

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR A STRONGER QUEBEC

What English-speaking Quebecers should be
able to expect from their government

ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS ARE PART OF QUEBEC.

We live, work, raise families, build businesses, volunteer, create, study and contribute in communities across the province. Our schools, health and social service institutions, community organizations, cultural organizations and local networks have helped build Quebec and continue to strengthen it today.

In preparing for the next provincial election, TALQ spoke with English-speaking Quebecers and community organizations working in health and social services, education, employment, economic development, youth and seniors' issues, arts and culture, heritage and regional development.

Across different regions and sectors, we heard many of the same concerns. The message was not simply that government should spend more money or create more programs. It was that English-speaking Quebecers should have a more constructive and dependable relationship with their provincial government.

That comes down to five practical priorities...

1. RECOGNIZE US AS PART OF QUEBEC'S FUTURE

English-speaking Quebecers should not be viewed only through debates about language laws or access to English services.

We are workers, employers, entrepreneurs, students, artists, volunteers, taxpayers and community leaders. Our institutions and organizations contribute to the economic, social and cultural life of Quebec.

Recognition means treating English-speaking Quebecers as a permanent part of Quebec and considering our communities when decisions about the province's future are made.

The next government should:

- recognize English-speaking Quebecers as full and lasting contributors to Quebec;
- recognize the knowledge and experience that English-speaking community organizations can bring to solving problems; and
- ensure that government departments consider the realities and contributions of English-speaking communities when developing policies and programs.

This is not about special status. It is about having our place in Quebec recognized and being able to contribute fully.

2. TALK WITH COMMUNITIES BEFORE DECISIONS ARE MADE

Too often, English-speaking communities hear about a new law, policy or government decision after the important choices have already been made.

By then, it may be too late to point out how a decision could affect a school, health service, regional community, employer, cultural organization or individual Quebecer.

Community organizations work directly with people every day. They often know where problems are developing and how government decisions will work in practice.

Government should make use of that knowledge before decisions are final.

The next government should:

- speak with English-speaking communities early enough for their experience to make a difference;
- maintain regular communication instead of consulting communities only when a problem arises; and
- tell communities what happened with the advice and concerns they raised.

Consultation should not mean more meetings for the sake of meetings. It should mean hearing from the people affected while there is still time to improve a decision.

3. MAKE SOMEONE IN GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE

Issues affecting our communities cross many parts of government including health, education, employment, immigration, culture, economic development and regional affairs.

There needs to be a permanent place in government responsible for making sure those issues do not fall between departments.

The next government should:

- make the government office responsible for relations with English-speaking Quebecers permanent;
- give it the ability to work across government departments;
- maintain a permanent advisory group made up of people from English-speaking communities across Quebec;
- establish regular ways for community organizations and government to work together; and
- make it clear who is responsible for following up when issues affect more than one department.

The goal is straightforward: English-speaking Quebecers should know where responsibility lies, and that responsibility should continue regardless of changes in ministers or governments.

4. **MAKE GOVERNMENT DECISIONS WORK PROPERLY IN REAL LIFE**

A policy can look reasonable on paper and still create problems when people try to use a service or program.

Rules may be understood differently from one department, agency or region to another. Front-line employees may not have clear information. Individuals and organizations can end up facing unnecessary paperwork or being told different things depending on whom they speak with.

English-speaking Quebecers should be able to expect government rules and commitments to be applied clearly and consistently.

The next government should:

- make sure policies affecting English-speaking Quebecers are applied consistently across Quebec;
- give public servants and service providers clear information about their responsibilities;
- identify problems quickly when a new policy is put into practice; and
- remove unnecessary administrative obstacles that make it harder for people and community organizations to access programs and services.

People should not need to become experts in government administration simply to understand what they are entitled to or how a program is supposed to work.

5. HELP ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES REMAIN STRONG ACROSS QUEBEC

Strong communities depend on more than individual government services. They depend on local organizations, institutions, employers, volunteers and networks that connect people and create opportunities to live and work in their communities.

This is particularly important outside Montreal, where demographic change, labour shortages, youth leaving their regions and limited organizational resources can threaten the long-term vitality of English-speaking communities.

Community organizations often do a great deal with limited resources. They connect people to services, help newcomers and seniors, support young people, preserve local culture and heritage, encourage employment and entrepreneurship, and bring people together.

The next government should:

- help community organizations build the long-term capacity they need to serve their regions;
- support opportunities for English-speaking Quebecers to live, work, build careers and raise families throughout Quebec;
- strengthen institutions and organizations that contribute to local economic and community life; and
- pay particular attention to keeping young people connected to opportunities in their home regions.

Keeping these organizations and institutions strong benefits their regions and Quebec as a whole.

THE BOTTOM LINE

English-speaking Quebecers are not asking to stand apart from Quebec.

We are asking to participate fully in it.

That means being recognized as part of Quebec's future, being heard before important decisions are made, knowing who in government is responsible for our concerns, seeing government policies applied fairly and consistently, and having strong communities and institutions that allow us to contribute.

These are practical expectations of government.

A stronger relationship between the Government of Quebec and its English-speaking citizens can strengthen our communities—and Quebec as a whole.

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Advocating.
Living in
Québec.**

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