

The Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations  
and the Official Languages Regulations Re-Application Exercise  
Presentation notes—April 2025

## Slide 1 Presentation on the Regulations and the OLRRE

- Hello, and welcome to the presentation on the [Official Languages \(Communications with and Service to the Public\) Regulations](#) or, the Regulations, and the Official Languages Regulations Re-Application Exercise, that we usually call, the OLRRE for short.
- During the presentation, we will have a look at the Regulations and at the OLRRE as well as the institutions' obligations with respect to the language designation of offices.
- We will also look at different situations and examples, but please remember that the text of the Regulations and of the [Directive on the implementation of the Official Languages \(Communications with and Services to the Public\) Regulations](#), referred to as the Directive, always prevail.

## Slide 2 Background

- The Regulations stem from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Official Languages Act*.
- It is important to note that the *Official Languages Act*, or the OLA, is a quasi-constitutional law.
  - Quasi-constitutional laws are designated as such because they deal with a constitutional matter and express our fundamental values but are passed in accordance with the normal process for passing legislation.
  - They take precedence over all other federal laws.
  - The other two major quasi-constitutional laws are the *Canadian Bill of Rights* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.
- Together, the Charter and the OLA give members of the public the right to federal communications and services in the official language of their choice, under the following circumstances:
  - in the National Capital Region;
  - in the institutions of Parliament;
  - at the head offices of the institutions;
  - and where there is significant demand; and
  - where justified by the nature of the office.
- We can see that Parliament did not intend all federal offices to be designated bilingual.
- We will come back to the concepts of “significant demand” and “nature of the office” later.

### Slide 3 The Role of the Regulations

- The Regulations initially came into effect in 1991 and were amended in 2019.
- Nearly 11, 000 offices are subject to the OLA and the Regulations.
- Using various criteria and thresholds in the form of numbers and percentages, the Regulations define, for an existing office:
  - the circumstances where there is significant demand in the minority language, in which case it must be designated bilingual; and
  - cases where the nature of the office justifies it being bilingual.
- Here on the slide, under the first bulb, you'll see that the Regulations apply to existing federal offices. Therefore, the Regulations do not determine IF an institution needs to open or close an office at any given location, nor to they specify how the office must provide its services.
- How services are offered and how institutions operate are not considered when determining the language designation of an office, unless the services are offered by means of a toll-free number, an automated system or videoconferencing.

### Slide 4 What is Meant by “Office” and “Public”

- The Regulations apply on offices that communicate with and provide services to the public and that are not already bilingual under the OLA, like those mentioned earlier in the NCR or agents of parliament or institutions' headquarters.
- An office is a location where a federal institution offers services to, or communicates with, the public.
- The public is any person, group of persons, organization or business that receives services from, or communicates with, federal institutions including representatives of other levels of government.
- When we think of “communications with and services to the public,” we often think of the general public—the average person—who might walk into an office in person to use the services intended for the general Canadian public. However, the concept of communications with and services to the public in the sense of the Regulations is much broader.
- For instance, it can include services and communications by appointment only or on a ferry, or communications with and services to:
  - persons who have committed an offence, for Border Services or the RCMP;
  - the inmate population, if you're working with Correctional Services;
  - other levels of government, such as municipal or provincial government employees;

- scientists and academics, for those of you working in science-based departments; or
- suppliers and other contractors, in the case of Defence Construction Canada.

## Slide 5 Significant Demand

- The Regulations are the instrument for the application of part IV of the OLA, the part on communications and services.
- Under the OLA, the Governor in Council may, by regulation, consider the following criteria in determining whether there is significant demand in English, in French or in both official languages:
  - The size of the linguistic minority in the area served and its proportion to the total population of the area;
  - The particular characteristics of the minority;
  - The volume of communications or services between an office and its users; and
  - any other criteria deemed appropriate.
- These criteria are included in the Regulations through three different kinds of rules:
  - The General rules (significant demand)
  - The Specific rules (significant demand), and
  - The Nature of the Office rules.
- On the next slides, we will explore these different kinds of rules.

## Slide 6 General Rules – Calculation Method

- Among the criteria mentioned to determine whether there is significant demand, there is the minority language population that is to be taken into account.
- The calculation method provides data on the size and proportion of the linguistic minority for each census metropolitan area (CMA) and each census subdivision (CSD) in Canada.
- This information is essential to estimate significant demand and determine the linguistic obligations of more than 8,000 of the nearly 11,000 federal offices.
- The language data is obtained through the decennial Census of the population, led every 10 years by Statistics Canada, using a calculation method which draws on the Census' responses related to the mother tongue, the primary language used at home and the language regularly used at home.
- We will look at how these data are used in the next slides.

## Slide 7 General Rules – Thresholds

- The general rules include criteria and thresholds that are applied to the minority population data obtained using the calculation method.
- In general, the size and proportion of the minority where the office is located are examined. If it meets the thresholds and the office's situation respects the prescribed criteria, the office is designated as bilingual.
- There is an example on the slide. If an office is the only one to offer its services in Bathurst, New Brunswick, a census subdivision in which the minority is 500 people or more, representing five percent or more of the total population in the region, then this office is designated as bilingual.
- This is just one example. There are several other rules and criteria. Sometimes, one must determine the service area of an office to see if there is significant demand at an office.

## Slide 8 General Rules – Service Area

- As previously mentioned, in some cases, the territory or geographic area served by an office must be defined to determine its linguistic designation. This is called the service area of an office.
- The service area is determined by the institution. It may be larger than the census subdivision where the office is located. It can include several regions, even an entire province.
- Once the service area is defined, the thresholds and criteria of the Regulations are applied:
  - First, we apply the new rule according to which if there is a minority language school in the service area of the office, the office is designated bilingual.
  - If there is no minority school in the service area, we then verify to see if there are at least 5,000 people from the linguistic minority in the office's service area. If so, it is designated bilingual, if not, it depends!
    - Some offices will have to apply other thresholds and criteria, for example, if the service area overlaps provinces with two different official languages, such as Quebec and Ontario for example, the office is then designated as bilingual; or
    - If there are at least 500 people from the minority representing at least five percent of the total population of the service area, the office is designated as bilingual.
    - In addition, in certain circumstances (and in certain regions and for non-key services) the Regulation provides that when the service area of an office does not reach these thresholds, we must verify whether there is a

significant demand or not by measuring the real demand for service in the minority language.

- If there is a five percent or more of demand in the minority language, the office is designated bilingual. This is called measurement of demand. We will come back to it a little later in the presentation.
- These are just a few examples of the use of language data and the thresholds prescribed by the Regulations, but we would like to reassure you that the System for official languages obligations – SOLO for short – will tell you which rule applies and will tell you if the thresholds are reached and if there is a school in the service area. We will look at SOLO a little later in the presentation.

### Slide 9 General Rules – Principle of Proportionality

- The principle of proportionality is another way of using language data. When an institution has several offices offering the same services in a region, it must generally offer bilingual services at a number of offices equal to or greater than the percentage of the minority in that region. We have an example here on the slide:
  - Let's say there are three offices offering the same non-key services in Montréal. The percentage of the minority in Montréal is 30.3 percent.
  - We multiply three offices by 30.3 percent which gives us 0.9. The number is always rounded up, so one of the three offices must be bilingual.
  - Once the number of bilingual offices has been determined, the institution must consider the offices' mandate, the distribution of the minority, and opinions obtained from consultations with the minority when choosing which office is to be designated bilingual among those three offices.
- Here, we give an overview of the application of the principle of proportionality; however, the situation may vary depending on the circumstances of the offices in question.
  - For example, there are services that we call "key services" because they are closer to the general public, like Canada Post services. Offices are more likely to be affected by the principle of proportionality if they offer key services than if they offer non-key services simply because, in smaller census subdivisions, only offices offering those key services are so numerous that they would need to apply the principle of proportionality.
- When you apply the Regulations through SOLO, the system automatically notifies you when proportionality must be applied to a group of offices offering the same services. Moreover, we, at the Official Languages Centre or Excellence, are here to help if you have any questions.

- Regarding consultations, we have developed a best practices guide for consultations related to the application of the Regulations. It can be found in the [Regulations Toolbox on the GCWiki page](#).

## Slide 10 Specific Rules

- There are situations where demographic data is not useful in determining whether there is significant demand for service in the minority language at an office.
- For example:
  - Demographic data is not a good indicator of significant demand at an airport as travellers at the airport may be from other regions, or even other provinces. The same is true for plane routes. So:
    - For airports, if it is located in a provincial or territorial capital, the airport, and the federal offices within that airport, are designated as bilingual.
    - For other airports, the million rule is used. If the total number of passengers arriving and departing at the airport over a year is at least one million, the airport and federal offices located within that airport, are designated as bilingual.
    - When an airport does not reach the threshold of one million, actual demand in the minority language by travellers going through the airport is measured.
    - Demand is also measured for most plane routes. We will look at the measurement of demand on the next slide.
  - Demographic data is also not useful for offices that serve a restricted and identifiable clientele. These offices offer services that are not available to the general public. The restricted clientele is exclusive, and the institution has an up-to-date list of its clients. For example, Veterans Affairs and Correctional Service serve a restricted and identifiable clientele.
  - To determine the language of service, these offices must also measure the demand by their clientele, or more precisely in those cases, they survey their clientele directly.

## Slide 11 Measurement of Demand

- A measurement of demand is a survey of an office's clientele to find out their language preference for communications and services.
- Two scenarios apply:
  - In some cases, if there is at least 5% demand **in the minority language**, the office is bilingual. Otherwise, it is unilingual in the majority language (French in Quebec, English in the rest of Canada). This is the case for offices measuring the demand from the general public after a service area, at points of entry in

Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario, Search and Rescue offices, and from the travelling public at airports, train stations, ferry terminals, and offices in those facilities.

- In some cases, there must be at least 5% demand **in both official languages** for the office to be bilingual. Otherwise, it is unilingual in the language in which there is at least 5% demand. It is therefore possible for such office to be unilingual French outside of Quebec or unilingual English in Quebec. This scenario applies to offices serving a restricted and identifiable clientele, to plane, train or ferry routes, ship-to-shore communications offices and search and rescue.
- As with the other rules, SOLO will tell you when it is necessary to measure the demand. In addition, we have developed a good practices guide for measurement of demand. It can also be found in the [Regulations Toolbox on our GCWiki page](#).

## Slide 12 Nature of the Office

- We've arrived at the final set of rules. The Nature of the Office rules.
- In some cases, the very nature of the office or its mandate is such that it must automatically be designated bilingual.
- Normally, offices subject to Nature of the Office rules offer services to the general public.
- Sometimes, it is the national or international nature of the office's mandate, such as an embassy or consulate, which makes it bilingual.
- In some cases, it is because the office offers services related to health or public safety, such as a first aid clinic at an airport.
- Sometimes, it is other circumstances, such as services offered by a toll-free telephone number or by videoconference.
- In some situations, it is the location of the office that means that it should be designated bilingual, such as an office in a national park.

## Slide 13 Application of the Regulations

- So, who is responsible for applying the Regulations? The institutions are responsible for applying the Regulations to determine or verify their offices' language designation.
- Since the Regulations apply to existing offices, as the person responsible for official languages, it is important to keep your institution's list of offices up to date.
- You can create or delete offices and modify your offices' information directly in the System for Official Languages Obligations (SOLO). SOLO will tell you which rule applies to the office based on the information you entered such as the address and, or the type of services provided at that office.

- The Official Languages Centre of Excellence here at TBS will remind you of this requirement to keep your institution's list of offices up to date annually during the Review on Official Languages exercise.
- Depending on the applicable rule, the language designation of the office may be provided automatically and immediately, but sometimes, you will need to take steps to confirm the language designation of the office, such as:
  - determining the office's service area;
  - measuring the actual demand for service at the office; or
  - consulting the minority population when the principle of proportionality applies.
- SOLO will guide you on the steps to take, as applicable.
- The Regulations must be applied or their application verified:
  - When an office opens, closes or moves, or when its functions change.
  - During the Official Languages Regulations Reapplication Exercise, known as the OLRRE.

## Slide 14 The Official Languages Regulations Reapplication Exercise (OLRRE)

- (Why?) As the composition of the population and the geographic boundaries of the regions change over time, the Regulations provide that institutions reapply the rules to their offices every 10 years, using language data from the most recent decennial census of population.
- Since people's habits can also change, the [Directive on the Implementation of the Official Languages \(Communications With and Services to the Public\) Regulations](#) (the Directive) ensures that the demand for specific rules—such as ferry routes, airports, and restricted and identifiable clientele—is measured at least every 10 years as well.
- (How?) The process through which the reapplication of the rules takes place is the Official Languages Regulations Re-Application Exercise (OLRRE). We, the Treasury Board Secretariat, coordinate the OLRRE using SOLO.
- (Who?) This reapplication of the Regulations is done on offices currently designated as bilingual or unilingual alike as it aims to **confirm** the language designation of existing federal offices and keep their information up to date.
- Offices subject to the general rules and the specific rules must undergo the OLRRE, but not those subject to the nature of the office rules.
- (When?) As mentioned earlier, the OLRRE is held every 10 years. The most recent one was launched in 2023 and will continue until 2027, and the next one will begin following the publication of the language data from the Census in 2031. Institutions have a big role to play in the OLRRE. We will look at this in the next slide.



## Slide 15 – OLRRE Steps

- As previously mentioned, the OLRRE takes place every 10 years, following the publication of the language data from the Decennial Census by Statistics Canada. These are the general steps for this exercise
- The OLRRE process begins with training and a request to start obtaining the information required to update your institution's list of offices such as confirming the address of your offices and whether they are still open or if new offices opened and need to be registered in SOLO.
- The OLRRE itself begins once the list of offices is up to date, with the application of the so-called automatic rules on existing offices registered in SOLO.
  - Automatic rules are those that do not require any intervention on your part to be applied. Once these rules are applied in SOLO, we immediately know the linguistic designation of most of these offices. They can be general rules or specific rules.
  - For example, if an office is the only office in a large city to offer its services, it is *automatically* bilingual. If a train station is in a census subdivision where the minority is greater than 500 people representing at least 5% of the total population of that area, it is *automatically* bilingual. There is no need to consult, define a service area or measure the demand for these offices.
- Around the same time, we also begin the work for specific rules, such as the measurement of demand for offices where demographic data is not relevant, like routes, airports, ferry terminals and offices offering services to a restricted and identifiable clientele.
  - If your institution is subject to these rules, you will be notified in SOLO and, as provided by the Directive, you will have two years to measure the demand in those offices and to provide your results in SOLO.
- Also around the same time, some of you will be assigned tasks in SOLO, perhaps to determine the service area of some of your offices and/or to consult the minority served by your offices under the proportionality rule to discuss the location of bilingual offices.
  - As provided by the Directive, you will have six months to determine the service area of your offices and six months to complete your consultations and identify your bilingual offices in SOLO.
- Six months after the beginning of the OLRRE, if you have defined the service area of some offices at the beginning and that some of them have not reached the service area thresholds prescribed by the Regulations, in some cases, SOLO will inform you that you must now measure the demand in those offices.
  - The measurement of demand following the service area applies only to offices that do not offer key services, in some regions.

- The two-year deadline to complete this process and enter your results into SOLO will begin at that time.
- At the same time (six months after the beginning of the OLRRE), if you have offices that were under the proportionality rule, in some cases, SOLO will tell you that offices that were not identified as bilingual following your consultations with the minority must now define their service area. We call those residual offices.
  - The application of service area rules on residual offices does not apply to offices in large cities where the minority is greater than 5000.
  - The six-month deadline to define the service area of these offices begins at that time.
- Throughout the OLRRE, demographic protection is applied by SOLO to offices subject to rules that depend on the number and percentage of the minority.
  - Demographic protection ensures that offices currently designated bilingual can retain their bilingual designation if the minority has remained the same or has increased in number, even if its proportion of the total population has decreased.
  - For example, if an office was going to lose its bilingual designation during the OLRRE because it no longer met the percentage threshold, but the minority population in the region where it is located or in its service area has increased or remained the same, SOLO will identify that office as designated bilingual under the new demographic protection provision.
- TBS, as the OLRRE coordinator, provides dates and instructions before each step of the OLRRE, as well as focused information sessions on what needs to be done and other resources.

## Slide 16 Once the OLRRE Has Been Completed

- Once the language designation of an office has been determined, the Directive gives newly bilingual offices up to one year to implement their new obligations.
- In cases of newly unilingual offices, you have up to one year to inform the minority population served of the date the bilingual services will no longer be provided at that office and where they can receive services in their preferred official language.
- Once the timelines set out in the Directive have passed, the annual review is the tool used by TBS to verify compliance.

## Slide 17 A Bilingual Office

- Your institution must consider official languages obligations in the planning of its operations and resource needs, just as it must consider its other obligations regarding employment equity, security, accessibility, etc.

- In its decisions, your institution must consider equal treatment in both official languages. For example, one cannot offer an in-person service in English and make French available by phone only.
- The [Policy on Official Languages](#) and the [Directive on Official Languages for Communications and Services](#) provide more details for implementing bilingual obligations within your institution.

## Slide 18 Contact Us

- Should you have any questions on any of the content in this presentation, we invite you to please email us at the generic inbox listed on this slide. Please feel free to communicate with us in the official language of your choice.
- You can also find more information and resources in our [Regulations Toolbox on GCWiki](#).