The CHAMBER.

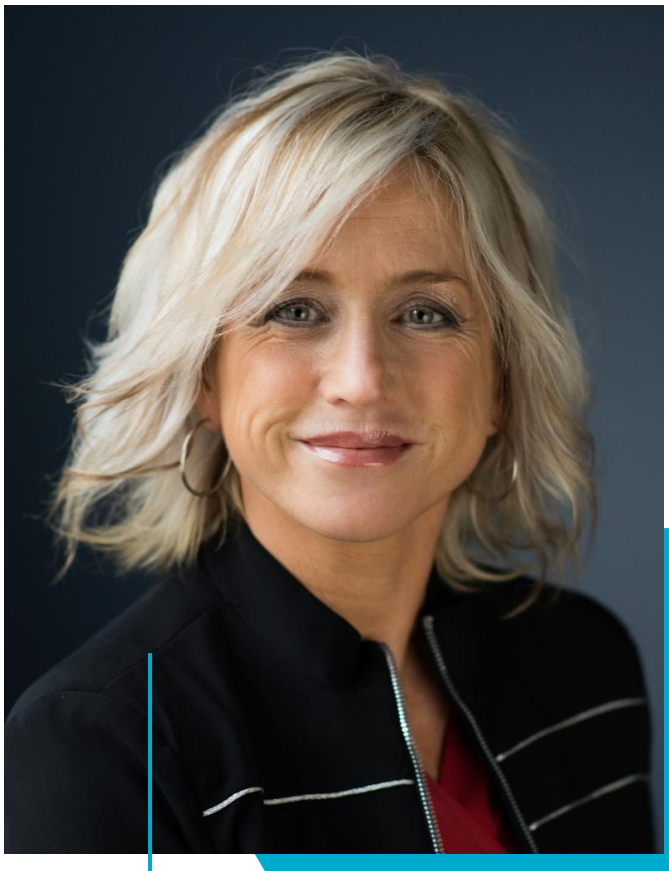
Francophone Entrepreneurial Focus Group

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

FGA

Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones de l'Ontario

Message from the President

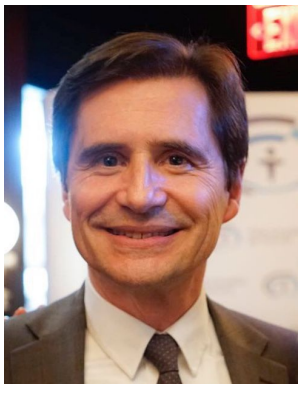


Northern Ontario proudly boasts 122,360 Francophone speakers, of whom 16,000 identify the Timmins region as home. These are community members, leaders, consumers, and business owners and operators that provide products and services in both official languages, contributing to our tax base, economy and our heritage.

While the focus of our discussion revolved around the unique barriers Francophone leaders face as an underrepresented group in the business world, there were many highlights centred in the pride these entrepreneurs have in sharing and creating new experiences within their culture.

As The Chamber continues to identify service gaps within industry or culturally-specific hubs, we strive to understand how support mechanisms can be implemented to provide equity among funding and government programs in support of Francophone business leaders-- who for them, is not just a way of doing business, it is a way of life.

Melanie Verreault
2020-21 Chamber President



Richard Kempler, Acting Executive Director
Fédération des gens d'affairs francophones de l'Ontario

A word from our roundtable partner

In Ontario's linguistic minority context, Francophone entrepreneurs are still facing several major challenges when growing their businesses. Awareness and recognition efforts are needed to give visibility to Francophone, and bilingual, businesses throughout the province. Doing business in French and in a bilingual manner has specific imperatives, different from English. With few work documents available in French, business creation, mentoring, logistical and administrative support—in particular—are proving more difficult for Francophone businesses. This lack of French-speaking networks and support results in a potentially higher risk for these businesses to fail in their early years of operation. In the midst of a pandemic, these difficulties are even more acute when it comes to health and safety measures that must be adequately translated to ensure a safe work environment for employees and ensure the sustainability of any activity.

THE FOCUS

Francophone business leaders remain a unique part of our socio-economic landscape. The Chamber hosted a focus group to understand what Franco-entrepreneurs felt was lacking within the Chamber network and the broader business community. As the "voice of business in Timmins," The Chamber acknowledges that a voice comes as a reflection of the community-- and for Timmins, that includes Francophone business leaders. As Francophones, leaders, business owners and operators, sat around the virtual table, the discussions centred around what gaps existed with respect to programs and services available to French business owners and operators and leaders of organizations in our community. From an advocacy standpoint, the group sought to identify what policies, as a Chamber and as a business community, should be developed to better promote Francophone entrepreneurs in Timmins.

FINDINGS

Rapid Information Sharing Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

At the height of the pandemic and as information continues to be shared, the lack of documentation, legislation, and articles shared in French shed light on the need for more rapid translation services. The group knew how critical it was to distribute material in a timely manner but recognized that the information was primarily disseminated in English, with French sometimes taking days to be available. As new information, programs, and services become available, and it is essential to share the information in both official languages, so Francophone business owners and operators are not left deciphering regulation independently.

Francophonie in the Health Sphere

Conveying medical concerns to health professionals can be challenging, but the irrevocable implications of having those concerns lost in translation can be dangerous. French health services offer potentially life-saving ways for Francophones to accurately describe their symptoms to an attending physician who, in turn, can provide a diagnosis in terms the patient can clearly understand. The dissemination of information in promoting healthy living and directives for French speakers' medication regimes is crucial to their health, and funding services that provide this information in French will undoubtedly lend to their longevity.

The Growing Gap in a Francophone Workforce

The group identified a significant gap in available bilingual workers. There was a heavy focus on the comfortability and potential discriminatory nature of English speakers speaking French. There is a perceived level of pride within French speakers that often leaves anglophone uneasy with speaking the language. This apparent lack of inclusivity or forgiveness can heavily impact a person's willingness to communicate in French, specifically in a business environment.

A Need for a Francophone Network

There is also a great unknown in what businesses or business leaders identify as Francophone, and thus there does not exist a network specific to French-speaking business leaders. Generally, there is little indicating which business identifies as francophone or even provides francophone services without a direct tie to the Francophone community. This can be challenging for newcomers to our community-- especially those coming from French-speaking regions. It is also challenging for owners and operators to identify as a Francophone business as no scale exists to identify just how "French" a business represents. It was noted that businesses often receive surveys attempting to understand how many indigenous and immigrants they employ but rarely receive questions on the number of francophones they employ. There are also no financial incentives to employ French-speaking workers, unlike other underrepresented groups. What incentives does the employee have for identifying as francophone if there aren't any that exist?

For more information, please contact:
Cameron Grant
Senior Policy Analyst
Government and Stakeholder Relations
The Chamber.
policy@timminschamber.on.ca | 705.360.1900

About the Chamber

With 625 members, The Chamber is one of the largest accredited chambers of commerce with distinction in northeastern Ontario. As the "Voice of Business in Timmins" since 1949, our advocacy and policy initiatives focus on ensuring a positive business climate in the City of Timmins.