



Towards a strengthened municipal-provincial partnership

Notice on the 16 strategic
priorities of Manitoba's
bilingual municipal leadership

September 2023

Provincial elections are an ideal time to take stock of what has been achieved in recent years, and to open a frank and constructive dialogue about current priorities, both with the candidates running to form the next provincial government, and with the newly elected government as it begins its mandate.

This campaign comes at a time when Manitoba society is mobilized around crucial and unprecedented socio-economic issues.

The Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM) and its members are themselves mobilized around the implementation of their Municipal Economic Recovery Strategy and their Strategy to Support Economic Immigration to member municipalities, in addition to the roll-out of their new Municipal Maturity Model (3M).

In order to build prosperous communities and offer public services effectively in both official languages, it is essential to strengthen cooperation and coordination between provincial and municipal governments. The partners will thus have a renewed impact on the federal government to obtain the resources needed for optimal service delivery.

As usual, the AMBM remains resolutely non-partisan in any form of election. However, it invites all stakeholders and public decision makers to take note of the strategic priorities presented in this notice, and then to clarify their position so that together, we can take action in a spirit of collaboration, for the benefit of Manitoba's bilingual communities.

Important note: the priorities set out below are drawn from the AMBM's current major strategic orientations. They appear randomly, by topic, and not in any particular order.

1. The Manitoba government must play an active role in resolving the shortage of Francophone and bilingual workers

The Manitoba Labour Market Outlook for 2022-2026 forecasts steady employment growth in the province, with a total of 114,300 jobs created over the same period. Across Manitoba, sales and service, education, law, social services, community and government services, trade, transportation and aircraft operations are expected to provide the most jobs, with a combined total of 61,900.

Among Manitoba's rural bilingual municipalities (14 of the AMBM's 15 members), a recent report commissioned by the AMBM highlights that the strongest industries in 2022 will be, in order of importance, educational services, health care and social assistance, agriculture and construction. The data is clear: demand for jobs in these key sectors will continue to grow.

Added to this is the fact that on the AMBM territory, mastery of the official languages is either necessary or at least a definite asset. Recruiting French-speaking and bilingual professionals is crucial to maintaining and developing basic infrastructures in French, starting with education and health care.

In Manitoba, the AMBM's subsidiary, the Economic Development Council of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (*Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba* or CDEM), is responsible for recruiting Francophone and bilingual economic immigrants through a formal partnership with the Province under the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP). In fact, the CDEM coordinates the Francophone *Invitation au Manitoba* stream of the Skilled Worker Overseas pathway program.

Align talent attraction efforts with labour market demand and economic outlook

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are an attractive destination for many Francophone and bilingual candidates for economic immigration through the MPNP.

Every year, the CDEM meets thousands of qualified potential Francophone and bilingual immigrants, and convinces them to apply to the MPNP pool. However, only a few hundred of them subsequently receive their official letter from the Province inviting them to settle in Canada as permanent residents. Immigration processes are complex and time-consuming, due to factors such as waiting times, the targeting of foreign occupations to the needs of rural employers, and the bureaucratic red tape that goes with it all.

The CDEM invests a great deal of effort in attracting and recruiting newcomers, notably by participating in events such as Destination Canada and Destination Manitoba abroad, and

by welcoming prospective immigrants to Manitoba as part of exploratory visits linked to the *Invitation au Manitoba* stream. In order to access a French-speaking and bilingual workforce that matches the needs of employers and the socio-economic fabric of rural French-speaking and bilingual areas, targeted recruitment missions abroad would be an ideal way to reach targets.

PRIORITY # 1:

Substantially increase Francophone and bilingual economic immigration to Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, particularly in rural areas, by attracting a targeted workforce that meets the needs of local employers, as well as immigrant investors.

PRIORITY # 2:

Facilitate access to full CDEM autonomy in the selection of Francophone and bilingual candidates for immigration under the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program.

PRIORITY # 3:

Create a customized initiative to support the recruitment of immigrants who match the economic fabric and the Francophone and bilingual workforce needs of rural bilingual municipalities.

Recruiting and integrating new talent in rural areas

Hundreds of employers in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities that value both official languages are expressing a desperate need for a bilingual workforce to ensure their sustainability and support their growth, but are reluctant to turn to immigration as a solution. Many of them, particularly in rural areas, see recruiting bilingual and Francophone immigrants as a complex operation. They are therefore looking for the best channels to access these resources, and tangible support to strengthen their capabilities to ensure their smooth inclusion in the business once hired.

PRIORITY # 4

Raise awareness and support rural employers in attracting and including new talent to support their growth.

2. The Manitoba government must invest in the development of strategic, structuring infrastructure

Municipalities own 60% of the critical infrastructure that supports our economy. These must be continually renewed and maintained, while new infrastructure must also be developed.

Over the past few years, our municipal governments have had to face unprecedented challenges that have revealed their precariousness, and this is not the end of the story. Think of the COVID-19 public health crisis, climate change, galloping inflation and ever-rising interest rates, under-exploitation of their tourism potential and profound digital marginalization.

When the Province of Manitoba supports Manitoba's bilingual municipalities in the implementation of strategic and structuring infrastructure projects, it also contributes to the development of Francophone minority communities (FMCs) on their territory.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, every dollar invested in local infrastructure boosts Canada's real GDP by \$1.20 to \$1.60¹. There's no doubt, then, that infrastructure investment is one of the most powerful and progressive levers of economic growth, and a veritable tool for economic development across Canada.

The expertise developed by Eco-West Canada, the AMBM's most recent non-profit subsidiary, includes assisting small Manitoba and Canadian municipalities in the assessment, financing and implementation of sustainable infrastructure - from an energy efficiency perspective.

Affordable housing and related municipal infrastructure

Affordable housing is a cornerstone of sustainable, inclusive communities. Families need a safe place to live and raise their children, which includes affordable and decent housing options close to parents' workplaces, childcare, schools and community services.

For Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, the shortage of affordable housing is a major concern. All the more so as the construction of new housing invariably entails the need to invest in the corresponding municipal infrastructure: drinking water, wastewater treatment, solid waste management, public transport, community energy systems, access to reliable digital infrastructure, and so on.

In rural areas, the situation is so critical that local employers are extremely limited in their ability to attract new talent to fill their jobs, due to a lack of local and regional housing. This

¹ Source: FCM, "Building back better together," November 2020, p. 9.

leads to stagnation in the development and prosperity of the companies and municipalities concerned, and limits their attractiveness.

PRIORITY # 5

Increase access to affordable housing in rural areas, taking into account the corresponding municipal infrastructure.

Regional and inter-regional public transport

At a time when a growing number of current residents (seniors, young people, students, single-parent families and low-income earners) and potential residents (newcomers) don't own a car, and when climate change is forcing us to review our carbon footprint, smaller municipalities feel it's high time to introduce new public transit solutions.

The introduction of environmentally friendly public transport solutions is increasingly the prerogative of municipalities aspiring to offer a renewed quality of life and a higher level of prosperity to their population.

There's a need, there's a will, and now's the time to work on multiplying these kinds of projects in Manitoba's rural bilingual municipalities.

PRIORITY # 6

Implement efficient, sustainable mass transit solutions in small rural communities, from a regional and inter-regional perspective.

Digital infrastructure

In 2023, access to broadband Internet service and mobile connectivity (cellular telephony) has become an everyday necessity.

This digital infrastructure is vital to the quality of life of the population, in terms of health care, education, telework and public safety. Businesses rely on these digital infrastructures to innovate, grow and remain competitive. The absence of such services is enough to discourage any business from setting up and operating in rural areas.

In 2020, 60% of Canada's rural communities still had no access to reliable high-speed Internet service². Despite government investments in recent years, many bilingual communities in rural areas are still deprived of decent digital infrastructures. Yet it's an essential service to the

² Government of Canada, Minister of Industry (Industry Strategy Council), Restart, Recover and Reimagine Prosperity for All Canadians: An Ambitious Growth Plan for Building a Digital, Sustainable and Innovative Economy, Ottawa, October 2020, p. 43.

[Online] [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/062.nsf/vwapj/00118a_fr.pdf/\\$file/00118a_en.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/062.nsf/vwapj/00118a_fr.pdf/$file/00118a_en.pdf).

inclusive economy that these communities and their FMCs deserve.

In minority communities, the lack of digital infrastructure contributes to linguistic assimilation. It is practically impossible to normalize the French fact without giving ourselves the technological tools to access content in this official language.

PRIORITY # 7

Connect all bilingual communities in Manitoba to reliable, affordable high-speed Internet and cellular services.

Basic infrastructure and municipal services

Every day, residents depend on basic municipal infrastructure and services. These include road and bridge maintenance, public transit, drinking water supply and wastewater treatment, police, emergency, public health and environmental management services, not to mention community, recreational and cultural facilities, events, public programs and much more.

Year after year, AMBM members invest heavily to maintain their infrastructure. Due to a lack of resources, several infrastructure assets have reached an advanced state of disrepair and require immediate attention. This is the case for many water treatment systems, arenas, recreation centres and municipal libraries, to name but a few.

The presence of infrastructure used by Francophones in FMCs is crucial to building strong, dynamic and prosperous communities, especially since these infrastructure assets stimulate the local economy and have a long-term effect on the economic development and sustainability of these same communities.

In addition, municipalities have an essential role to play, particularly in supporting and overseeing the development of quality French-language educational childcare services on their territory. They have the powers, skills and leverage to influence access to and the development of places, with a view to sustainable, dynamic land use and development. All the more so as early childhood is an important driver of vitality for FMCs.

PRIORITY # 8

Give local governments the tools they require to play their full part in building and maintaining high-quality, sustainable municipal infrastructure.

PRIORITY # 9

Significantly increase the number of infrastructure dedicated to Francophones in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities in order to protect the French language and move towards real equality between our two official languages in the province by setting up a special endowment fund.

PRIORITY # 10

Give local governments the tools they require to offer cultural, sports and leisure services that enhance their residents' quality of life, including attractive bilingual libraries.

PRIORITY # 11

Provide families with a sufficient number of quality French-language educational childcare services throughout the AMBM territory.

3. The Manitoba government must increase its support for Francophone and bilingual economic development, entrepreneurship and tourism

Community Economic Development

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities play a predominant role in local economic development, with a direct impact on the vitality of their FMCs. Their responsibilities in the field of economic development are many: local services to businesses, community economic development service infrastructure, development of industrial zones and parks, and so on.

Given the scope of the responsibilities devolved to local governments, the AMBM and its two specialized economic development subsidiaries (the CDEM and EWC) are working to ensure that their members have the resources they need to be at the forefront of their territory's development.

The Province of Manitoba is an integral part of a far-reaching trade and transportation corridor, thanks to its network of communication routes and efficient intermodal facilities. In this context, Manitoba's bilingual municipalities have great assets (including the added value of French in the strength of bilingualism), but these are often unrecognized within Canada and even more so on the international scene.

In 2020, the World Trade Centre Winnipeg launched its new trade strategy *Towards a Trade Strategy for Manitoba - Building on Local Clusters for Global Success*. Manitoba's bilingual municipalities match the key sectors of Manitoba's economy offering the best commercialization prospects for the province, and identifies six key industry clusters of the future: digital and precision agriculture, proteins, next-generation buses, transportation and logistics, aerospace and the urban economy (digital services, insurance, cultural and creative industries).

PRIORITY # 12

Support economic development and job creation in Manitoba's Francophone and bilingual communities by investing in land development and entrepreneurial support measures, with particular emphasis on certain disadvantaged groups.

Manitoba's French-speaking community: a tourism pillar that needs to be better exploited

Tourism was hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. Due to widespread travel restrictions and a collapse in demand, the sector experienced the worst crisis in its history in 2020, and is still struggling to recover in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, mainly in rural areas.

According to a baseline scenario established by *Tourism Economics*, the province is not expected to return to 2019 tourism spending levels until 2024, and despite this, uncertainty remains.

AMBM members must take advantage of the French fact in Manitoba, but we need to go further. In 2022, the Francophone Tourism Advisory Council (Manitoba) unveiled a strategy to revitalize the sector, based on two major assets: the historical and contemporary reality of the Francophone community, and the discovery of Métis culture and heritage.

PRIORITY # 13 :

Support the ongoing tourism development of Manitoba's Francophone and bilingual communities by creating and marketing distinctive new experiences that highlight Francophone heritage and culture, particularly in rural areas.

4. Manitoba government must anchor its commitment to bilingual government services

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities recognize the value of the French language. They have been committed to and invested convincingly in providing services in both official languages throughout their territory for many years, using their own financial and human resources.

In 1989, the Province of Manitoba adopted its first French Language Services Policy to ensure that the Manitoba community could receive government services in the official language of their choice. *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* was unanimously passed to establish the necessary framework to enhance the vitality of Manitoba's Francophone community and support its development. The purpose of the Act is achieved through the activities of the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and the Advisory Council, including the adoption of French-language services plans for all public and government entities in the Province.

Even today, the Manitoba government has the opportunity to renew its leadership and support for FMCs by actively participating in the improvement of bilingual government services in the province, through in-depth collaboration with the AMBM and Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, notably through the introduction of the new Municipal Maturity Model.

Implementation of the Municipal Maturity Model (3M)

The Municipal Maturity Model (3M), developed by the AMBM in conjunction with the elected officials and Chief Administrative Officers of Manitoba's rural bilingual municipalities, is a Canadian first on the municipal scene.

The 3M will allow AMBM member local governments to assess their level of maturity for each of the indicators related to: 1) service delivery and communications with the public; 2) governance, leadership and strategic direction; and 3) people management.

Gradually, AMBM members intend to adopt the 3M over the next year, but will invariably require additional resources to implement it.

Moreover, the Province recently indicated its intention to consider positively the introduction of the 3M by AMBM members, by way of by-law, in accordance with the *Municipal Act*.

When it comes to providing municipal services in both official languages, the City of Winnipeg is governed by the *City of Winnipeg Charter* and the French Language Services By-law.

PRIORITY # 14 :

Implement the 3M in Manitoba's rural bilingual municipalities through a strengthened municipal-provincial partnership.

Predictable, stable funding to support bilingual government services

According to a report commissioned by the AMBM, between 2015 and 2020, the 14 AMBM member rural bilingual municipalities invested a total of \$3,905,943 in the provision of municipal services in both official languages, for an annual average of \$781,189. It appears that this overall investment could rise to \$4.5 million by 2025. If they had the necessary resources, these municipalities would prefer to quadruple their investment to better match their real needs.

On March 7, 2023, the Department of Municipal Relations announced details of the increase in basic operating costs for recurring municipal operations starting in the 2024-2025 provincial fiscal year. The AMBM and its members hope that this increase will recognize the importance of supporting municipal investment in the provision of services in both official languages.

In terms of federal funding, the Department of Canadian Heritage's Development of Official-Language Communities Program and Enhancement of Official Languages Program are not accessible to municipal governments. In reality, municipalities can only access federal funding to support their provision of services in both official languages if their respective provincial/territorial government applies on their behalf.

The Canada-Manitoba Agreement on French-language Services (CMAFLS) is a proven federal-provincial fiscal tool. It is one of the relevant mechanisms and levers to consider in order to gain greater recognition for municipal investment in official languages, with a view to improving bilingual government services overall. At the same time, deployment of the 3M will make it possible to quantify municipal investment and provide municipalities with clear targets to achieve.

Without such mechanisms and levers in place, FMCs are deprived of access to optimal municipal service delivery in both official languages, with the result of slowing their vitality and development over the longer term.

The City of Winnipeg has also passed a resolution calling on the governments of Manitoba and Canada to renew their financial commitment to support the improvement, delivery and implementation of French-language services for their municipality, as well as for other bilingual municipalities in Manitoba and Canada.

PRIORITY # 15:

Guarantee Manitoba's bilingual municipalities predictable, stable funding to support bilingual government services over the long term.

PRIORITY # 16:

Significantly expand the federal-municipal-provincial partnership to improve the delivery of municipal services in both official languages.

Building on our successes

In recent years, the municipal-provincial partnership has seen several significant and beneficial developments for FMCs in Manitoba's bilingual communities.

In addition to continuing to provide financial support to the AMBM for the translation of its members' documents, the Province established the Working Group on Collaboration and Consultation between the Government of Manitoba and the AMBM, and confirmed its intention to give positive consideration to the introduction of the 3M by member municipalities.

During this period, the Province also substantially increased its support for the operations and infrastructure of Manitoba's bilingual municipalities through the introduction of a new funding model, as well as for numerous projects taking place on their territory, notably through the Arts, Culture and Sport in Community Fund (ACSC), the Building Sustainable Communities Program (BSC) and the Urban/Hometown Green Team Program (UHGT).

Ultimately, well-funded municipalities are essential to sustaining Manitoba's economic and demographic growth. With the appropriate modern fiscal tools, local leaders can confidently tackle today's challenges, including transport, infrastructure renewal and climate resilience.

With a view to building on these successes and continuing to work together to build ever more prosperous, attractive and resilient bilingual communities, the AMBM looks forward to a strengthened and mutually beneficial municipal-provincial partnership over the coming years.

About the Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM)

The Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM) is the voice of bilingual municipal leadership in the province of Manitoba. It represents 15 local governments committed to offering services in both official languages to their citizens, including the City of Winnipeg. Together, these municipalities represent the majority of Manitoba's population.

Manitoba's bilingual municipal leadership is also at the head of the AMBM Group, a consortium of three organizations with complementary vocations: the AMBM, the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (*Conseil de développement des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba*, or CDEM) and Eco-West Canada (EWC), which has specialized in the green economy since 2008.

Complementing each other, these three organizations actively contribute to the development, vitality and sustainability of the province's Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs).