

**The Bilingual Advantage  
Group Reports - March 7, 2012**

Challenges / Road Blocks :

- How to reduce turnover of bilingual staff after you have invested the resources into training them, especially in seasonal positions (it was also identified that this is an issue overall in PEI and not just with bilingual staff).
- Many Québec tourists visiting PEI don't know there is a French community here/or an option for French service/interaction in at least some establishments.
- Anglophone employers who want to hire bilingual staff don't know where to go to recruit qualified people.
- The pay incentive debate: some believe French-speaking staff should get an increased wage, while others believe that the fact they speak French is their advantage to getting the job over other candidates.
- Dialect challenges: Islanders not being as open to hiring French speaking staff with different accents (ie. Québec, France, etc).
- HR in Kings County is especially a challenge – less training in French available in that part of the province, and those who do speak French go work for CTMA because pay rates are higher.
- French has been identified as a difficult language to learn later in life, for those who wish to retain their current staff but train them to be bilingual.
- Lack of willingness from employees to learn French if their place of work suddenly requires or wants to add bilingual service.
- Spreading the message to employers that baby steps are ok (i.e. have French signage welcoming customers even if you can't speak it, then learn a few words such as 'bonjour', and wait to hire bilingual staff when you can).
- French service is often only prioritized during the summer/tourist season, when we should be offering it year-round.

- Services offered by Innovation PEI are very limited for French speaking entrepreneurs. There are no incentives or services to encourage economic development in French or a bilingual workplace when starting a business.
- Government departments don't always hire enough bilingual staff to fill the needs by Francophone employers and entrepreneurs. For instance, Skills PEI advertises their programs bilingually but only three out of 30 staff (in Charlottetown office) is French speaking. In other cases, the level of French ability by the staff is not sufficient to service clients who are fluent in French, so the clients choose to work with English staff instead.
- Businesses that are not tied to the French community are not aware of the need to offer their services bilingually, and the benefits it could bring to them. Small businesses, in particular, will not make any changes unless they see a guaranteed result; otherwise it's just an increased cost. How do we make them believe?
- The restaurant industry, in particular, is a big challenge because salaries are not high enough to attract bilingual workers, yet the clientele there requires French service more than other industries.
- Some workplaces have employees who speak French and don't even know it; they could be offering bilingual service but are not aware.

*Additional Challenges discussed that were addressed by the Expert Panel:*

CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p>How to access standardized testing or evaluation tools to know if your employees have adequate French ability (ie. a French last name does not mean you can speak it well, or a fluently bilingual status on a resume is not always true).</p>	<p>All Immersion students receive a certificate upon completion of their program. Employers may ask to see it.</p> <p>The Department of Education is implementing the DELF proficiency test which assesses levels in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Potential employees who have taken this test would also have a certificate to show employers.</p>

CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p>Limited translation services available locally.</p> <p>Extra costs attached to translating (including printing).</p> <p>The belief that translating your website or signage will create expectancy by customers that you can offer French service at all times.</p> <p>Verifying the accuracy of translated text if you don't speak French.</p>	<p>Translation NB has funding available for translation of menus, signage, programs, pamphlets, websites, etc. Most applications are reviewed and approved within 24 hours.</p> <p>There are two certified translators on PEI who provide services through Translation NB grants.</p> <p>Customers appreciate being able to research, read and make plans by accessing French marketing materials, even if the service is not available in French onsite. For instance, a tourist coming from Québec wants to be able to understand the pricing, location and room options at a B&amp;B while online, even if the owners can't greet him in French upon arrival.</p> <p>All translators through TNB are certified, so text accuracy is guaranteed. If employers are doubtful, there is a committee to review it.</p>
<p>Francophiles may have a reduced confidence level in speaking French openly to customers, due to lack of practice.</p> <p>Employers don't openly encourage their French or bilingual staff to speak French other than when a customer requires French service.</p>	<p>Employers should encourage French socialization in the workplace, i.e. French coffee breaks for all bilingual staff.</p> <p>The Acadian &amp; Francophone community of PEI is working on strategies to better include Francophiles into its social structure, i.e. host events for them at French community centres, reach out to college/university French clubs, etc</p>

CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p>How to encourage French immersion students to maintain their French beyond high school.</p>	<p>CPF &amp; French for the Future occasionally host youth awareness events (such as the '<i>Le français pour l'avenir</i>' forums) to highlight opportunities and reasons for them to keep up their French skills.</p> <p>RDÉE is researching tools that compile jobs and opportunities available to bilingual / French speaking employees looking for work on PEI. This would demonstrate the wide need for bilingual staff on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Discuss pay bonuses for bilingual staff (i.e. call centres).</p>



### Opportunities:

- Partnerships between Collège Acadie and Holland College to offer French classes beyond high school.
- So many students graduate from the French immersion program, there is a huge opportunity to help them keep honing their skills after high school. How to reach them and encourage this?
- Tools are available to help employers with translation, hiring bilingual staff and accessing the French customer market. They need to be more vocal about their needs so we can help them, and we need to better promote these tools.
- Many Francophone or bilingual workplaces are open to co-op placements, whereby Francophiles can practice their French in a professional environment.
- Huge opportunity to encourage Francophiles to socialize in French with the presence of French community centres and libraries in Charlottetown, Summerside, Rustico, etc. The French community needs to be more active in its networking and invitations so the Francophile community feels comfortable going there.
- The prominence of IT solutions can help bridge gaps where French services are not onsite (for instance, bringing in a French resource via Skype or webcam).
- The presence of so many Francophiles on PEI represents a great cultural diversity that we should be celebrating.
- Businesses offering French services can tap into off-Island French markets to create partnerships for growth (i.e. NB, Québec).
- There are organizations like CPF, French for the Future, SSTA, etc that exist to promote French language, however most of the effort is directed toward the employees and developing their French abilities. Can these organizations offer programs/services to employers as well?
- Many employees with bilingual capacity are willing to keep learning and improve their French skills, however tools to help them are not readily available (need \$ for French language courses after high school).