

# Vision, Vitality and Viability

Report on the Consultation by the  
Secretariat for Relations with English-  
speaking Quebecers

Quebec Community Groups Network –  
March 2020



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**25 YEARS**  
of  
**Working Together**

**Erratum:** The last bullet on page 8 should state that the English-speaking Community receives about 3 percent of the \$1.1 billion of the provincial budget spent to support community groups, or about \$33 million. If the funding reflected our numbers, about 13 percent of the population, our share of the funding would be about \$143 million.

## **Background**

During a July 2019 visit with the English-speaking community of Grosse-Île, in the Magdalen Islands, MNA Christopher Skeete, the Parliamentary Assistant to Premier François Legault for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, announced a province-wide consultation. Scheduled for Fall 2019, the stated goal was to develop an action plan to address the priorities of Quebec's English-speaking community in collaboration with the Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers.

Meetings with community stakeholders were held in regions throughout Quebec. These culminated with a sectoral meeting in Quebec City on November 15, 2019. QCGN representatives participated as observers at all of the meetings. We made a presentation at the sectoral meeting<sup>1</sup>.

On December 6, the Secretariat convened a telephone meeting to validate its draft report on findings, priorities and orientations, and next steps. The draft had been submitted to participants the previous afternoon. QCGN submitted a post-validation document on December 9.

Mr. Skeete pledged that the results of the consultation will form the foundation of a government action plan for English-speaking Quebecers and be reflected in the upcoming provincial budget. When the consultation was announced, QCGN committed itself to preparing a report on the discussions. We are proposing a plan for and by our community to address our needs and priorities. We must better define and structure our community's working relationship with the Secretariat. We need our government to listen to us, not just talk to us. Our overriding objective is to ensure our community's continued vitality, allowing and encouraging English-speaking Quebecers to continue to actively contribute to Quebec's development and vitality.

### **1. The Consultation**

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<sup>1</sup> Notes for presentation by QCGN Director-General Sylvia Martin-Laforge, Sectoral consultation, November 15, 2019 <https://qcgnc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Speaking-notes-Sylvia-sectoral-consultation2020.11.15-1.pdf>

Organized by the Secretariat and structured under the theme “Building Bridges,” the consultation kicked off on September 5 on the Gaspé Peninsula in New Carlisle. It ended with a multi-sectoral/multi-regional forum in Quebec City on November 15.

All sessions except the multi-sectoral/multi-regional meeting began with a presentation of the Secretariat’s mandate; its accomplishments since it was created in November 2017; and a description of its funding program<sup>2</sup>. The presentation included relevant statistics and data about Quebec’s English-speaking community, drawn from various lesser-known sources that were not referenced. Opening presentations were followed by roundtable discussions facilitated by an external consultant. Participants were invited to comment and highlight issues of concern. Mr. Skeete offered his personal reflections during concluding remarks.

Following each session, participants were invited to complete a 13-question survey. The response rate was 48 per cent. The lowest satisfaction level was registered for the Pointe Claire gathering. The highest was for Gatineau. Respondents largely reported that the consultation was appreciated, and that it provided an opportunity to be heard.

The consultation process provided a promising restart for dialogue between our community and the Secretariat and – by extension – the Government of Quebec. Of course, Kathleen Weil, the first Minister for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers, conducted a similar exercise early in 2018. Both suffered from being unstructured and too narrowly focused on project funding. Ultimately, both failed from their initial stages to address a more fundamental and longstanding problem: the need for Quebec to consider us full-fledged Quebecers and take us into account throughout the development of legislation, regulations and guidelines.

The Liberals’ Bill 86 and the CAQ’s Bill 40, both aimed at abolishing school boards, demonstrate what results when successive provincial governments excluded English-speaking Quebecers while legislation that impacts them greatly is being drafted. Over the years, such omissions have drained our vitality. Now, they threaten the viability of our institutions and communities.

Once again, a rushed consultation has let us down. If the process were really about our community, the initial step should have been to engage community stakeholders to identify their needs and propose solutions to systemic issues they best understand. Such a grassroots approach could have percolated up to overarching policy and programming solutions with tangible and widespread impact.

The process was flawed. Invitations to this latest consultation were received at the last minute. Guest lists were not shared in advance. Documents were distributed on the eve of meetings. Most importantly, the discussion was not framed around community concerns. Such a format, not surprisingly, yielded a long list of issues, but no substantive consideration of the underlying

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<sup>2</sup> Support Program for Organizations Serving the English-Speaking Communities  
<https://www.quebec.ca/en/government/ministere/conseil-executif/secretariats/srqa/support-program-for-organizations-serving-the-english-speaking-communities/>

causes or recommendations for structural change. The government cannot find a solution to a problem it does not fully understand. We understand this because it is our community's lived reality. In the end, discussions proved more anecdotal than substantive.

It remains unclear how legislation, regulations and guidelines – and ultimately policies, programs and funding initiatives – will be improved by the results of this consultation. Most government policy consultations are launched with a discussion paper that contextualizes the issues and provides recommendations for policy and programming solutions. This long-established and well-accepted methodology does more than lay the necessary foundation for productive dialogue. Such an approach also provides a constructive framework for debate and fine-tuning. However, in this instance, there was no such roadmap. There was no timeline for action.

A draft report on findings, priorities, and orientations submitted to participants for validation on December 6 suggested two sets of next steps.

The first concerned three actions to complete the consultation process. Of these, only the first has taken place: a survey was sent to validation-session participants about their experience. As for the second and third actions, participants have no information about the production of the consultant's final report, nor has an official French-language translation that is accessible to the Quebec's civil service been published on the Secretariat's website.

The second set identified actions to be undertaken by the Secretariat. These included: briefings of key ministries about the consultation results; continued liaison with organizations and institutions; input on the Plan d'action gouvernemental en matière d'action Communautaire<sup>3</sup>; measures for consideration in the 2020 budget; and continued participation in the Conférences administratives régionales<sup>4</sup>(CAR). Three months later, no information is yet available on whether any of these actions have been implemented.

This undermines the bona fides of the consultation. It underlines a lack of transparency and effective communication from the Secretariat about its activities.

QCGN wishes to put the consultation in appropriate context. With funding from the federal Department of Canadian Heritage, English-speaking Quebec has a long history of developing our own community development plans. The most recent sprung from a well-attended community priority setting conference that was the culmination of 19 regional and sectoral consultations, five focus groups, and an online survey of more than 500 English-speaking Quebecers. This concluded with the signing of a Declaration of Community Priorities 2012-

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<sup>3</sup> Plan d'action gouvernemental en matière d'action Communautaire

[https://www.mtess.gouv.qc.ca/telecharger.asp?fichier=/publications/pdf/SACA\\_plan\\_action\\_gouv\\_act\\_communaire.pdf](https://www.mtess.gouv.qc.ca/telecharger.asp?fichier=/publications/pdf/SACA_plan_action_gouv_act_communaire.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Conférences administratives régionales <https://www.mamh.gouv.qc.ca/developpement-territorial/concertation/>

2017<sup>5</sup>. This in turn formed the basis of our current community development plan: 2012 – 2017 Community Priorities and Enabling Strategies of the English-speaking Community of Quebec<sup>6</sup>.

Our community's overarching priorities are validated annually and endorsed at Annual General Meetings of the QCGN. This process is piloted by the Priority Setting Steering Committee (PSSC), an advisory committee of leaders of our community, our Network and the QCGN. Our community development plan and the Declaration were renewed in 2018 during an extensive consultation to determine where new resources in the federal Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future<sup>7</sup> should be directed. Regrettably, the Declaration that was debated and approved by some 200 community leaders from across the province did not serve as the launching pad for the Secretariat's consultation. We believe this Declaration would have provided the best framework for advancing our community.

These priorities re-emerged strongly when the QCGN conducted broad consultations within our community ahead of recent provincial and federal elections. Over the summer of 2018, the community determined 16 key issues<sup>8</sup> which our community wanted the future Government of Quebec to address. These included maintaining the Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers and enshrining it in law; guaranteeing access to health and social services and other government programs in English; protecting the constitutional minority language rights of English-speaking Quebecers to manage and control their schools through elected school boards; and addressing the employability issues and poverty facing English-speaking Quebecers.

## **2. Draft Report of the Secretariat**

The draft report presented at the validation session of December 6, 2019, contained findings, priorities and orientations, along with next steps. Participants were invited to submit comments. The final version of the report has not as yet been published. It is expected to be released soon.

The following overview highlights key comments expressed during the consultation.

### *Community sector*

- Individuals have limited success in accessing government services, particularly for health care. Staffing shortages and turnover are a consistent and continuing concern.

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<sup>5</sup> QCGN Declaration of Community Priorities 2012-2017 <https://qcgnc.ca/community-priorities/#declaration>

<sup>6</sup> 2012 – 2017 Community Priorities and Enabling Strategies of the English-speaking Community of Quebec <https://qcgnc.ca/2012-2017-community-priorities-enabling-strategies-english-speaking-community-quebec/>

<sup>7</sup> Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/official-languages-action-plan/2018-2023.html>

<sup>8</sup> Quebec's English-speaking Community and the 2018 Provincial Elections <https://qcgnc.ca/2018-elections-issues-2/>

- Organizations are hampered in obtaining access to provincial government funding because of little or no outreach to our communities – and even less in English – that communicates available programs.
- For decades, English-speaking Quebecers have been clamouring for better French-language training.
- Some participants called for exemptions from French-language testing for individuals/professionals whose sole functions are limited to serving members of our English-speaking community. Examples include health and social service professionals, as well as teachers.
- Our community's relationship with the francophone majority is complicated. Notwithstanding, there is a strong desire on the part of the community to more fully participate in our larger society. This is difficult to accomplish and sustain with a small organizational infrastructure.
- All the above factors contribute to the lack of integration, and thus to out-migration and our community's ongoing brain drain.

#### *Government sector*

- Many decry the lack of transparency around federal-provincial funding transfers and how funds meant for our community are being spent.
- A major priority to ensure our voice is heard within government is to increase the proportion and thus the number of English-speaking civil servants within the Quebec public service. The dismal rate of employment of our community members in the public service contributes to the perception among our young people that the government is not open to them.
- Ministers and their ministries must be more responsible for engaging with our community and not depend on the Secretariat to do it for them.

#### *The Secretariat*

- Initiatives to build bridges and strengthen community/government relations would be well-received.
- Thanks to Secretariat funding, some community organizations are stronger than in the past. But they are still in need of capacity development for outreach and liaison.
- Many said that Secretariat funding should be solidified and expanded, and that the Secretariat itself be more accessible in the regions.

Input by sector during the consultation centred on multiple issues which are widely recognized as crucial components of community vitality<sup>9</sup>. These include:

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<sup>9</sup> Bourhis, R. Y., & Landry, R. (2012). Group Vitality, Cultural Autonomy and the Wellness of Language Minorities. In R. Bourhis (Ed), *Decline and Prospects of the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec* (pp. 23-69). Ottawa, ON. Canadian Heritage.

- access to health and social services – particularly if restricted to “historic Anglos”
- staffing shortages in both health and education;
- the fragility of Community Learning Centres;
- Bill 40 and what it means for the management and control of our institutions;
- the lack of capacity in many municipalities to engage with the English-speaking community;
- persistent poverty and employability issues that are unique to English-speaking Quebecers;
- the needs of visible and ethnic minorities within the English-speaking community;
- funding and building of capacity to preserve our heritage;
- the disappearance of our institutions; and
- the hollowing out of our English-language media, particularly small community newspapers.

### **3. An Immediate Step**

All parties have achieved consensus on at least one of these issues: long-requested access to free French-language training.

Mr. Skeete said he was receptive to the community’s request for enhanced access to French language training for English-speaking Quebecers. We encourage the government to move forward with a concrete action plan.

### **4. Evidence supports our approach**

The long list of issues in the draft report accurately reflects legitimate concerns of English-speaking Quebecers. The community has repeatedly conveyed these concerns over the past quarter-century. It is high time to stop talking. It is time for action.

In 2019, the English-speaking community of Quebec was polled on several occasions. Notably, the Department of Canadian Heritage commissioned Vox Pop to survey Official Language Minority Communities<sup>10</sup>. Alarming trends surfaced:

- Almost half (47%) of respondents say they believe the state of our community has not improved in 20 years;
- Almost one-third (30%) of respondents from our community indicated that their access to health and social services has deteriorated over the past five years;
- 61% do not believe that our community has a strong and effective leadership representing our interests;

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<sup>10</sup> Vox Pop survey Study on the Appreciation and Perception of Canada’s Two Official Languages Among Official Language Minority Communities Prepared for the Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2019 [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2020/pch/CH14-48-2019-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2020/pch/CH14-48-2019-eng.pdf)



- Fewer than one-third (32%) say they believe community-based and not-for-profit organizations are committed to representing and serving the interests of our community;
- A strong majority (83%) say the province's efforts to represent our community are inadequate;
- Almost two-thirds (64%) are dissatisfied with provincial services; and
- More than half (55%) said they believe their access to provincial services will worsen in the next five years.

Furthermore, a Léger Marketing survey<sup>11</sup> jointly commissioned by QCGN, the Association for Canadian Studies, the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC), and the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) identifies similar trends:

- A significant minority (15%) reported never obtaining services in English from the Quebec government;
- One in five (20%) reported never getting health care services in English, while one-quarter (26%) indicated they rarely obtained health care service in English;
- Among vulnerable populations, a majority (61%) of respondents between the ages of 55-64 reported that they often or sometimes have problems getting provincial government services in English;
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents indicated that English-language school boards are important to them;
- Four out of five (80%) said they were opposed to the government's plan to abolish school boards;
- More than two-thirds (69%) said they do not think they have the same opportunity as a French-speaking Quebecer to land a job in Quebec; and
- A significant majority (82%) feel their chances for economic success are greater outside Quebec.

In summary, Mr. Skeete failed to address some fundamental concerns voiced by participants about his government's legislative initiatives. The dismantling of valued community institutions such as school boards was omitted by Mr. Skeete in his otherwise thorough summaries of each meeting.

This is indicative of one of the weaknesses of this consultation. The focus was largely concentrated on symptoms – not root causes of our community's disaffection.

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<sup>11</sup> Léger Marketing for the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC), the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) and the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS), Aug. 29 and Sept. 4, 2019, English-Speaking Quebecers: Views on Governance <https://qcgnc.ca/english-speaking-quebecers-views-on-governance/>

## 5. The Link to Root Causes

The root of the problem is that the government has not recognized, much less acknowledged, longstanding concerns as priorities. What follows are a few examples of the link between issues identified by our community and their underlying causes:

- Improving access to health and social services for English-speaking Quebecers is hampered by red tape and delays. It took government officials more than three years to put into effect new regulations for the Provincial Committee for the Provision of Health Services and Social Services in the English Language, often referred to as the Provincial Access Committee, and confirm its membership. It then took another year for CISSs and CIUSSs to do the same for Regional Access committees. Training for Access Committee members has not been completed, yet they were obliged to work under very short deadlines – unrealistic in some regions – to review and give their opinion on new Access Programs created by CISSs, CIUSSs and specialized hospitals. The lack of training and impractical deadlines risk compromising the quality of the programs. Moreover, the legislative framework does not allow Access Programs to include important components of health and social services such as ambulance transport, new family physician clinics known as GMFs, and other forms of care now delivered outside the public network. The clear solution to ensuring a full range of medical and social services to English-speaking Quebecers in our own language is to change the legislative definition of Access Programs to encompass these important services.
- The failure to recruit English-speaking Quebecers into the public service is caused by longstanding, systemic issues – not the lack of language skills. The government must implement an employment equity program that ensures the civil service reflects the proportion of English-speaking Quebecers and overall diversity of Quebec society. A recent report for the Secretariat by the Quebec English-speaking Community Research Network (QUESCREN) entitled *Employment of English Speakers in Quebec's Public Service*<sup>12</sup> reinforces this fact, noting the lack of specific employment equity measures targeting English-speaking Quebecers. It also notes that decades of underrepresentation in the provincial public service has existed despite evidence of some interest among English speakers in working for the government of Quebec – including those who speak French well. The presence of government officials who are English-speaking, not simply those who speak English, would provide the additional benefit of civil servants who can apply a different lens when provincial officials are drafting government strategies. This, of course, does not negate the importance of formally consulting the community.

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<sup>12</sup> *Employment of English Speakers in Quebec's Public Service*, Quebec English-speaking Community Research Network, authors Celine Cooper, Patrick Donovan, and Lorraine O'Donnell  
[https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Quescren\\_QPSRPTEnglish.pdf](https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Quescren_QPSRPTEnglish.pdf)

- The English-speaking community of Quebec constitutes 13 per cent of the population, yet it receives roughly three per cent of the government's overall spending to support community organizations. We know the extent of this underfunding because Mr. Skeete told this to each and every group he consulted. He noted that our three per cent share is somewhere between \$60 and \$70 million. If the funding reflected our numbers – more than 1 million English-speaking Quebecers – this support would amount to \$281 million. The root cause of this discrepancy is a lack of outreach on the part of government programs to the English-speaking community and a lack of uptake by organizations serving English-speaking Quebecers. A large part of the solution lies in making more information available in English and marketing these programs to English-speaking community organizations. Earmarking a portion of funding for our community would be a bold step forward. This should apply all government funding programs such as *Sécretariat à la jeunesse* and the *Secrétariat aux aînés* – but particularly those administered by the *Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales* (SACAIS) and the *Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires* (PSOC).

It is evident the above examples are the tip of the iceberg. A holistic, fact-based approach to the long-standing, deeply rooted issues that affect our community is sorely needed to effect transformative change rather than simple band-aid solutions. This is where the Secretariat, the Government of Quebec, and others seeking to truly assist English-speaking Quebecers must concentrate their efforts.

## **6. Roles and Responsibilities of the Secretariat**

Much of the focus of the consultation was on the role of the Secretariat.

As originally designed, the Secretariat was mandated to build bridges between our community and the Quebec government. However, by overlooking major policy differences between our community and the government, and putting too sharp a focus on funding grassroots initiatives, the Secretariat is not serving as an effective intermediary.

The Enhancing Regional Community Capacity and Strengthening Community Vitality programs were seen by recipient organizations as a welcome addition to the provincial government funding landscape by cash-starved organizations struggling to support this province's minority. The caveat is that ministries must not consider that Secretariat funding opportunities absolve them of their own obligation to fund English-speaking communities through their own programs.

It should be standard practice for our community to be consulted by all ministries and government agencies on major initiatives that affect English-speaking Quebecers. The Government must ensure we are taken into account in the development and implementation

of programs, policies and procedures. The Government must also ensure that services received in English are equivalent to and of the same quality as those offered in French.

Throughout the consultation, Mr. Skeete was clear. He said the Secretariat's role is to increase community capacity, not to establish a parallel government for English-speaking Quebec. This overlooks its essential role as a conduit between our community and the machinery of government.

It would be useful if the work of the Secretariat was guided by community concerns. The role of the Secretariat, and the Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier for relations with English-speaking Quebecers, is to represent our community to government, and not to represent the government to our community. To support this role, the Secretariat and our Minister – Premier François Legault – as well as his Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Skeete, must take into account what they are hearing from the community and its leadership. This would secure informed advice and input on the development of strategies, priorities and programs which affect our community. We also recommend that Quebec adopt analogous consultation frameworks to those used by other provinces and federal institutions with vital minority responsibilities and programs.

## **7. Mixed Messages**

As our community was being consulted by Mr. Skeete, his Coalition Avenir Québec government limited significant input from our community during parliamentary hearings on a bill that would ultimately eradicate our minority's Constitutional right to manage and control our schools. With Bill 40, Education Minister Jean-François Roberge abolishes school boards, creates service centres and centralizes the real power within his ministry.

Actions speak louder than words. Invoking closure to force through this controversial legislation sends a contradictory message to our linguistic minority community. The pattern repeats itself; the government likewise limited debate on its secularism law, Bill 21. Once again it invoked closure, this time to impose a ban on the wearing of religious symbols by some public sector employees. Our community maintains that under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Bill 21 cannot apply to a school board that administers minority language education. Furthermore, the religious ban has aggravated an ongoing teacher shortage by preventing the hiring of teachers wearing religious symbols such as hijabs and kippahs.

Additionally, the threat to re-open Bill 101, and hurtful debates such as recurring episodes of the Bonjour/Hi debate, along with recent musings that services in English should be restricted to 'Historic Anglos', make English-speaking Quebecers feel unwelcome in their home province.

These signals sent a clear message contrary to the spirit of consultation.

## 8. Conclusion

Looking ahead, we are proposing that governments adopt the model of “nothing about us without us” and support our community’s strategic vision. We propose the following approach.

The Secretariat must lead the way in ensuring the government lives up to Premier François Legault’s commitment to ensure the doors of his government would be open to our community and that our views would be considered in policy development. This means the Secretariat and the Premier’s Parliamentary Assistant must serve as strong advocates for our community within government at both the political and the administrative level.

We urge governments at all levels to build on the Declaration of Community Priorities as the underpinning for all legislation, regulations and guidelines – and ultimately policies, programs and funding initiatives that affect our community. In so doing, a research agenda will emerge to provide the evidence base and the proper tools to ensure a match between problems and solutions.

It is critical to recognize that the underrepresentation of English-speaking Quebecers in the government apparatus, and the lack of consideration of our needs and priorities, is a chronic problem, not a new one. This is an issue that needs immediate and concrete action. Our government must be prepared to address the needs of English-speaking Quebecers. It must be incorporated this obligation into the process of developing policies and programs. Our community must not be an afterthought or simply ignored.

In the meantime, the Quebec Community Groups Network has embarked on a strategic planning process. This comprehensive community consultation includes a survey that has been completed by more than 500 community leaders and organizations. We are conducting follow-up town halls and focussed interviews with dozens of community leaders. All of this will culminate in an inclusive community forum at the end of March 2020 to assemble all of the “*forces vives*” of English-speaking Quebec to work together to build a collaborative model that identifies common challenges, collective goals, and identify appropriate measures.

Together, through a structured strategic planning process, we will craft a strategic action plan by our community for our community – a vision that we hope all of our government partners will endorse and contribute to its realization.