



Brief

FEBRUARY 2021 FEDERAL PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION
TOWNSHIPPERS' ASSOCIATION



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

Introduction

For more than 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 more than 40, 000 English-speakers who are spread across a region that is geographically larger than Belgium; 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), including preliminary data showing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; and conclude with recommendations for consideration in the development of a new federal budget.

Vitality for Canada's Official Language Minority Communities

The Government of Canada's commitment to official languages is reaffirmed by the *Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future*. The Action Plan implements the *Official Languages Act* and supports the vision of a diverse Canada that embraces linguistic duality and bilingualism as the foundation of the social contract that brings us together. The implementation of this vision requires the cooperation of the provinces, but leadership on achieving the common goal rests squarely with the federal government; this leadership ensures that the equality of Canada's official languages is not territorialized, a path abandoned by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, who understood that doing so would destroy the national vision of a bilingual country.

Canada's official language minority communities are key to linguistic duality in Canada, not only ensuring the presence of our two official languages from sea to sea to sea but also ensuring that Canadians can live a full life in the official language of choice no matter where they choose to live. This underpins the Government of Canada's commitment contained in Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* to enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and support and assist their development, and to fostering our society's full recognition and use of both official languages.



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

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).

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).



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

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 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).

Preliminary health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on English-speakers in the HET

A September 2020 survey of 6,261 adults in seven of Quebec's health regions (Mauricie-et-Centre-du-Québec, Estrie, Montréal, Laval, Lanaudière, Laurentides, and Montérégie) conducted by Léger over a two-week period revealed that while one in five adults reported having symptoms consistent with generalized anxiety disorder or major depression in the two weeks prior to the survey, there were population groups that are more affected by these psychosocial impacts than others: young adults (especially those between the ages of 18 and 24), Anglophones, and health care workers



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

(Université de Sherbrooke, 2020). Anglophones were shown to be twice as likely as Francophones to have anxiety or depressive symptoms related to COVID-19 because they (along with the young adult population) suffer greater direct impacts from the pandemic, a higher degree of stigmatization, more mistrust in authorities, the use of different sources to get information about COVID-19, and more false beliefs than the other population groups who participated in the survey (Université de Sherbrooke, 2020). Finally, the study also highlighted that individuals who already experience stigma double their risk of experiencing anxiety or depression and that Anglophones are included in the population groups experiencing stigma, which currently affects close to one in ten adults in Quebec (Université de Sherbrooke, 2020).

Community priorities

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

Respondents in 2016 identified access to health and social services in English as being their top priority; 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).

In the fall (September) of 2020 the Association began data collection for its 2022-2027 strategic planning exercise and preliminary results from the community survey indicate that, with the notable exception of access to health and social services in English, priorities have for the English-speaking community in the HET are shifting; the defense our minority language community's rights in Quebec's National Assembly and consideration/integration for our minority language community in policy development and program design at all levels of government ranking second and third respectively (Townshippers' 2020).



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

Recommendations

Supporting the creation and development of programs and initiatives in support of economic, entrepreneurial, and educational opportunities for English-speakers in our region is a primary objective of the Association's mission and strategic plan. TA's 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 an approach that is inclusive, diverse, and that draws from the expertise of all the actors in the milieu.

The Government of Canada must fulfill its commitment, contained in Part VII of the Official Languages Act, to enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and support and assist their development, fostering our society's full recognition and use of both official languages – it must **not invest in, enhance or create policies that territorialize the equality of Canada's official languages.**

Programs for the targeted adaptation of basic services, for example, by implementing mechanisms to meet the psychosocial needs of **vulnerable groups such as English-speakers in Quebec** must be created. **Recurrent funding for that supports the recruitment and retention of young professionals in rural regions** like our Historical Eastern Townships contributes not only to its economic growth, but also to the global vitality of the linguistic minority communities living within them. **Programs from all sectors that have been transferred to provincial governments must be monitored** to ensure that they remain available to Quebec's English-speakers **and accessible in real ways** that combat language-based discrimination and that allow organizations to be innovative their approaches. **Programs and investments should facilitate collaboration between education and skills-building** combat both the lack of skilled workers in essential fields and the exodus of young professionals whose skillset cannot be matched to opportunities in their home regions.

In order to continue to meet the socio-economic challenges and increasingly diverse needs of the English-speaking members of our communities, associations and organizations like Townshippers must collaborate 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 that is indexed** to develop and implement the projects and new initiatives that short-term project envelopes are available to support while costs of



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

operations increase across the board. **For a sustained results-based approach there must be a firm resolve on the part of all levels of government** to recognize that without a concerted effort to reinforce and adequately fund targeted programs, the vitality of Quebec's minority language community, an already vulnerable population, will continue to deteriorate, especially those outside of the province's large metropolitan centres.

If the Government of Canada intends to implement programs that will help increase vitality and stimulate economic growth and want to ensure that investments are in line with local realities, **please do not dismiss the input provided by locally and regionally organizations**; while they are well-represented by their provincial advocacy partners, they remain the most well-positioned to detail the needs of their communities and can help you invest well in the vitality of our Official Language Minority Communities.



*February 2021 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
submitted to the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau,
Compton-Stanstead M.P. and Minister of Agriculture and
Agri-Food.*

References

- BOURHIS, R.Y AND LANDRY, R. "Group Vitality, Cultural Autonomy and the Wellness of Language Minorities." In *New Canadian Perspectives: Decline and Prospects of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec*, Research Report, edited by Richard Y. Bourhis, 23–69. Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2012.
- CANADIAN HERITAGE. *Frame of reference for the Vitality of Official-Language Minority Communities (OLMCs). Official Languages Support Programs (OLSP) – Support for the Community Sector.* Ottawa: 2013.
- CENTRE INTÉGRÉ UNIVERSITAIRE DE SANTÉ ET DE SERVICES SOCIAUX DE L'ESTRIE – CENTRE HOSPITALIER UNIVERSITAIRE DE SHERBROOKE. 2016. *Responding Better to the Needs of the Linguistic and Cultural Communities in Estrie.* Sherbrooke: Direction de la santé publique.
- JEDWAB, J. 2012. "Determining who is an English-Speaking Quebecer and Assessing its Demographic Vitality." In *New Canadian Perspectives: Decline and Prospects of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec*, Research Report edited by Richard Y. Bourhis. Pp 99–128. Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2013.
- POCOCK, J. 2015. *Socio-Demographic Profile of the English-speaking Community of the Historical Eastern Townships: 2011 Census of Canada and National Household Survey. Birth Place and Mobility.* Presentation prepared for Townshippers' Association.
- POCOCK, J. 2018 *Socio-Demographic Profile of the English-speaking Community of the Historical Eastern Townships: 2016 Census of Canada and National Household Survey.* Presentation prepared for Townshippers' Association.
- UNIVERSITE DE SHERBROOKE. 2020. *Study by the Université de Sherbrooke on the psychosocial impacts of the pandemic.* Available: <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/study-by-the-universite-de-sherbrooke-on-the-psychosocial-impacts-of-the-pandemic-886218205.html>