

# THE AGENCY FOR CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

## POLICY MANUAL

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**SUBJECT:**

Bilingual Services

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### 1. Guiding Principle

The Agency's client co-operatives, their members and the general public are entitled to service in the official language of their choice. The Agency will actively invite all parties it communicates with to express their language preference and will respect that choice.

### 2. Oral Communications

2.1 The Agency will make every effort to conduct oral communications in the official language preferred by the client or member of the public.

2.2 The Agency will ensure continuity of service to each client co-operative by assigning a French- or English-speaking staff member, depending on the co-op's preferred language of business, to manage the relationship. If no relationship manager speaks French in the Agency office nearest to a francophone co-op, the Agency will assign a relationship manager from another centre to work with it.

2.3 All Agency offices will use automated telephone answering and call transfer to enable callers to conduct business in their choice of either English or French.

2.4 Bilingual employees are required to record voice-mail greetings in both English and French.

2.5 The voicemail greetings of unilingual relationship managers will give the caller the option of talking with a French-speaking relationship manager.

- 2.6 The voicemail greeting of other unilingual employees will give the caller the option of talking with the French-speaking receptionist, who can direct them to the staff member who can best meet their needs.
- 2.7 The Agency will ensure that any independent contractors who work with francophone co-ops on the Agency's behalf, such as building inspectors or appraisers, can communicate effectively in French. If necessary, the Agency will meet this requirement by engaging a contractor from another region.

### **3. Written Communications**

- 3.1 The Agency will correspond with client co-operatives, their members and the general public in the correspondent's preferred official language.
- 3.2 The Agency will issue reports to client co-operatives in their official language of choice.
- 3.3 All Agency forms and resource documents will be made available in both official languages.
- 3.4 Correspondence the Agency intends for broader circulation among client co-operatives or other stakeholders will be distributed in both official languages.
- 3.5 The Agency will publish its annual report in both official languages, as well as descriptions of its services or programs and any other materials intended for broad distribution among clients, other stakeholders or the general public.
- 3.6 The Agency will publish media releases in both official languages.
- 3.7 All Agency policies and summaries of minutes of meetings of the Board of Directors will be published in both official languages.
- 3.8 The Agency will simultaneously release French and English versions of all written communications, except in exceptional circumstances.

### **4. Electronic Communications**

- 4.1 The rules above for written communications will also govern the Agency's electronic communications.
- 4.2 All material produced by the Agency or its government partners and published on the Agency's website will appear in both official languages.

4.3 The Agency will normally publish documents from third parties only in the language in which they were made available.

4.4 Staff who expect to be away from the office must post auto-responder e-mail messages in both English and French.

**5. Audiovisual Communications**

The Agency will produce all audiovisual materials in both official languages.

**6. Meetings and Events**

6.1 The Agency will conduct its meetings with individual client co-operatives in the co-op's preferred official language.

6.2 The Agency will arrange for simultaneous interpretation in French and English at its public meetings, or otherwise ensure that unilingual attendees can follow and participate in the proceedings, including any discussion.

6.3 The Board of Directors will conduct its meetings in English, providing individual interpretation into French, and from French to English, as necessary.

6.4 When participating at events sponsored by bilingual organizations, the Agency will provide handouts in both official languages. For events sponsored by unilingual organizations, the Agency will provide handouts, on request, in the other official language.

**7. Language Capacity of Staff**

The Agency will meet the requirements of this policy and honour its commitment to client-centered service through human-resource policies that set levels of proficiency in the employee's second official language for all positions.

**8. Guidance to Agency Staff**

The Agency will provide appropriate guidance to assist staff in observing this policy.

**9. Monitoring and Complaints**

9.1 The Agency will regularly evaluate its effectiveness in providing bilingual services, as described in this policy, through the processes developed for evaluating its client-centered service.

- 9.2 A client or member of the public with a complaint about language of service may invoke the Agency's published dispute-resolution procedure.
- 9.3 The Agency will refer to CMHC any complaints it receives under the *Official Languages Act*.