# Introduction

This handbook is for managers, human resources professionals and persons responsible for second official language training (SOLT) in federal institutions.

It contains advice on how to implement the Treasury Board[*Guidelines on Second Official Language Training*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32788)and providesrecommendations on different language learning options and tools.

The following guidelines are intended to support institutions in providing equitable access to SOLT to employees who seek to develop or maintain their second official language skills.

This handbook has seven sections:

1. [Identifying a person responsible for SOLT in your institution](#_Defining_the_roles)
2. [Fostering a culture of bilingualism](#_Fostering_a_culture)
3. [Ensuring success in SOLT: A shared responsibility](#_Ensuring_success_in)
4. [Selecting the types of SOLT that best meet employees’ needs](#_Selecting_the_types_1)
5. [Making SOLT inclusive](#_Ensuring_an_inclusive)
6. [Collecting and tracking SOLT data](#_Collecting_and_tracking)
7. [Appendix](#_Appendices)

This handbook aligns with existing policies, directives, standards and guidelines.

# Identifying a person responsible for SOLT in your institution

Under subsection 6.1.8 of the [*Directive on Official Languages for People Management*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=26168), deputy heads are responsible for offering language training to employees.

It is recommended that, to support it in fulfilling this responsibility and to facilitate collaboration with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, each institution identify a person responsible for SOLT. This person is the first point of contact in the institution for questions about SOLT. The person responsible for SOLT can visit the [Language Training Hub](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub) or contact the [Official Languages Centre of Excellence](mailto:OLCE-2OL-Learning_CELO-Apprentissage-2LO@tbs-sct.gc.ca) for support.

# Fostering a culture of bilingualism

Creating a bilingual workplace where people feel comfortable using their second official language can only be achieved when senior management, managers and employees all commit to fostering a culture of bilingualism.

The following are actions that senior management, managers and employees can take to do this.

## Senior management: build linguistic security

Linguistic security refers to the level of comfort and confidence a person feels when using a language. It can apply to first‑ or second‑language speakers. In this handbook, it is mainly used for second‑language speakers.

Linguistic security in the workplace is only possible when senior management is actively involved. Senior managers can build linguistic security by:

* giving employees opportunities to use their second official language at work
* using their own second official language at work, whether at the management table or with employees

## Managers: create an environment conducive to the use of both official languages

According to the [*Policy on People Management*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32621), employees must be enabled to “acquire and maintain the knowledge, skills, and competencies to succeed in their work” (subsection 4.1.24.1). The Policy also states that deputy heads must support and encourage a continuous learning environment. Employees need to have a safe space to use their second official language and to take linguistic risks. In the context of maintaining language skills, and to support deputy heads with their responsibilities, managers are encouraged to create an environment that is conducive to the regular use of both official languages by providing a safe and inclusive work environment that is free of judgment.

Doing this in a hybrid work environment can be challenging, but it’s essential if the public service is to be bilingual. Following are some ways managers can lead by example:

* use their second official language to show employees that the workplace is conducive to the use of both official languages and promotes linguistic security
* encourage employees to use the [MS Team backgrounds](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/images/4/40/Generic_OL_Backgrounds_-_Arri%C3%A8re-plans_g%C3%A9n%C3%A9riques_LO.zip) during virtual meetings to indicate that they want to practise their second official language
* avoid the reflex to switch to the first official language of people who are having trouble expressing themselves in their second official language; doing this can make them afraid of making mistakes, which can deter them from practising

For more information and examples, managers can refer to the [Guide for Managers – Supporting your employees’ second official language learning journey: a shared responsibility](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub/Handbook) available on the [Language Training Hub](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub).

## Employees: use their second official language

Employees are encouraged to take linguistic risks and use their second official language even if they’re nervous about making mistakes. It’s only through practice that confidence will grow.

Employees can, for example:

* take part in team meetings only using their second official language
* find a conversation partner to practise with

Information about opportunities to practise second official language skills is available on the [Language Training Hub](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub).

# Ensuring success in SOLT: A shared responsibility

Senior management, managers and employees all play a role in ensuring success in SOLT and in supporting a culture of bilingualism.

A bilingual work environment will not only allow employees to maintain their language skills, but also to have more success in SOLT since they can put what they’ve learned into use.

The following are examples of responsibilities each group could have to make sure people succeed in SOLT.

## Senior management: Providing SOLT to employees

As mentioned in [section 1](#_Identifying_a_person) of this document, under subsection 6.1.8 of the [*Directive on Official Languages for People Management*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=26168), deputy heads are responsible for offering language training to employees.

Under subsection 3.4 of the [*Guidelines on Second Official Language Training*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32788), senior management is encouraged to provide equitable access to SOLT by:

* integrating SOLT into their organizational human resources plan
* ensuring a fair representation of designated employment equity groups

## Managers: Supporting employees throughout their SOLT journey

Managers are encouraged to discuss SOLT needs with their team members at the beginning of and throughout their career and to support them on their SOLT journey by:

* fostering a workplace where employees feel comfortable taking linguistic risks
* respecting employees’ learning time (As described in the employee’s responsibilities, time investment and consistency are key factors in ensuring the success of SOLT.)
* checking in regularly with employees about their progress and to find out whether they need more support

For more information and examples, managers can refer to the [Guide for Managers – Supporting your employees' second official language learning journey: a shared responsibility](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub/Handbook) available on the [Language Training Hub](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub).

If an employee has not used their second official language regularly or can no longer perform at the required second language proficiency level (in reading comprehension, written expression or oral communication) as described in the [*Qualification Standards in Relation to Official Languages*](https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/staffing/qualification-standards/relation-official-languages.html), it is recommended that their manager work with them to establish a plan to help them regain and maintain the linguistic skills they need for their position. To help develop a plan, managers and employees can refer to the maintenance and learning paths proposed in the [Playbook](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub/Playbook). Managers can also encourage employees to use the [self-assessment tests](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/second-language-testing-public-service/self-assessment-tests.html) to get a sense of their current second language proficiency levels.

## Employees: Committing to their SOLT journey

Employees are encouraged to:

* discuss their SOLT needs with their managers at the beginning of and throughout their career
* take advantage of [informal SOLT](#_Informal_SOLT) options as a first step or to complement formal training
* include SOLT activities in their learning plans
* keep their manager informed of their progress in SOLT and ask for support if necessary

It is important for employees who are taking [formal SOLT](#_Formal_SOLT) to fully participate in their training by:

* attending classes
* doing the required work
* maintaining their proficiency by using their second official language daily during and after SOLT

Whichever SOLT option is selected, the following are other considerations to ensure success.

* **Intrinsic motivation**: Coming from within learners themselves, this motivation gives meaning to what is being learned, helps learners retain new concepts, and increases confidence.
* **Time investment**: Learning a new language takes more than a couple of weeks.
* **Consistency**: Consistent use is the key to maintaining what was learned over the long term.

# Selecting the types of SOLT that best meet employees’ needs

People learn in different ways. Some people might use just one type of SOLT; others might use a combination. Some learners prefer formal training, but resources are limited. It might not be feasible to offer formal training to everyone. Institutions are therefore encouraged to offer different types of SOLT.

There are two basic types of SOLT: informal and formal.

## Informal SOLT

Informal SOLT can be offered at the beginning of and throughout a person’s career and is usually:

* self-directed (doesn’t involve a teacher)
* available for free or at minimal cost

### When to use informal SOLT:

* as a first step to help the learner acquire a basic understanding of the language and to improve their chances of success in subsequent formal training
* while waiting for approval to enroll in formal SOLT
* when preparing for a second language evaluation
* for maintaining second official language skills (information on resources and tools for language maintenance is in the [Playbook](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub/Playbook))

Examples of informal SOLT:

* [Mauril](https://mauril.ca/en/)

Mauril is a free digital application that helps learners improve their oral comprehension, develop their vocabulary, and integrate language knowledge into everyday life.

* Other online applications and platforms

Other e‑learning websites and applications offer informal training. Employees can discuss with their manager or supervisor what is available in their institution.

* Language pairing programs

These programs pair learners so that they can practise speaking their second official language. For this type of program, it is recommended that learners be at an intermediate or advanced oral proficiency level to be sure they can participate in a conversation and understand the other person.

* Lunch-and-learn sessions

These sessions let employees practise their second official language in a group setting.

They can be unstructured or based on a theme. For example, participants could discuss new initiatives or procedures in their institution.

Lunch-and-learn sessions can be a great way for employees in unilingual regions for language‑of‑work purposes to practise their oral proficiency skills in their second official language.

* Playbook

The SOLT playbook, available on the [Language Training Hub](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub/Playbook), provides examples of online learning options, tools and resources according to learners’ needs in a variety of organizational contexts.

The playbook includes resources from the Canada School of Public Service, as well as from Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Learners can use the playbook to learn and maintain all three second official language skills: reading comprehension, written expression, and oral communication.

## Formal SOLT

Formal SOLT is usually training where there is a teacher in a structured classroom setting, whether in person, virtual or hybrid.

Formal training tends to be more expensive than informal training.

When to use formal SOLT:

* when employees has been appointed to a non-imperative bilingual position after having made an agreement to meet the official language proficiency requirements of positions within two years in accordance with the [*Public Service Official Languages Exclusion Approval Order*](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/public-service-hiring-guides/public-service-official-languages-exclusion-approval-order.html)
* when an employee’s position has become bilingual, or the language profile has been raised as a result of a review and re-identification process in accordance with the [*Directive on Official Languages for People Management*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=26168) and the [*Bilingualism Bonus Directive*](https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/d1/en)
* when employees want to increase their second official language proficiency level (for example, move from B to C in oral expression)
* although formal SOLT is not recommended for language maintenance, there might be circumstances where it’s appropriate, for example when employees are in an environment where they have few opportunities to use their second official language, such as in [unilingual regions for language-of-work purposes](https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/values-ethics/official-languages/list-bilingual-regions-canada-language-of-work-purposes.html).

It is recommended that, before employees start formal SOLT, they and their manager sign an agreement that sets out their responsibilities for the training. [Appendix A](#_Appendix_A_–) contains a sample agreement.

More information on access to formal SOLT is in subsection 3.4 of the [*Guidelines on Second Official Language Training*.](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32788)

### Examples of formal SOLT

* Training under Public Services and Procurement Canada’s [standing offers](https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/app-acq/sflo-olts/index-eng.html). Three sets of standing offers are available. They include accessibility services:
  + 1. In-person or virtual classroom SOLT in the National Capital Region
    2. Oral proficiency virtual tutoring services across Canada
    3. Online self-study program and virtual SOLT services across Canada

If you’re looking for another type of regional language training, contact your institution’s contracting unit or training department. They can help you find procurement tools that meet your needs (internal procurement tools, regional master standing offers, and so on).

* Training under institutions’ own standing offers
* Training provided by teachers from institutions’ own SOLT services

Some institutions may have their own SOLT services by hiring dedicated teaching staff.

Institutions can use several of these formal SOLT methods simultaneously to better meet their employees’ needs.

# Making SOLT inclusive

The following approaches are recommended when supporting an employee in their SOLT needs.

## Provide equitable access to SOLT

Institutions are encouraged to account for employment equity representation when planning access to formal SOLT, as referenced in section 3.4. of the [*Guidelines on Second Official Language Training*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32788).

It is recommended that the number of employees from designated employment equity groups enrolled in formal SOLT be at least proportionate to their overall representation in the institution. [Section 6 of this handbook](#_Collecting_and_tracking) contains an example of how to obtain the representation of designated employment equity groups.

Institutions can also consult the [Language Training Hub](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Language_Training_Hub/Best_Practices) for possible implementation strategies and best practices for ensuring that people in designated employment equity groups have equitable access to formal SOLT.

## Provide an inclusive learning environment for all public servants

Having an inclusive mindset is essential to providing a safe learning environment where all employees feel respected and included and can participate fully in SOLT.

Institutions are encouraged to offer resources to everyone involved in the SOLT process whether they teach, work on the registration process or implement accommodation measures.

Following are some resources that institutions might want to consult in relation to creating an inclusive learning environment.

### Resources on Government of Canada website

The following resources are accessible to anyone, even if they don’t work in the federal public service.

* [The Clerk’s Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion in the Federal Public Service](https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/call-to-action-anti-racism-equity-inclusion-federal-public-service.html)
* [The Clerk’s Call to Action forward direction message to deputies](https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/call-to-action-anti-racism-equity-inclusion-federal-public-service/call-to-action-message-to-deputies.html)
* [Building a Diverse and Inclusive Public Service: Final Report of the Joint Union/Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion](https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/corporate/reports/building-diverse-inclusive-public-service-final-report-joint-union-management-task-force-diversity-inclusion.html)
* [Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service/government-canada-workplace-accessibility-passport.html)
* [Accessibility in the public service](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service.html)
* [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://a11y.canada.ca/en/index.html)
* [Summary of the Accessible Canada Act](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada/act-summary.html)
* [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)
* [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan 2023–2028](https://justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/ah/pdf/unda-action-plan-digital-eng.pdf)
* [Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/knowledge-circle/many-voices.html)

### Resources on Canada School of Public Service website

Only public servants can access the following resources on the school’s site, and they must have an account with the school.

* [Anti-Racism Learning Series](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/anti-racism-eng.aspx)
* [Accessibility Learning Series](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/accessibility-learning-eng.aspx)
* [Indigenous learning products](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/ils-eng.aspx)
* [2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion Learning Path](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/2slgbtqi-eng.aspx)
* [Values and ethics learning path](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/values-ethics-eng.aspx)
* [Equity, diversity and inclusion learning path for executives](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/diversity-inclusion-eng.aspx)

## Provide accommodation for SOLT when necessary

SOLT is a professional activity like any other workplace training activity, so the duty to accommodate applies to it.

The duty to accommodate is about removing [barriers](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/working-government-canada-duty-accommodate-right-non-discrimination/duty-accommodate-general-process-managers/recognize-need-accommodation.html%22%20/l%20%22toc1) that hinder an employee’s full participation in the workplace and preventing discrimination on the [13 prohibited grounds](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/h-6/FullText.html#:~:text=Marginal%20note:-,Prohibited%20grounds%20of%20discrimination,-3%C2%A0(1) under the [*Canadian Human Rights Act*](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/H-6/). Providing accommodation measures so that an employee can enrol in SOLT addresses these barriers and supports the employee in achieving the training objectives.

The following are steps to take to ensure that the duty to accommodate is fulfilled during SOLT. They are based on the requirements of:

* the [*Privacy Act*](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/p-21/FullText.html)
* the [*Policy on People Management*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/(S(e021jvamqbhco5551teiyz55))/doc-eng.aspx?id=32621)
* the [*Directive on the Duty to Accommodate*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32634) and the associated [mandatory procedures](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32634%22%20\l%20%22:~:text=Appendix%3A%20Mandatory%20Procedures%20for%20the%20Duty%20to%20Accommodate)
* the [*Duty to Accommodate: A General Process for Managers*](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/working-government-canada-duty-accommodate-right-non-discrimination/duty-accommodate-general-process-managers.html), a framework that institutions should refer to in its entirety and provides additional information about each step.

The subsequent steps are derived from the [*Duty to Accommodate: A General Process for Managers*](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/working-government-canada-duty-accommodate-right-non-discrimination/duty-accommodate-general-process-managers.html).

### **Step 1:** Recognize the need for accommodation

Managers are responsible for fulfilling the employer’s legal duty to accommodate. Employees are responsible for communicating their work-related accommodation needs.

Institutions should therefore continually encourage managers and employees to be proactive in their discussions about accommodation needs, particularly for SOLT.

### **Step 2:** Gather relevant information and assess needs

In many cases, an accommodation request can be addressed through collaborative engagement between the manager and the employee without requesting information or documentation from external sources.

Guidance on requesting documentation when required to understand barriers and identify accommodation measures is in [*Duty to Accommodate: A General Process for Managers*](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/working-government-canada-duty-accommodate-right-non-discrimination/duty-accommodate-general-process-managers.html).

### **Step 3:** Make an informed decision about accommodation measures

For the SOLT, a personalized learning plan, where appropriate, should be developed in collaboration with learners and with the support of a language learning specialist. If the institution does not have a language learning specialist, an educational consultant from a private language school can draw up the plan.

### **Step 4:** Implement the decision

Whether the training is provided internally or externally, the manager is to remain involved in the accommodation process and in the training institution’s efforts to incorporate the accommodation measures into the SOLT plan to make sure barriers are addressed and the duty to accommodate is met.

It is therefore advisable that a SOLT agreement be drawn up between the learner, the manager, the teacher, and the language school (if applicable). The agreement would set out how accommodation measures that impact the delivery of the language training will be implemented so that the learner’s needs are met.

### **Step 5:** [Keep records and follow up with the employee](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/working-government-canada-duty-accommodate-right-non-discrimination/duty-accommodate-general-process-managers/keep-records-follow-up.html%22%20/l%20%22toc1:~:text=Process%20for%20Managers-,5.%20Keep%20records%20and%20follow%20up,-Managers%20should%20respect)

Managers should follow up with the employee to confirm that the accommodation measures put in place address their needs. They are to retain, in the appropriate institutional records, a record of the accommodation the employee requested and the accommodation that was provided, including accommodation provided informally.

### **Step 6:** Schedule adapted second language evaluations with the Public Service Commission.

Managers can check the Public Service Commission website for an [overview of the assessment accommodation process](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/assessment-accommodation-page/the-assessment-accommodation-process/overview-assessment-accommodation-process.html) and to schedule an adapted second language evaluation, if needed.

# Collecting and tracking SOLT data

The [*Guidelines on Second Official Language Training*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32788) state that data can help institutions design and implement their SOLT program to better meet learners’ needs. To obtain meaningful data about learners, institutions are encouraged to track the indicators that matter most to them.

Subsection 3.5 of the [*Guidelines on Second Official Language Training*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32788) contains a list of data to track.

Information on the use, handling and safeguarding of information is in the Treasury Board [*Security Organization and Administration Standard*](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12333) and [Code of Confidentiality for the Collection of Self-Identification Data in the Public Service of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/self-identification/code-confidentiality.html).

## Example of how to obtain the percentage of learners enrolled in SOLT from the designated employment equity groups:

1. The person responsible for SOLT enrolment in an institution can send a list of the personal record identifiers (PRIs) of all the learners in their institution to their self-ID data stewards, who are authorized to extract the self-ID data from the institution’s human resources system.
2. The stewards then cross‑reference the PRI list with the list of employees who have self‑identified in their institution.
3. Finally, they calculate the percentage of learners enrolled in SOLT, by designated employment equity group, and provide it to the person responsible for SOLT in the institution. It is recommended that institutions consult their Access to Information and Privacy team about management of SOLT data. It must be done in accordance with the [*Privacy Act*](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/p-21/FullText.html) and the related Treasury Board policy instruments.

# Appendix

## Sample of commitment agreement for SOLT

Second official language training (SOLT) is a significant investment for an employee and for their institution. It is therefore important that it be effective and that both parties benefit from it as much as possible. Commitment by both parties is essential.

This agreement sets out the main responsibilities of the employee and of their manager when an employee is on formal SOLT, whether part-time or full-time and whether group or individual.

**Employee’s responsibilities**

1. Commit to fully participating in the SOLT according to the predetermined conditions and schedule
2. Discuss with their manager any planned leave to determine the best time for them to take SOLT
3. Inform their manager of any need for accommodation before starting SOLT
4. Inform their person responsible for SOLT and manager of any situation that could delay their learning in a significant way
5. Maintain the level of language proficiency attained by using their second official language when they return to work and by taking advantage of the tools provided for language maintenance (for example, the maintenance path proposed in the Playbook)

**Manager’s responsibilities**

1. Release the employee from their duties throughout the training period
2. Regularly monitor and discuss progress with the employee
3. Create a workplace that supports participation and promotes the use and practice of the employee’s second official language in order to maintain their language skills. To that end, provide all reasonable assistance, in particular by ensuring that the employee has access to tools and activities that will facilitate retention of the second official language skills.

By signing this agreement, both parties commit to fulfilling these responsibilities.

Name of employee (print name) Name of manager (print name)

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Employee’s signature Manager’s signature

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