



# Brief

2020 FEDERAL PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION  
TOWNSHIPERS' ASSOCIATION



*2020 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and to Elisabeth Brière, Sherbrooke M.P.*

## **Introduction**

For 40 years Townshippers' Association has been at the forefront of community engagement, pursuing its mission to promote the interests of the English-speaking community in Quebec's historical Eastern Townships, strengthen its cultural identity, and encourage the full participation of the English-speaking population in the community at large. We work on behalf of over 40, 000 English-speakers who are spread across a region that is larger than Belgium in its geography; stretching from Philipsburg in the west to Megantic in the east, and from Inverness in the north to the U.S. border in the south.

This brief will provide essential information regarding factors affecting Official Language Minority Community vitality; recent statistics describing the situation of English-speakers in the Historical Eastern Townships (HET); and conclude with recommendations for consideration in the development of a new federal budget.

## **Vitality for Official Language Minority Communities**

Group vitality is the lens through which the different variables that impact the resiliency of individual language communities negotiating multilingual environments are examined (Bourhis and Landry 2012). If there are mechanisms in place that enable an Official Language Minority Community to strengthen its overall vitality their ability to maintain themselves and flourish as a collective body in an intergroup context will also increase. Likewise, language communities void of vitality will inevitably face extinction within the intergroup context (Bourhis and Landry 2012; Jedwab 2012).

Important factors contributing to vitality include the presence of an environment offering the possibility of receiving an education in and having access to recreational and cultural activities in the official minority language (Canadian Heritage 2013). The presence of institutions and an active offer of services available in the official minority language along with the possibility of participating in the economic and social expansion of the community are also integral to building and sustaining OLM community vitality (Canadian Heritage 2013). Relationships with the majority leading to support and cooperation between the two official language groups, recognition and respect for language rights, and influence and authority within the majority institutions are also of tremendous importance (Canadian Heritage 2013).



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## **Demographic and socio-economic trends among English-speakers in the Historical Eastern Townships**

The Historical Eastern Townships is home to approximately 40 000 individuals who identify their first official language spoken (FOLS) as English (JPocock 2018). Youth retention continues to challenge the renewal and vitality of our communities; the proportion of English-speakers aged 45 and up outweighs the proportion of those 0-44 (52.5% to 47.6% respectively) (JPocock 2018).

In 2016, just over half (53.2%) of English-speakers in the historical Eastern Townships held a high school certificate or less and their tendency to have a low income was elevated (40%) when compared to French-speakers (32.9%) in the region (JPocock 2018). Levels of unemployment were also higher among English-speakers (7.1%) in the HET when compared to their French-speaking counterparts (6%) (JPocock 2018). Provincially in 2016, 38.5% of English-speakers found themselves in a low-income bracket compared to 31.8% of the majority community. Low income is higher among English-speakers living in the Historical Eastern Townships (40% vs. 32.9%); the percentage of English-speakers in the HET who earn more 50K or more per year also falls below that of French-speakers in the same region (18.9% vs. 23.5%) (JPocock 2018).

In September 2016, the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de l'Estrie – Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke's (CIUSSSE-CHUS) Direction de santé publique (DSP) published a report citing data collected through the 2012 Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (QSCDK) measuring the proportion of vulnerable children in various areas of development. The 2016 DSP Estrie report showed that children in Estrie whose mother tongue is English are proportionately more likely to display a vulnerability in every stage of their development than children who have French as a mother tongue (CIUSSSE-CHUS 2016). In fact, the proportion of English-speaking children in Estrie identified by the region's public health institution as vulnerable is greater than that of their counterparts in the rest of the province in every stage of development (CIUSSSE-CHUS 2016). The proportion of schools tagged as disadvantaged in the Eastern Townships School Board is comparable to schools throughout Québec (31%) however, the attendance of childcare service before school is markedly lower for children enrolled in the ETSB (32.8%) than in both provincially (80.9%) and in the French school boards in the region (between 73.3 and 88.6%) (CIUSSSE-CHUS 2016). The lack of English-language childcare services and programs available for children aged 0-4 that are linked to the English



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school board system is an important factor to be considered in explaining the vulnerability of English-speaking children in Estrie (CIUSSSE-CHUS 2016).

Newcomers form a greater proportion of the English-speaking population in the HET compared to majority population sharing the same territory; a much higher proportion of the HET's English-speaking population was born outside the province or country (25.4% vs. 4.1%) (Pocock 2015). Mobility trends within the HET's English-speaking community show a significant proportion of newcomers to this region have moved here from another MRC within the province followed by those arriving from outside of Canada, and those moving from another province respectively (Pocock 2015).

## **Community priorities**

In the spring of 2016 Townshippers' undertook a large-scale community survey as part of its 2017-2022 strategic planning process.

98% of 431 respondents identified access to health and social services information in English as being at least somewhat important to them (84% identified this as very important), 98% also indicated that receiving medical and other health related services in English was at least somewhat important to them (again, 84% identified this as very important). A text analysis of the additional comments left by respondents revealed that preoccupations with comprehension are at the fore with the ESC in the region ("English" "Understand" "French" were the top 3 words used for concerns related to Access; "French" "Understand" "Speak" were the top 3 for concerns related to receiving care) (Townshippers' 2016).

Youth retention ranked second among community priorities, with poverty and employment close behind. Advocacy and being considered in policymaking at all levels of government, provincially and federally also ranked high among the priorities of community members who participated in our strategic planning process. 95% of respondents indicated that having an English-language school board was important to them, while 89% demonstrated that adequate employment opportunities were of importance as well (Townshippers' 2016).

## **Recommendations**

Fostering community development and the growth of initiatives that support the pursuit of economic, entrepreneurial and educational opportunities for English-speakers who call the Eastern Townships home is a primary objective of the



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Association's strategic plan. Our history of working in collaboration with community stakeholders to ensure that existing and future resources within the English-speaking community are maximized demonstrates our recognition that successful and sustainable economic development requires a holistic approach that draws from the expertise of all the actors in the milieu.

**Recurrent funding for programs supporting the recruitment and retention of young professionals in rural regions** such as the Eastern Townships contributes not only to the economic growth of rural regions, but also to the global vitality of our linguistic minority communities. **Programs supporting job-seekers with resume writing, translation and other employability issues that have been transferred to provincial governments must be monitored** to ensure that they remain available to English-speakers and accessible in real ways that combat isolation, and adapted in recognition of why individuals are not accessing services offered by the majority community and in ways that allow organizations to be innovative their approaches. There must be **greater collaboration between education and skills-building programs to align graduates with the employment market** in order to combat both the lack of skilled workers in particular fields and the exodus of those whose skillset cannot be matched by opportunities in their home regions.

In order to continue to meet the economic development and employment needs of the English-speaking members of our communities, associations and organizations like Townshippers must work in tandem with other institutions and organizations also working to address economic development and employability issues – locally, regionally, provincially and federally. We **need sustained financial support for operations** in order to develop and implement the projects and new initiatives that short-term project envelopes are available to support. The community sector cannot maintain its momentum or build sustainability for projects when the cost of operations increases every year, but recurrent funding envelopes do not. For a result based approach there must be a firm resolve on the part of government, at the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal levels, to recognize that without a concerted effort to reinforce and adequately fund the community sector, the plight of the rural English-speaker, an already vulnerable population, will continue to deteriorate.

Furthermore, it is vital that any **federal programs developed to bolster economic development in linguistic minority communities take into account the fundamental differences between urban and rural realities lived by English-speakers** across the province and are made available directly to organizations based in the regions, funding cannot remain in the hands of provincially mandated organizations who themselves are not adequately funded to work in the regions; your regionally based organizations have the expertise and have developed the essential links to their



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communities that are required to achieve a maximum positive impact – this funding has not been trickling down to the communities in a way that adequately meets their needs. **Provincial programs supporting economic development and employability are not adapted to the realities of the English-speaking communities** in the regions and are only offered through organizations unfrequented by our population because of linguistic barriers and a collective memory of negative experiences associated with reaching out only to be reminded of where we live and what language the individual engaged to offer the service assumes we should be speaking.

If your government intends to implement economic programs that will help create jobs and stimulate economic growth and are striving to ensure that investments are in line with our local realities, we implore you to take the input provided by local organizations seriously and work as much as possible with regionally mandated community organizations to help you invest well in your Official Language Minority Communities. Take advantage of our expertise and knowledge-base and **provide us with the resources we need to stimulate and support our vitality with an equitable proportion of Roadmap funding.**



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