



Office of the
Commissioner of
Official Languages

Commissariat
aux langues
officielles

BILINGUAL GREETINGS

IN FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS: LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

July 2016



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PREFACE

Active offer—greeting the public in both official languages with “Hello! Bonjour!” or “Bonjour! Hello!” for example—is a crucial yet poorly understood obligation prescribed by the *Official Languages Act*. A bilingual greeting unequivocally informs people at first contact that they have the right to use the official language of their choice at federal offices that are required to provide services in English and French.

Without active offer, the interaction between the federal institution and the client starts off on the wrong foot, which has an impact on service delivery in the official language of the client’s choice. Clients who are not immediately offered service in their preferred language may assume that service is not available in that language or that if it is available, asking for it may cause delays or embarrassment. Some people are intimidated by having to ask for service in their preferred language when it is crowded or when the employee seems to be very busy. However, despite attempts to rectify the situation, a number of institutions still have problems in terms of active offer. Year in and year out, my office sees federal institutions struggling to provide an active offer routinely and consistently in situations where they are in direct contact with the public.

A number of federal institutions have already taken measures to resolve the problem. In some cases, these measures have been effective. In others, the effect has been temporary or not noticeable. In light of this situation, my office wanted to determine whether certain factors, such as human or environmental factors, contribute to problems regarding the provision of active offer. This study explores the work environments, individual mindedness and beliefs that can help ensure a successful active offer or result in an inadequate one. Several federal institutions participated in the study, and I would like to thank them for their valuable contribution. The study would not have been possible without their very active involvement.

What we discovered through consultations with employees of these institutions proved to be very instructive. Front-line employees have many misperceptions about active offer. Some believe that all clients are aware that services are available in both official languages. They think that it is therefore unnecessary to make an active offer. Others assume that most Francophones prefer to deal with federal

institutions in English (or in French for Anglophones in Quebec) or that the language spoken by the client in line is the same one he or she would want to use with the government employee. As a result, despite the corrective measures taken by institutions to discourage this kind of behaviour, it will probably continue to happen until these misperceptions are addressed.

Many employees that were consulted were not aware of how the absence of an active offer affects the client, believing that those who wish to be served in a particular language have only to ask. It is therefore just as important to make employees aware of the negative effects that the absence of an active offer may have on the client. Putting the onus on clients to request service in their preferred official language tells them that they cannot assume that their language rights will be respected. This sends the message that the majority language is the default language, even though both official languages have equal status in situations where bilingual service is required. Clients who have to state—or even reiterate—their wish to be served in their preferred official language can feel like second-class citizens.

This study does not contain administrative or operational recommendations to help rectify the situation. Federal institutions already have a number of tools to resolve their problems in terms of active offer. However, if the measures they take do not include consideration of their employees’ misperceptions, the measures may have little impact. I therefore encourage institutions to take a different approach—one that focuses on employees’ first-hand experiences. For example, training should directly address any misperceptions that employees may have.

This year, my office will be producing communications tools to correct misperceptions and to supplement those already developed by departments and shared by the Council of the Network of Official Languages Champions. However, we encourage federal institutions to address the problem immediately from a broader perspective that takes into account the human aspects of front-line service from the point of view of the employee and from the point of view that the client can have.



Graham Fraser

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT

Part IV of the *Official Languages Act* requires that members of the public be served in the official language of their choice when dealing with the Government of Canada and its institutions in offices and locations specified by the Act and its Regulations. Federal government offices or facilities that are designated as bilingual must provide services in both official languages. In order to ensure that clients are informed that services are available in both official languages, the Act also states that an active offer must be made.

In-person active offer means using a bilingual greeting—e.g., “Hello! Bonjour!” or “Bonjour! Hello!” or other similar greeting—when initiating face to face communication. This type of greeting clearly indicates to walk-in clients that services are available in both official languages. In addition to providing an in-person active offer, federal institutions¹ that are required to deliver bilingual services must also provide an active offer over the telephone, on recorded messages, on Web site welcome pages and on signs and notices.²

Over a number of years, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has noted recurring lapses with regard to in-person active offer among front-line employees at several federal institutions,³ even in cases where bilingual services were available. Many tools (e.g., videos, pins, stickers, self-assessment tests, posters and brochures) are available in federal institutions to inform employees of this obligation or to help them make an active offer. Yet problems persist in spite of the availability of these tools. Hypothesizing that misperceptions or various individual, organizational and social factors might be involved in the lack of active offer where it is required, the Office of the Commissioner decided to study the factors and conditions that help or hinder the provision of active offer.

1.2. THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to better understand employees’ perspectives on the individual, organizational or social factors that influence whether an active offer is made. For example, these factors may relate to the individual interactions between front-line employees and clients, to organizational processes, structures or cultures, or to the linguistic makeup and dynamics of the communities in which federal offices are located.

The study focused specifically on the moment when an active offer must be made, i.e., the moment of first contact with the client. It did not examine the issue of the availability or quality of bilingual services.

The Office of the Commissioner contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. to conduct this study in the winter of 2015 to help determine the factors that influence in-person active offer of service in both official languages. The results of the study will help to develop strategies to address these factors and to improve the overall situation.

This study was conducted based on qualitative lines of evidence. Specifically, six focus groups with front-line employees, four focus groups with supervisors and twelve interviews with executives were held as part of this study. The study methodology can be found at the end of this report.

Employees from the following 11 federal institutions participated in the study:

- Canada Border Services Agency
- Canada Revenue Agency
- Canadian Museum of History
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- Correctional Service Canada
- National Arts Centre
- Public Works and Government Services Canada
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Service Canada
- Veterans Affairs Canada
- VIA Rail Canada Inc.

This report summarizes the study findings and presents the conclusions.

1 In this report, the term “federal institutions” is used to designate federal institutions and organizations that are subject to the *Official Languages Act*. Because most of the activities involving these institutions and described in this report took place before the change of government on November 4, 2015, the names used in this report are those that were in effect before that date.

2 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, *Information for offices and facilities of the Government of Canada that must provide services to Canadians in both official languages*, 2012. On-line version (www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/psm-fpfm/ve/ol-lo/olcsp-locsp/bob-eng.asp) accessed June 1, 2016.

3 Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, *Annual Report 2012–2013*, Ottawa, 2013. On-line version (www.officiallanguages.gc.ca/en/publications/annual_reports/2012-2013) accessed June 1, 2016.

1.3. SCOPE

The study was qualitative in nature and based on a relatively small sample of institutions and employees. To minimize potential bias due to self-selection,⁴ it was foreseen that federal institutions participating in the study would provide a list of front-line personnel, regardless of the interest of individual employees in participating or their apparent commitment to the active offer obligation. From these lists, Malatest was to select names of participants to be contacted. However, in some instances, institutions both selected and recruited participants. Because the selection of participants may not have been done randomly and participation was voluntary, the possibility of sampling biases cannot be ruled out. More detail on the methodology is provided in an appendix.

As a result, this study is not meant to be an assessment of the state of active offer in the federal government or in any of the institutions involved in the study. No conclusions can be drawn about the relative prevalence of a particular issue or perception regarding active offer. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to all front-line employees in federal institutions but should be considered as indications of how some experience or perceive active offer. Rather, the findings of this study will help the Office of the Commissioner and the federal institutions better target their messages and interventions regarding active offer.

1.4. WORD OF CAUTION

The Office of the Commissioner cautions the reader that the findings revealed misperceptions about the Act and the active offer obligation. The study points to the need to counter these and provides alternative messages that are consistent with the Act.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING IN-PERSON ACTIVE OFFER

The results of the focus groups and interviews suggest that most of the employees, supervisors and executives who were consulted agree with the need for active offer and understand its importance. They appeared to have little objection or resistance to complying with active offer requirements. Although study participants did share anecdotes of some front-line employees refusing to provide an active offer based on personal beliefs, they did not think that this type of behaviour was widespread. While disagreement with the obligation was present in some cases, the study found that a combination of other factors likely constitutes a greater barrier to active offer for front-line employees.

In the opinion of many study participants, providing an in-person active offer is actually simple: just an extra word when greeting the client for the first time (“Hello! Bonjour!” or “Bonjour! Hello!”). However, for some front-line employees, a number of factors influence the systematic use of active offer. The study found that these are related mainly to awareness of the specifics of the obligation, mistaken assumptions about the obligation or about requests for service, and conditions of the work environment. These are discussed in sections 2.1. and 2.2.

2.1. AWARENESS OF OBLIGATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

The study revealed that one of the most significant barriers to overcome may be an incomplete understanding of the obligations related to active offer. Other important challenges are employees’ assumptions that they know which official language the client prefers or that the client knows that bilingual services are available. The fact that employees are not aware of the active offer obligation may point to insufficient training or communications. However, training in and of itself may not be the reason employees make a conscious decision—based on misguided assumptions about the client or the situation—not to make an active offer. These types of situations suggest a need for improved training overall and ongoing communications that can discourage assumptions. These factors are discussed further in sections 2.1.1. through 2.1.4.

⁴ A self-selection bias is present when participants volunteer for a study. These participants may be more eager than others regarding the issue being discussed and may not be representative of the overall population.

2.1.1. INCOMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTIVE OFFER OBLIGATION

The study findings revealed that awareness and understanding of in-person active offer is fundamental in ensuring that clients' language rights are respected. If employees do not know about active offer and its requirements, they cannot make it. Based on the focus group and interview results, there seems to be a good general awareness of the existence of the obligation. However, although all study participants understood that bilingual services must be provided, some were not aware that they were required under the Act to greet clients in both official languages at all times.

The level of awareness about active offer seems to be related to the work environment and the type of service provided (discussed in more detail in section 2.2.). For example, awareness is particularly high among front-line employees and supervisors in bilingual regions and among those who work at service counters. A clear finding of this study was that the volume of official-language minority clients has an impact on the awareness of active offer. While this was true for most study participants, there were some exceptions: for example, a front-line employee in British Columbia reported being very aware of the active offer obligation, despite the fact that there are few client requests for service in French in that province.

2.1.2. TRAINING AND COMMUNICATIONS IMPORTANT FOR COMPLIANCE

Most of the front-line employees and supervisors who were consulted were aware of the active offer obligation. However, those who work in specific environments seemed to be more aware of the details of the obligation. This heightened awareness could be partly the result of the extent of training and communications delivered in that environment.

The study results suggest that approaches to active offer training and communications vary by the type of service provided. For example, focus group participants who work at service counters said that learning about active offer was an integral part of their job training. Many executives who were interviewed also said that the topic of active offer was covered comprehensively during staff training. A few front-line employees and executives said that certain videos about active offer were an important part of training. Videos depicting the human side of active offer and focusing on respecting rights were cited as being particularly effective, as opposed to those quoting policy and stressing legal obligations. A few executives noted that these videos helped to foster understanding and cooperation among front-line staff by shifting the focus from *what* active offer requires them to do to *why* they should do it. Study

participants from institutions that provide other types of services described less targeted training, such as simply being told what they were required to do to meet the obligation.

Monitoring active offer also varies by type of service. Some study participants said that their performance in terms of active offer is integrated into service standards and performance reviews. Others were provided with less dynamic tools such as periodic e-mail reminders.

Training and communications can also be provided through individual feedback. An important way to assess whether training and communications have been effective is to monitor interactions between front-line employees and clients. Some institutions conduct regular monitoring activities. In many offices, monitoring is systematic and viewed as an institutional accountability measure. Some institutions have addressed the situation proactively to reduce the likelihood of complaints. In other institutions, the benefits and importance of monitoring are acknowledged, but resources to monitor front-line staff are limited.

Following up with front-line employees to discuss the results of monitoring is also a measure that has been taken by many of the institutions that participated in the study. In-person discussions and consistent reminders are important to raise awareness and to help employees develop the habit of greeting clients in both official languages.

2.1.3. ASSUMPTIONS THAT CLIENTS ARE AWARE OF BILINGUAL SERVICES

Active offer lets clients know that services in both official languages are available, because many may not be aware of this. Not all front-line employees or supervisors understand this. The study results show that some assume that clients are aware of the availability of services in both official languages. Some focus group participants mentioned that the availability of bilingual services is evident through signage in government offices as well as through Web sites and other communications.

Some study participants disagreed with this assumption, noting that signage often goes unnoticed and that clients are often surprised that in-person bilingual services are available. This situation is particularly common in locations with a smaller official-language minority population, such as the Western regions, but is also found in bilingual areas such as the National Capital Region.

This assumption about clients' awareness of bilingual services contributes to another misperception that active offer is not always necessary. However, the extent to which these assumptions influence the decision to make an active offer remains unclear.

2.1.4. PREFERRED OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OFTEN ASSUMED

Some study participants said they felt that they could sometimes make assumptions regarding the client's official language preference based on various indications. This occurs mainly when clients are known or when they are heard speaking prior to being greeted by the front-line employee. Making assumptions about the client's preferred official language can be a significant impediment to active offer.

This was frequently mentioned during focus groups and interviews, especially by employees working in smaller communities where clients are known or in service areas where there are several meetings with the client (e.g., immigration). In both instances, employees felt that they had to make a choice between meeting the active offer obligation and providing a more personalized service. Employees feel that if the client is already known, the bilingual greeting may feel awkward and impersonal. Supervisors mentioned that in these cases, an active offer is usually not made.

The other factor that can lead to an employee's making assumptions about the client's official language preference is overhearing the client speak prior to first contact or hearing the client speak before an active offer can be made.

In both instances, the executives who were interviewed noted that these assumptions should be discouraged, because the language the client speaks to someone else or to the employee may not be their preferred language or the language in which they wish to be served. It was noted that perhaps the person the client is speaking to is unilingual or perhaps they prefer to communicate with each other in a certain language. In cases where the client addresses the employee first, the client may not be aware that services are available in both official languages and therefore uses the majority official language. As stated by the executives who were interviewed, when front-line employees make assumptions about clients' official language preferences—regardless of whether their assumptions are correct—client rights are infringed because the choice guaranteed by the active offer obligation is not provided.

2.2. WORK ENVIRONMENT

The study findings revealed that the work environment may play an important role in successfully establishing the habit among front-line employees of greeting clients in both official languages. Daily work conditions can either help or hinder active offer. Favourable conditions tend to be found in bilingual offices in which the minority language is often used among colleagues and with clients. Conditions that can hinder active offer include limited engagement from leadership, a low frequency of requests for services in the minority official language, a high volume of clients, the scheduling structure and the office's bilingual capacity. These issues are summarized in sections 2.2.1. through 2.2.5.

2.2.1. POSITIVE IMPACT OF ENGAGED LEADERSHIP

Leadership has a considerable impact on workplace culture. By influencing policies, tools and mechanisms, leadership determines the way an institution functions. Compliance with the in-person active offer obligation is no exception. As suggested by some executives, if a leader makes active offer a priority, the institution is in a better position to resolve issues and to establish measures and mechanisms to help front-line employees develop the habit of greeting clients in both official languages.

The study results suggest that institutional leader engagement varies when it comes to active offer. Not all executives who were interviewed said that active offer was on the agenda for executive level meetings. Those who did specified that discussions focused mainly on addressing complaints as opposed to developing systematic approaches to support clients' language rights. One executive, however, spoke of a director who was extremely engaged and who made active offer a priority in institutional service standards. This approach had a positive impact on awareness, attitudes and resulting compliance among front-line employees. The executives who were interviewed noted that if active offer is not a priority at the executive level, then efforts involving in-person active offer tend to decline, which then affects awareness and compliance.

2.2.2. ACTIVE OFFER CHALLENGES IN AREAS WITH SMALLER OFFICIAL-LANGUAGE MINORITY POPULATIONS

Study participants felt that they were influenced by the presence of the minority official language, or the relative lack thereof, in the public space in their communities. The frequency of requests in the minority language tends to be linked to the location of the service. In offices that receive fewer requests, employees tend to forget that active offer is still a requirement.

According to study participants, the smaller number of requests for service is one of the main reasons some front-line employees do not make an active offer. The level of demand and, more importantly, contact with members of the official-language minority population (who are usually bilingual) sometimes causes certain employees to doubt the need for systematic active offer.

In regional offices, employees find it difficult to develop or maintain the habit of greeting clients in both official languages. Supervisors and executives in these regions noted the challenge of constantly having to remind their front-line staff to make an in-person active offer.

Study participants in regions where there are fewer requests for services in the minority official language do not oppose the provision of bilingual services; however, some expressed the opinion that active offer was not necessary in all situations and felt that there should be more flexibility in how and when an active offer needs to be made.

Fewer active offer-related issues were mentioned by front-line employees, supervisors and executives working in regions with a higher proportion of official-language minority clients or in offices with a bilingual work environment. These two factors are interrelated. For example, because service providers in the National Capital Region receive requests in French more frequently, the proportion of bilingual employees is higher and the work environment tends to be more bilingual. Active offer is easier to maintain when providing services in English and French on a daily basis. Providing services in a generally bilingual environment makes it easier to get into the habit of making an in-person active offer.

2.2.3. LARGE VOLUME OF CLIENTS CAN RESULT IN FORGETTING ACTIVE OFFER

If something has not become a habit, it can be easily forgotten, particularly in moments of stress. The same is true for something as seemingly simple as the bilingual greeting that is required to comply with the in-person active offer obligation. In cases where front-line employees must serve a large volume of clients, where they are facing pressure to maintain prompt service or where they are just feeling overwhelmed, active offer can be easily forgotten.

Study participants felt that the issue can be exacerbated in security-related situations. For example, border services officers and correctional service officers said that they were less likely to make an active offer if there was a risk of a security breach.

2.2.4. STAFF SCHEDULING CAN AFFECT AWARENESS AND BILINGUAL CAPACITY

Another issue mentioned by study participants was the rotation of staff in front-line positions. In some institutions, a large pool of front-line employees rotate positions and work shifts. There is a core group of employees who regularly fill positions in which they are the first point of contact for clients.

In some cases, however, employees with less experience must step in. These employees are sometimes less aware of the active offer obligation and do not regularly greet the public in both official languages.

Creating the necessary awareness is therefore a challenge in a workplace where employees rotate positions and work shifts. Employees who work weekends and night shifts may not be able to learn from more experienced colleagues or have direct contact with their supervisors. In-person discussions and reminders to make an active offer are difficult when staff and supervisors are working at different times. In these environments, managers are faced with the challenge of effecting change in their workforce when they see their personnel only a small proportion at a time during their work hours.

2.2.5. BILINGUAL CAPACITY IMPORTANT TO EMPLOYEES

As mentioned by the study participants, complying with the active offer obligation appears to be simple. It is only an extra word in the initial greeting to clients. However, for some employees, the extent of their own ability to provide service in both official languages has a major impact on whether they will make an active offer.

Some unilingual front-line employees do not feel comfortable about being able to continue serving the client if the minority official language is requested and may then decide not to make an active offer.

Furthermore, in some government offices, it can be a challenge to locate a bilingual employee to provide service to the client. This can happen even in offices that are designated as bilingual when bilingual employees are not available or on site.

When no one at the office can provide service in the client's preferred official language, bilingual employees from other offices must be located in order to serve the client. A number of supervisors from the focus groups reported having to call several offices before finding someone able to provide service in the minority official language. Some supervisors noted that there was a central

telephone number or a list of numbers to call. Others reported that lists were often out of date because of employee turnover. Many focus group participants said that this affects the quality of service: what would normally take only a few minutes takes much longer. A few participants said that clients who speak both official languages will often waive their language rights in order to avoid a longer wait.

The issue of bilingual capacity is important on many levels. In an office with little or no bilingual capacity, many front-line staff feel uncomfortable making an active offer. This is also a result of their level of comfort with the second official language.

Front-line employees may feel reluctant to make an active offer when they fear that they will not be able to understand the client in the minority official language and will have to convey that they cannot provide the service themselves and need to locate someone to provide service in the client's preferred language. Avoiding active offer can also be the result of a negative experience in which a client expressed dissatisfaction with an employee's language skills.

Focus group participants often discussed language training not only as a means to improve second-language skills and raise comfort levels, but also as a way to increase the number of employees who are comfortable making an active offer and the number of bilingual employees who can provide service of equal quality in both official languages.

Budget limitations were reported to be the primary barrier to language training for some institutions. Coordinating training was also said to be challenging. Because of the nature of the work, it is difficult for some offices to allow employees to take language training during office hours. On-line training is sometimes seen as a practical option but is not always the most effective approach. Practising out loud is important for developing oral skills in a second language, and on-line training is not the best way to develop these skills.

In cases where training is not possible, some front-line employees become frustrated that they must make an active offer but are not given the opportunity to develop the necessary language skills. They are also frustrated with the overall lack of organizational support.

3. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Study participants identified internal and external factors—relative to front-line employees—that have an impact on in-person active offer in both official languages.

3.1.1. INTERNAL FACTORS: AWARENESS OF OBLIGATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

Internal factors include issues related to awareness and assumptions:

- Awareness of the active offer obligation
- Assuming clients are aware of the availability of bilingual services
- Assuming clients' official language of preference

Although some of the issues concerning awareness and assumptions are interpersonal (i.e., choices made by front-line staff about how to approach a client), measures to raise awareness and limit assumptions can be established by the institution. Training and ongoing communications are important to raise awareness and improve understanding of the complexities and sensitivities related to official languages and bilingualism. In particular, messages should explain why active offer is important, and then give specific details of what is required. Taking these steps can help to dispel assumptions and ensure that clients' language rights are respected.

3.1.2. EXTERNAL FACTORS IN WORK ENVIRONMENT

External factors include organizational issues related to the work environment:

- Leadership
- Frequency at which services are requested in the minority language
- Volume of clients
- Staff scheduling
- Bilingual capacity

Workplace conditions are usually beyond the control of the front-line employee. Nevertheless, they play an important role in helping front-line employees in—or hindering them from—successfully developing the habit of greeting clients in both official languages. In theory, an in-person active offer is a simple action: an extra word in the initial greeting to clients (“Hello! Bonjour!” or “Bonjour! Hello!”). The study found that in practice, although employees are aware of the obligation, there are significant workplace barriers to making an active offer consistently.

3.2. CONCLUSIONS

In spite of its small sample size and other methodological limitations (such as the possibility of a self-selection bias), the study showed that workplace factors and an incomplete understanding of the active offer obligation may have a negative impact on the decision to make an active offer.

Several mistaken assumptions were revealed, the most important of which was that all clients are aware that bilingual services are available and will request them if they wish to obtain them. Many study participants were not aware that this assumption and the resulting failure to make an active offer were contrary to the letter and spirit of the Act.

These findings suggest that communications regarding the issue of active offer must focus directly on these assumptions and specifically address the various situations encountered by employees in front-line positions. Using examples of real situations experienced by staff may prove to be more effective than expounding general principles. Other findings from this study suggest that taking a legalistic or obligations-based approach when training staff is not as effective as focusing on the client experience and on service standards.

APPENDIX: STUDY METHODOLOGY

Interviews and focus groups were conducted across Canada by teleconference with individuals employed by the federal institutions participating in the study. Six focus groups with front-line employees, four focus groups with supervisors and twelve interviews with executives were held as part of this study.

The objective of the focus groups was to better understand, through employees' and supervisors' own perspectives, the factors that help or hinder in-person active offer. The objective of the interviews was to discuss the results of the focus groups, identify issues from the executives' perspective and discuss possible solutions. The research tools, including moderator guides and an interview guide, are available upon request.

The following tasks were completed during the focus groups and interviews.

DETERMINED FOCUS GROUP COMPOSITION

To form the sample database, participating institutions were asked to each provide a list of 20 to 30 potential participants regardless of the interest of individual employees in participating or their apparent commitment to the active offer obligation. The database was reviewed by Malatest to determine the most appropriate focus-group composition that would help ensure sufficient representation by institution, region and language preference. Practical factors were also considered. Because of the difficulties in scheduling convenient times for a focus group with participants from across Canada and in ensuring fair representation of French-speaking employees within cross-Canada groups, focus groups were composed of participants from the same region and included representation from as many institutions as possible. Tables 1 and 2 show the composition of the focus groups by region and language.

Table 1 – Front-Line Employee Focus Groups

Group	Language of Discussions	Anticipated Number of Participants
East	FR	6
Quebec	FR	6
Ontario	FR	6
	EN	6
West	EN	6
Canada Revenue Agency*	EN/FR	6

*Canada Revenue Agency no longer provides in-person services to the public but nevertheless has considerable insight to offer on the issue of active offer. The Agency's group included former front-line staff as well as managers and individuals responsible for official languages. Results from this group provide insight from both the front-line and the supervisory perspective and are used to support findings from both lines of evidence.

Table 2 – Supervisor Focus Groups

Group	Language of Discussions	Anticipated Number of Participants
East	EN	6
Quebec	FR	6
Ontario	EN	6
West	EN	6

IDENTIFIED CANDIDATES FOR EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

Institutions that participated in the study were asked to provide a list of potential key executives to interview. The lists were reviewed to determine the most appropriate interview respondents (i.e., those knowledgeable about official languages issues in general and within their institutions). With a maximum set at twelve interviews, the objective was to conduct one interview per institution (excluding the Canada Revenue Agency) and have two additional interviews available for cases where two knowledgeable executives were available.

REVIEWED AND FINALIZED DATA COLLECTION GUIDES

The Office of the Commissioner drafted a moderator guide for focus groups with front-line employees. Malatest reviewed the guide and suggested some modifications, particularly with respect to instructions to participants about confidentiality and the functioning of the focus group. The guide explores awareness of the in-person active offer obligation, perceptions of active offer and participants' experience with it.

Following the focus groups with front-line staff, the Office of the Commissioner revised the moderator guide to better align it with the objectives of the supervisor groups.

As with front-line employee groups, the discussions with supervisors explored issues of awareness and perceptions of the in-person active offer obligation. They also focused on issues related to supervisors' perspectives on making an active offer and explored the challenges supervisors face in ensuring that their front-line employees meet the obligation.

The Office of the Commissioner drafted an interview guide to facilitate assessing the results of the focus groups, discussing issues faced at a higher level and developing possible solutions.

RECRUITED FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Focus group participants were recruited mainly by e-mail.

Malatest informed potential participants of the focus groups through a bilingual e-mail invitation developed by the Office of the Commissioner. The purpose of the invitation was to confirm interest in participating in the focus group, to provide the date and time of the group and to confirm availability. Potential participants were also asked to confirm the language in which they would like to participate. Employees whose preferred language corresponded to the language of their region's focus group(s) were selected to participate.⁵ They were then sent a confirmation e-mail that provided the teleconference information to call into the focus group. Each participant was contacted by telephone the day before their focus group to confirm attendance.

A sufficient number of front-line employees agreed to participate in the focus groups. About ten were confirmed for each group, with the expectation that at least six would call into the teleconference. The exception was the Ontario French-language focus group, in which only three employees agreed to participate. Nevertheless, Francophone participation overall slightly exceeded Anglophone participation.

Table 3 shows the number of employees in the sample by region. Included are the numbers of employees who were invited, who accepted, who confirmed and who participated.

⁵ The sample database included the language preference for some of the potential participants. The initial invitation was sent not only to all employees with a language preference corresponding to the focus group language, but also to those whose language preference was unknown.

Table 3 – Participation of Front-Line Employees by Region

Group	Language	Objective	Sample	Number Invited	Number Accepted	Number Confirmed	Number Participated
East	FR	6	47	37	13	10	7
Quebec	FR	6	50	44	15	10	10
Ontario	FR	6	81	67	14	3	3
	EN	6				9	8
West	EN	6	62	54	13	11	8
Canada Revenue Agency	EN/FR	6	8	8	5	5	4
Total		36	248	210	60	48	40

Efforts were made wherever possible to ensure representation from all institutions or at least include participants from institutions with similar mandates. Table 4 shows front-line employee participation by institution group.

Table 4 – Participation of Front-Line Employees by Institution Group

Grouping	Institution	Sample	Number Invited	Number Accepted	Number Confirmed	Number Participated
1	Canada Border Services Agency Correctional Service Canada Royal Canadian Mounted Police	90	76	21	17	13
2	Public Works and Government Services Canada Service Canada Veterans Affairs Canada	53	52	20	14	13
3	Canadian Museum of History National Art Centre	35	21	2	2	2
4	Citizenship and Immigration Canada VIA Rail Canada Inc.	62	53	12	10	8
5	Canada Revenue Agency	8	8	5	5	4
Total		248	210	60	48	40

The sample contained fewer supervisors than front-line staff. Although a sufficient number of supervisors agreed to participate in most of the focus groups, there were fewer than would have been ideal to ensure a minimum of six participants per group. All who accepted the invitation were selected and confirmed; however, fewer actually participated in the discussion.

Table 5 shows the number of supervisors in the sample by region. Included are the numbers of supervisors who were invited, who accepted, who confirmed and who participated.

Table 5 – Participation of Supervisors by Region

Group	Language	Objective	Sample	Number Invited	Number Accepted	Number Confirmed	Number Participated
East	FR	6	19	19	5	5	4
Quebec	FR	6	12	12	7	7	4
Ontario	EN	6	36	31	7	7	4
West	EN	6	32	32	7	7	6
TOTAL		36	99	94	26	26	18

RECRUITED EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Key executives were recruited by telephone. Although potential participants were not sent an invitation letter prior to being contacted by telephone, most were already aware of the study and were prepared to be interviewed. Twelve executives were recruited, and interviews were scheduled for dates and times most convenient for them. Table 6 shows the number of participants by institution.

Table 6 – Participation of Executives by Institution

Institution	Number of Interviews
Canada Border Services Agency	1
Canadian Museum of History	1
Citizenship and Immigration Canada	1
Correctional Service Canada	2
National Arts Centre	1
Public Works and Government Services Canada	2
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	1
Service Canada	1
Veterans Affairs Canada	1
VIA Rail Canada Inc.	1
TOTAL	12

CONDUCTED FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

Qualitative researchers from Malatest hosted the focus groups by teleconference. They led the discussions with the participants and ensured that everyone had the opportunity to provide an opinion on the topics discussed. Discussions followed the moderator guide developed for the focus groups. All focus group sessions were audio recorded.

The interviews were conducted by telephone. Discussions followed the guide developed for the interviews and allowed some flexibility for participants to discuss active offer-related issues that were important to them.

ANALYZED STUDY DATA

The qualitative data collected through the focus groups and interviews was summarized and analyzed. During the analyses, the content of each session was identified and systematically sorted to identify emergent themes. Separate technical reports outlining the methodology and the findings from each line of evidence were developed.