



March 02, 2021

LESA SEMMLER  
MLA, INUVIK TWIN LAKES

**Oral Question 408-19(2) Use of Indigenous Languages in GNWT Workplaces**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on October 27, 2020 regarding the active offer and the use of Indigenous languages in the public service.

It is the policy of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) that members of the public have reasonable access to its programs and services in official languages (Policy 71.10 – Official Languages). The GNWT is committed to serving people in a culturally respectful manner and ensuring cultural safety.

The active offer is a way of greeting the public which informs them that they are welcome to communicate with the GNWT in an official language other than English when seeking information or a service. An active offer can be communicated through a sign, a personal greeting or a recorded message. In publications, an active offer sheet is included that indicates how to access the publication in another official language.

When an active offer is made, it establishes a commitment to deliver services in that official language. Any member of the public in the Northwest Territories has the right to receive available services in English or French where there is a significant demand for communications with and services from the office in that language. Pursuant to the *Official Languages Act*, the *Government Institution Regulations* identify the four (4) communities of significant demand for French. By law, frontline staff at points of public service in Fort Smith, Hay River, Inuvik, and Yellowknife, must greet a member of the public over the phone in English and French: “Hello/Bonjour”. This ensures that French speaking residents in those communities can access services from all government institutions in English and French. If an employee provides an active offer, but does not speak French fluently, there is a process in place to access French services through referral or interpretation services for the member of the public.

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The French Active Offer training provides employees with relevant background, tools and advice on how to provide a French active offer to the public.

The French Active Offer training does not encourage participants to answer in an Indigenous Language. The training encourages participants to contact the Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat (ILES) with questions or concerns about how to provide an active offer in an Indigenous language. The Department can confirm that if participants in the training reach out to ILES, they would be directed to the *1997 Official Language Guidelines* which states that 'in a Designated Office, an employee will initially address a member of the public in all of the official languages of that designated office (including English) in which that employee is fluent'.

The *2019 – 2020 Annual Report on Official Languages* indicates there are 176 employees of the public service who receive a bilingual bonus for an Indigenous language. Employees receiving a bilingual bonus for an Indigenous language only receive French Active Offer training if they are in frontline positions in Significant Demand communities. Bilingual bonuses are offered to employees who speak an additional official language and provide adequate services to the public. These employees provide direct services to the public in an Indigenous language and receive a financial bonus for doing so. As per the *1997 Official Language Guidelines* these employees are required to provide an active offer of service in the official languages of that designated office in which that employee is fluent, and French, if it is a significant demand community. For instance, in Inuvik, a Gwich'in speaking frontline employee would initially address a member of the public in Gwich'in, English and French.

While there is currently no mechanism to ensure employees are following through on the *Official Language Guidelines*, in the fall of 2020, ECE began the process of revising the *Official Languages Guidelines Manual* in fulfillment of Action 2.1 of the *2018-2022 NWT Indigenous Languages Action Plan*. A draft has been completed and is currently under review within the Department. This process is anticipated to be completed by the end of December 2021. Updating the *Official Languages Guidelines Manual* is foundational to the successful implementation of the following actions related to services in Indigenous languages:

- Action 2.1 – Update official languages regulations, policy and guidelines to improve access to public services in Indigenous languages;
- Action 2.2 – Educate GNWT employees on their role in providing Indigenous languages services as laid out in the *Official Languages Guidelines*; and
- Action 2.4 – Support GNWT Departments to be able to offer improved public services in Indigenous languages as outlined in the *Official Languages Guidelines*.

For further details on the Action Plan and specific deliverables, please visit the *NWT Indigenous Languages Action Plan: A Shared Responsibility (2018-2022)* at: [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/nwt\\_indigenous\\_languages\\_action\\_plan\\_2018-2022.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/nwt_indigenous_languages_action_plan_2018-2022.pdf)

Thank you for your questions and interest in this matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.J. Simpson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

R.J. Simpson  
Minister, Education, Culture  
and Employment

- c. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment  
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs