



Office of the
Commissioner of
Official Languages

Commissariat
aux langues
officielles

ENG
FR

Effective practices
for chairing

BILINGUAL MEETINGS

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THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE IS **BILINGUAL.**

In regions designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes, employees have the right to work and be supervised in the official language of their choice. This includes meetings in which they participate.



GOOD PRACTICES

FOR HOLDING A BILINGUAL MEETING WITH EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE VARIED LEVELS OF **BILINGUALISM**

The chair is skilled in both official languages and ensures that all employees can participate fully in the meeting in the official language of their choice. The chair ensures that the meeting is in both official languages from start to finish.

At the beginning of the meeting, the chair reminds the participants, in both official languages, that they are free to use the official language of their choice.

The person who takes the meeting notes is skilled in both official languages, and comments made in each official language are reflected in the notes.

The invitation, agenda, handouts and minutes are distributed in both official languages at the same time.

No other measure is required, because in principle all the participants either speak both official languages or are receptively bilingual.

GOOD PRACTICES

FOR HOLDING A BILINGUAL MEETING WITH EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE VARIED LEVELS OF BILINGUALISM, AND SOME OF WHOM ARE **UNILINGUAL**

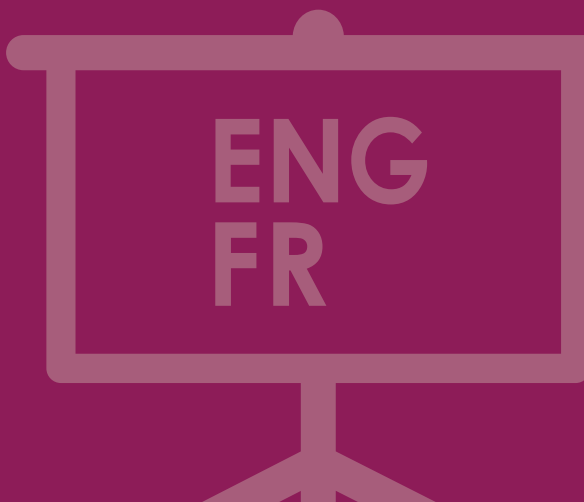
The chair must give a brief summary in English of the key points raised by participants speaking in French, and vice versa. This method does slow down the meeting a little, but adds enormously to common understanding. It is therefore important for the chair to plan for the necessary time.

BENEFITS OF BILINGUAL MEETINGS

Optimizes participation of all employees, because most employees are more productive in the official language of their choice.

Maintains employees' skills in their second official language, as they are exposed to both official languages.

Shows respect for everyone present.



Other examples of

GOOD PRACTICES



LANGUAGE KEEPER: During a bilingual meeting, the chair assigns someone to keep track of the balance between the use of English and French, and to advise when the balance needs to be readjusted.



EXPLAIN HOW THE BILINGUAL MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED: The chair explains ahead of time that each person's comments will be summarized in the other official language so that everyone can follow the conversation, and that this may result in occasional interruptions.



TRUST: Participants trust that the chair can summarize their comments effectively.



NEVER GIVE UP: Practice makes perfect. Patience and willingness to experiment are essential. Initial resistance is normal.



LEADERSHIP IS KEY: Leadership of the chair and of each participant in the meeting is key, as well as the leadership of the supervisors and managers at all levels who walk the talk.

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REMINDERS

RIGHT OF EMPLOYEES VS. OBLIGATIONS OF

SUPERVISORS: The right of employees to work in the official language of their choice in regions designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes creates an obligation for managers to supervise their employees in the official language of their choice and takes precedence over the managers' own language rights.

HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LANGUAGE OF WORK:

Bilingual meetings are only one of the elements covered under Part V of the *Official Languages Act*. Part V must be implemented in its entirety.

SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC VS. LANGUAGE OF WORK:

The right of members of the public to be served in the official language of their choice takes precedence over the right of employees to work in the official language of their choice. Under section 31 of the Act, whenever Part IV is in conflict with Part V, Part IV prevails.