very exercise of trying to define the English-speaking community may be part of the problem. Why is there a necessity to impose membership in a community? She said that we need to be open to change the parameters that we were once comfortable with. The bottom line is that it is much more difficult today to define the English-speaking community than it was in the past.

- English-speaking Quebec is now a community of communities, as there are minority communities within the English-speaking minority. The Black community. The Italian community. The Greek community. The LGBTQ+ community. And within these communities there are further subsets. This reality presents a challenge when it comes to speaking with one voice on minority rights.
- The traditional English-speaking community has been slow to embrace other communities. This has changed over the years as new Canadians have settled in Quebec. Today, 'membership' in the English-speaking community may be a result of an inability to effectively communicate in French.
- Young English-speaking Quebecers tend not to identify with a particular community. They have not had to face challenges related to language and are less cognizant of the realities that face English-speaking communities.
- Outside of common language institutions such as schools, hospitals and universities are the second most important unifying force within the English-speaking community. Even though these community institutions have evolved, now provide services in both English and French and are increasingly managed and controlled by officials in Quebec City, English-speaking Quebecers still view them as their institutions.



ONE VOICE. MANY ISSUES.

There are two challenges that hinder the English-speaking community from speaking with one voice: its intrinsic diversity and the strengths of its institutions. While both realities are viewed positively, it makes it difficult for one voice to stand out. The question was raised: Does McGill University want another organization to speak on their behalf? Probably not. Therefore, although the capacity is there, is one voice truly needed?

**“THERE SHOULD BE A
PRINCIPLED, STRONG VOICE
THAT REFLECTS THE VIEWS
OF THE COMMUNITY
WRIT LARGE**”

Others pointed out that on the other hand a CIUSSS or a university may wish to speak out on an issue but are reluctant to do so in fear of angering the government, its principal funder. A recent example that was frequently cited was Bill 21 which prevents civil servants from wearing religious coverings.

The reality is that one organization cannot speak out on every issue, particularly when representing as diverse a base as the English-speaking community in Quebec. There should be opportunities to let others lead. However, this can only be accomplished through a concerted effort to build partnerships with grassroots organizations that represent different sectors of the English-speaking community.

Unity is clearly a prerequisite for speaking with a single voice, and it may require a specific issue to galvanize the community. In addition, any organization that wishes to speak on behalf of the community has to understand the concerns of the community and be committed to engaging in a constructive dialogue with its membership.

A strong consensus emerged that unity on common positions is critical to promoting the vitality of the community. The current perception, however, is that the community is divided. When there is disagreement, there needs to be a structure in place that allows people to be listened to and to give them the confidence that the process was fair and transparent. In addition, compromise and a generosity of spirit is required to move forward.

THE MAIN ISSUES OF CONCERN

Maintaining community-based governance (management and control) of English-speaking Quebec's public education institutions (including post-secondary), access to health (including mental health) and social services in English, and access to justice are the top areas of concern and were raised by the majority of interviewees. When it comes to education issues, interviewees mentioned the replacement

of school boards with service centres and access to English education for immigrants as the specific areas of concern.

Several interviewees mentioned the ‘brain drain – ‘young Quebecers leaving the province taking their skills and education and experience with them. One interviewee noted the challenges associated with attracting and retaining high-skill individuals to Quebec. It was emphasized that our young people often having difficulty finding employment despite having strong French-language skills.

“LANGUAGE IS LESS OF AN ISSUE FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION. THEY DON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ENGLISH OR FRENCH. THEY THINK OF THEMSELVES AS QUEBECERS FIRST.”

Other issues raised frequently include minority rights, human rights, inclusiveness, tolerance, respect and kindness.

One interviewee mentioned that an open, business environment is a major area of concern. The province should not be putting up barriers to business and scaring entrepreneurs.

Another interviewee suggested that the English-speaking community has been in a quiet phase with no one issue taking over. This, in many ways, has been a challenge for the QCGN leadership. The organization sees threats that are not necessarily perceived or understood by individual community members. The QCGN needs to be better at articulating the threats to the community in a way that is understandable.

A VITAL YET FRAGILE COMMUNITY

Several interviewees stated that despite the challenges facing the English-speaking community, the community is in a good place at the moment. Progress has been made over the years, but it is not necessarily known or appreciated. Anytime the community is in the news, it is because of conflict. Many warned, however, that the current government’s agenda is likely to lead to friction with the English-speaking community and that it is no time for complacency.

A strength of the community is its strong institutions, like the McGill University Health Centre and its universities. At the same time, many expressed concerns that the merging of institutions has led to less community involvement and the centralization of decision-making in Quebec City. The end result is that

“VITALITY MEANS DIVERSE, CONFIDENT, RECOGNIZED AND RESPECTED”

community voices have been muffled and our participation less pronounced.

The vitality of the community also depends on where you live in the province. The English-speaking community of Montreal is vital, but it may not be the case in the regions.

Ensuring that the community remains vital requires representation across sectors of the population. In particular, efforts to engage youth through our strong institutions need to be enhanced.

A concern is the dearth of political champions for the English-speaking community, particularly at the municipal and provincial levels. In order to ensure the vitality of the English-speaking community, young people who could run for office and participate in community leadership need to be identified, recruited and supported. The bilingualism among young people will help them secure support from both English and French-speaking Quebecers.

One interviewee raised an interesting point about what the larger goals should be. The status quo probably is not the ideal system. The English-speaking community has been forced into the role of fighting for rights. What if we had a blank slate on which to design our ideal future? What would it look like? Perhaps not necessarily two groups divided against one another but one society that nurtures the best of both cultures, bilingual, skilled and world class.

ENLARGE THE TENT

Outreach to the communities that comprise English-speaking community is viewed as critical. Having successfully strengthened ties with the province's black community, interviewees are urging the QCGN to expand its horizons and adopt a similar approach with other groups. This is critical if the community is to speak with one voice. The recommendation is to enlarge the tent and expand the number of voices that speak out.

Success depends on the right leadership and diplomacy.

THE NEXT GENERATION

One area that kept coming up that was not in the questionnaire was how to engage the next generation of English-speaking leaders. The younger generation is more bilingual than older generations and may not necessarily identify with the English-speaking minority. In addition, unlike their elders who are focused on access to services in English and

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YOUNG PEOPLE
”

linguistic and minority rights, they tend to be concerned about global issues such as climate change, racism, personal respect.

The QCGN needs to connect to this generation where they live: social media, university campuses, etc. and on issues that they care about. And, with a vision that resonates.



PART II - THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE QCGN

HIGHLIGHTS

- The QCGN needs to become a collaborative, credible, principled voice that speaks with authority because it has taken the time to consult and to listen. A voice that allows others to speak up if necessary.
- The QCGN needs to speak out more and leverage traditional and social media.
- Diplomacy and listening are critical factors for rallying communities and organizations and building partnerships.
- A top-down approach is not the answer.

ONE VOICE OR MANY VOICES

There is not a consensus on whether there should be one voice that speaks on behalf of the English-speaking community. A consensus emerged that the QCGN has a critical role to play and at times may be the only organization with the leeway to speak out.

Most of the interviewees said that sometimes there are too many people and/or organizations speaking on behalf of the community. Others pointed out that at times it is valuable to have multiple voices because it creates the impression of a more broad-based movement.

Some said that, although a strong voice is needed, it does not always have to be the same voice. The QCGN does not necessarily need to be the only voice, there are organizations capable of speaking on matters related to a specific sector. The QCGN's role is to coordinate these voices and to fill the void when appropriate and necessary. In fact, the QCGN should be strategic in selecting the issues it wishes to champion.

A critical element is that whoever the spokesperson is (an individual, an organization), they should be credible to the government and to the community in general.

The QCGN should identify its niche and speak out on the issues that directly relate to its mission. The messaging should be evidence-based and backed up with public opinion polls and consultations with community groups.

The QCGN should find a way to speak for as many people as possible. But the speed of change in the community along with the short news cycle makes this challenging

A caveat, however, is to be careful on speaking out on issues that are not specifically language-related or lack a clear consensus among English-speakers.

GO OUT AND LISTEN

**“WE NEED A REAL LISTENING
TOUR TO UNDERSTAND THE
PRIORITIES AND
CONCERNS OF THE
REGIONS.
DRINK A LOT OF COFFEE.
SIT IN A LOT OF KITCHENS.”**

The main recommendation for engaging with the regions is by getting out of Montreal and “sitting in a lot of kitchens and drinking a lot of coffee.” Leadership should visit the regions to hear their priorities and concerns firsthand. It is always the people who live outside the large population centres that feel left out. The QCGN must facilitate two-way exchange. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that regional participants were supportive of the need for QCGN to play a strong advocacy role and on the areas of focus.

Diplomacy is key in collaborating with the regions. The QCGN cannot be burning bridges before it needs to cross them.

When it comes to the component parts of Quebec’s English-speaking community, the QCGN needs to go out and listen to their concerns. One interviewee suggested organizing introduction meetings with other grassroots organizations to present the QCGN. It should take the first step and ask, “how can we help you.”

BRANDING

The branding of the QCGN may need to change. The average Quebecer has no idea what the QCGN is or what it does. The name does not resonate.

THE ROLE OF THE QCGN

There was no consensus on what the exact role of the QCGN should be. Interviewees were aligned on an organization that advocates, that gathers research and insights and that rallies organizations and communities. Many urged the QCGN to work in partnership with other community organizations. APPELE Quebec was cited as a success story.

The interviewees mentioned various roles, including:

- Taking positions that are evidence-based which includes sponsoring research papers and conducting public opinion polling on issues affecting the English-speaking community
- Capitalizing on its role as the official language representative of the English-speaking community in accordance with the Official Languages Act.
- Filling the gap between policy and the real lives of English-speaking Quebecers
- Representing regional and demographic realities and populations
- Recognizing the diversity of English-speaking Quebec
- Strengthening community development programs
- Cultivating future leaders

ADVOCACY

Advocacy should be a primary focus of the QCGN at both the provincial and the federal level. It should become a strong presence in Quebec City and adopt a pro-active communications program which includes having a strong presence in the mainstream media and on social media.

Fact-based and evidenced-based advocacy is at the heart of what the QCGN does. The organization should advocate for policies and programs in Ottawa and Quebec City that enable the English-speaking community to flourish and thrive.

One way to do this is reach out to legislators before a crisis hits. Build the partnerships before we need them. This doesn't mean pledging loyalty. It means building relationships to make advocacy easier.

THE MISSION OF THE QCGN

For the most part, the interviewees validated the mission of the QCGN. However, it was difficult for some to comment on the mission because it was the first time that they had seen it. One interviewee said it did not speak to her at all. Another said that it is missing an objective: what is the organization trying to do?



PART III – THE FUTURE

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2020 has proven that looking ahead is difficult. Several interviewees did not even want to speculate on what the future will hold.
- Concerns were raised about the short-term agenda of the current Quebec government and its interest in launching a language debate.
- The same challenges the English-speaking community has faced in the past will be there in the years ahead. Austerity measures that will result from the COVID-19 crisis will make accessing services even more difficult.
- The demographics of Quebec are changing quickly. Will there be an English-speaking community or even a French-speaking community in 10 years?

THE CHALLENGES

**“AS A PARENT, I
WANT TO KNOW THAT
THERE IS A FUTURE
FOR MY DAUGHTER
IN QUEBEC”**

A shrinking community and the economy are the main challenges mentioned by the interviewees. Most participants agree that we need to keep the best and the brightest in the province. To keep the best in the province we need jobs. Young people who can afford to are leaving the province.

The community cannot grow if immigrants are funneled exclusively into French-language schools.

We are going to be facing potentially long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on the economy, retail, transportation, and many other sectors. Eventually

someone is going to have to pay the bill for the financial support from the government and the government spending.

HOW DOES THE QCGN FIT?

- Identify the common goals and challenges of English-speaking Quebec and invest in outreach efforts.
- Be more inclusive. The next generation has been raised to naturally work in teams. Although the results are not always perfect, team members willingly accept the outcome even if they have a different view.
- Reach out to other English-speaking minority communities. The QCGN needs to form coalitions with like-minded groups. “We have an image problem,” one participant said. The QCGN should do more advocacy at the grassroots level through presentations to various groups.
- Organizations can evolve by focusing on issues that facilitate bilingualism and breaking down barriers.
- The QCGN should increase its profile in order to be successful. It needs to expand its social media presence and its presence in traditional media.
- The QCGN should create partnerships with supportive organizations in the French-speaking community when we share common cause.
- The QCGN should assess its membership structure with an eye to allowing individual memberships and strengthening its institutional support.

MOVING FORWARD

The face of the community has changed because the growth English-speaking Quebec is experiencing is due to immigration. This change is happening quickly and is irreversible. And this change is having profound effects on the community’s identity, the way it is organized, the way it expresses itself, and the way it relates the Quebec’s Francophone majority.

The days of a homogeneous English-speaking Quebec are long over. We are indeed a Community of Communities. Diversity is experienced in many different ways. The urban-rural divide, socio-economic stratification, race, ethnicity and colour, are challenges that bedevil leadership of a unified English-speaking Community.

According to the community leaders interviewed QCGN or a rebranded QCGN is well positioned to play a vital role in advocating for English-speaking Quebecers but to succeed it needs to be strategic and to be willing to work in partnership. At times it should be the primary voice, while at others it should serve as the quarterback bringing like-minded groups and organizations together. Regardless the QCGN needs to reach out to community groups, enter into a dialogue with them and facilitate the building of a consensus.

The engagement strategy needs to be multifaceted and lead to the QCGN working with groups and organizations in a variety of fashions.

Finally, a sense of urgency exists as the agenda of the current Quebec government is raising alarm bells, and the need to have a unified voice is recognized as critical. Furthermore, the federal government is viewed as a critical ally in defending the community's rights, and the QCGN needs to ensure that it ensures the community's views and concerns are understood in Ottawa.

APPENDIX 1 NAMES OF INTERVIEWEES

Abraham Fuks
 Alain Guy
 Alix Adrien
 Andrew Molson
 Anna C. Skipworth
 Anna Gainey
 Anthony Koch
 Arthur Ayers
 Brian Lewis
 Brian Vidal
 Carolynn Roberts
 Chad Bean
 Charles Crawford
 Christopher Bourne
 Clarence Bayne
 Clifford Lincoln
 Dan Lamoureux
 Daniel Rottman
 David Morris
 Eileen Schofield
 Eva Ludwig
 Father John Walsh
 Gerry Cutting
 Helen Antoniou
 Janice Naymark
 Joan Fraser
 John Aylen
 John Parisella
 John Rae
 Jonathan Nuss

Jonathan Wener
 Jonathan Kalles
 Judy Martin
 Karen Hilchey
 Katherine Korakakis
 Katie Gunn
 Lily Ryan
 Lorne Steinberg
 Madeleine Lawler
 Malcolm Lewis-Richmond
 Mark Roper
 Marlene Jennings
 Martin Murphy
 Maureen Kiely
 Michael Prupas
 Nakuset
 Pam Hunter
 Rabbi Lisa Grushcow
 Robert Libman
 Royal Orr
 Ruth Pelletier
 Sandi de la Ronde
 Sara Saber-Freedman
 Shawn O'Donnell
 Sheila Goldbloom
 Stuart (Kip) Cobbett
 Terry Kaufman
 Vincenzo Guzzo
 Walter Duszara
 Yolande James

APPENDIX 2 BACKGROUND AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Working Together to Strengthen the Voice of English-speaking Quebec

Context

A quarter of a century ago, the QCGN was founded with a mandate to build the understanding and cooperation needed to develop strong, reasoned policy to ensure sustainable growth for English-speaking Quebec. During strategic planning exercise in 2013, the membership approved an updated mission: The QCGN is a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action on the strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec.

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Prior to the pandemic, the QCGN Board was close to completing an independent, facilitated process to collect information to guide the development of a strategic community development plan for a stronger and more resilient English-speaking community. This process, which involved interviews, a survey, and multiple town hall meetings, identified the need for stronger advocacy based on improved collaboration and consultation with the constituent parts of Quebec's English-speaking community.

Enlightened by this feedback the QCGN is addressing these findings head-on, setting up a Renewal Committee which has been mandated to propose a renewed vision, mission, and structure for the organization. As it assesses the governance structure of the QCGN, the Renewal Committee will be advising the QCGN on three key initiatives, namely an Engagement and Growth Plan, an Institutional Outreach Campaign, and a Greater Montreal Region Grassroots Campaign.

The Renewal Committee is chaired by **Matthew P. Harrington**, a professor in the law faculty of Université de Montréal. Also on the committee are lawyer **Matthew Aronson**, who is a member of both the Barreau du Québec and of the Law Society of Ontario; former MP **Eleni Bakopanos**, who serves as a Director on a number of non-governmental and not-for-profit Boards; historian

and demographer **Jack Jedwab**, who is President of the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration and the Association for Canadian Studies(ACS); Montreal lawyer **Bruce McNiven**, who is a devote community volunteer; retired federal public servant **Sheilagh Murphy**, who is currently the President of Quebec's Provincial Committee for the Provision of Health and Social Services in the English language.

The Official Languages Act

The federal government's Constitutional responsibilities to Canada's two official language communities are defined in the Official Languages Act (OLA), which has three purposes:

- Ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions, in particular with respect to their use in parliamentary proceedings, in legislative and other instruments, in the administration of justice, in communicating with or providing services to the public and in carrying out the work of federal institutions;
- Support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities and generally advance the equality of status and use of the English and French languages within Canadian society; and
- Set out the powers, duties, and functions of federal institutions with respect to the official languages of Canada.

Of particular importance is the Government of Canada's commitment to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada.

Each of Canada's 12 provincial and territorial official language minority communities (OLMCs) have representative organizations that maintain a special relationship with the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH). QCGN fulfills that role here in Quebec. The federal government works with the QCGN to build community cohesion and capacity and ensure the maintenance and extension of government services.

A key element of QCGN's mission is to ensure our official language community is able to advocate effectively on its own behalf and in so doing promote its vitality. It is important to emphasize that Quebec is the only jurisdiction in Canada where the federally recognized interlocutor for the official language minority community is not recognized by the province as the authoritative voice of the community.

A number of federal institutions – most notably Canadian Heritage, Health Canada, Justice Canada, and Employment and Social Development Canada – also maintain bilateral agreements with provinces and territories to flow money to official language minority communities in areas of provincial jurisdiction such as education, health and the administration of justice.

The QCGN is funded by Canadian Heritage to operate in three spheres:

- **SOCIETY** – Assists federal, provincial, and other levels of governments to commit to legislative policy and financial investments which support the strategic development of English-speaking Quebec; and ensures English-speaking Quebec's voice as a national linguistic minority in Canada.
- **COMMUNITY** – Identifies common development issues and priorities for action and supports the development of emerging sectors; develops and promotes identification with and attachment to the institutions of the English-speaking community; and encourages English-speaking Quebecers to participate in public dialogues around critical societal issues.
- **NETWORK** – Promotes a community of practice to share knowledge and information widely within the membership.

The Interlocutor for the Community

Federal Initiatives:

The work of the QCGN over the last years has led to a greater visibility of the English-speaking Quebecers' issues, challenges and priorities at the federal level, which in turn has impacted legislation, policies, and greater investment in program funding levels to community organizations.

The QCGN was a key contributor to the Government of Canada's current Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future that led to significant gains for English-speaking Quebec. The plan boosts funding to official language minority organizations by \$57.37 million and create a \$5.3 million fund for Quebec's English-speaking communities.

The QCGN was English-speaking Quebec's principle contributor to the Parliamentary inquiries related to modernizing the Official Languages Act and worked successfully with Treasury Board on updating the Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations.

The QCGN intervened effectively in the *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, showing solidarity with Francophone minority organizations in calling for abroad and generous interpretation of Section 23. The majority ruling of the court is a sounding reaffirmation of the rights of official language minority communities across Canada to receive education in their own language.

QCGN continues to work closely with key institutions like Industry Canada, Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada and other key Action Plan players to ensure the strategy's effectiveness.

Provincial Initiatives:

Provincially, the QCGN spearheaded the setting up of the Secretariat for relations with English-speaking Quebecers. Our first-ever Minister Responsible for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, congratulated the QCGN on its perseverance in demanding a structure within government responsible for the needs and priorities of English-speaking Quebecers. QCGN and our members have been key players in helping the Secretariat and Minister embark on an ambitious strategy to support our community.

QCGN worked with the Minister and the Ministry of Health and Social Services during and after the passage of *Bill 10, An Act to modify the organization and governance of the health and social services network, in particular by abolishing the regional agencies* to protect community management and control of our health and social service institutions. After months of intense and delicate negotiations the community obtained some significant changes to Bill 10 that preserved many of our institutions despite the loss of their individual board of directors as well as change that ensure the participation and engagement of English-speaking Quebecers to ensure the health and social service network is responsive to the needs of our communities.

QCGN continues to play a lead role in the protection of the English-speaking community's Constitutional right to manage its minority language educational institutions. We spoke out effectively against Bill 86 which was scrapped by the Liberal government in 2016. QCGN is also a founding member of a community-based coalition (APPELE-Québec) a province-wide alliance of community partners and educational stakeholders which is fighting *Bill 40, An Act to amend mainly the Education Act with regard to school organization and governance*. The legislation that was rammed through the National Assembly in February 2020 abolishes school boards across and replaces them with service centres.

The QCGN continues to oppose the Quebec government's controversial secularism legislation that was passed when Bill 21, An Act Respecting the laicity of the State become law. The QCGN co-sponsored polling to indicate the vast majority of our communities is opposed to the legislation that prohibits public-sector employees in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols at work and that they believe the bill's provisions violate the Quebec Charter of Rights. QCGN will be among those intervening in the court case when it is heard this fall.

Current Reality

Larger and more established than Francophone communities elsewhere in Canada, and having built and supported its own institutional infrastructure making a significant contribution to the development of the province, Quebec's English-speaking community did not feel as vulnerable 50 years ago as it does today.

Government after government, regardless of political stripe, have sponsored policies and programs that have reduced services in English and weakened our community's institutional framework. The agenda of the current Quebec government is particularly troubling. Legislative and policy initiatives in immigration, education, secularism, health services and language are having a negative impact. A coordinated, effective response is critical.

The QCGN has been asked by the Government of Quebec to provide input into anticipated changes to the Charter of the French Language and is awaiting the upcoming renewal of language policy. Based on experiences with this and previous government, it is anticipated negative impacts on English-speaking Quebecers and the institutions that serve us. Our community must have the capacity to meet this fight head on.

Time for Renewal

The leadership expectations placed upon the organization are fundamentally different than those during our early years. We deal with the federal apparatus having a legal framework for linguistic minority communities along with provincial ministries and agencies that are at times hostile to our community in complex policy areas – in an ever changing intergovernmental environment. And because English-speaking Quebec has significant policy gaps in some areas, it is often left to the QCGN to 'fill in the gaps'.

Circumstances require an organization that knows its community and has the policy and communications capacity to respond quickly and accurately to challenges. It also requires an organization that is backed by the community it serves. An organization without this is not representative of the community it purports to serve.

Through what we are calling QCGN 2.0, we are determined to reshape our organization into an effective community advocate that is able to meet the challenges we face head on while simultaneously continuing to collaborate with individuals and organizations across Quebec to identify priorities as well as strategies and resources to address them.

To inform its work, our Renewal Committee will be overseeing a community consultation that will include conversations with community leaders, focus groups, and surveys. This briefing note is designed to provide a framework for this dialogue.

Questions

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

1. A perennial challenge is defining membership in Quebec's English-speaking community.
 - I. Please provide your views on the composition of the community *i. Do you believe the community has the capacity to speak with one voice?*
 - II. *What issues are you most preoccupied or concerned with?*
 - III. *Would you consider that these are broadly perceived to be issues of concern to members of the English-speaking community?*

2. Please describe or comment on your perceptions of the current political and social context facing Quebec's English-speaking community. Please comment on legislation and public policy issues currently affecting the English-speaking community?
 - I. *Health and Social Services, School boards (Bill 40), Quebec's secularism law (Bill 21), toughening of language laws (Bill 101 Charter of the French Language), etc.*

3. How would you describe the vitality of Quebec's English-speaking community?
 - I. *Please describe what you think vitality of the English-speaking community should look like*
 - II. *What measures you recommend should be undertaken to ensure its vitality?*

THE REQUIRED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

4. Should there be an authoritative voice that speaks on behalf of English-speaking Quebec when issues arise that effect our rights as a linguistic minority?

5. What mechanisms should be in place to ensure collaboration with community groups and leadership?

6. The mission of the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) is to be a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action on the strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec.
 - I. *Is this mission still valid?*
 - II. *If not, how would you tweak it?*

7. What are the specific roles the QCGN should pursue in ensuring the vitality of the English-speaking community?

8. Should the QCGN be playing a more active role in the provincial arena?

THE FUTURE

9. What do you think will be the greatest challenges to the vitality of the English-speaking community over the next 10 years?

10. How do you see community organizations, including QCGN, evolving to address these challenges?