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Sport Canada

Proposal

Sport Canada

2008–12 Action Plan for Official Languages

In response to the recommendations of the

Report:

***Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport –
Study 2005***

Canada 

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I INTRODUCTION

- The 2008–12 Sport Canada Action Plan for Official Languages is Sport Canada’s response to the recommendations from the report entitled *Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport - Study 2005*. This plan does not cover all of the measures and initiatives that Sport Canada is implementing to foster the full recognition and use of both English and French in the Canadian sport system.
- Sport Canada complies with its official languages obligations pursuant to the *Official Languages Act* (the Act). In addition, under Part VII of the Act, Sport Canada plays a leadership role in the Canadian sport system to enhance the vitality of official-language minority communities and foster linguistic duality in the Canadian sport system. Sport Canada works with its partners in the sport system to ensure that the Canadian sport system is accessible to the public in both official languages and that coaches and high-performance athletes can express themselves and receive services in their preferred official language.
- Sport Canada assumes this leadership primarily through its contribution agreements. As part of its mandate and programs, Sport Canada provides financial assistance to National sport organizations, Multisport service organizations and Canadian sport centres. Since these are non-governmental organizations, they are not subject to the Act. Their official language obligations are solely of a contractual nature with Sport Canada.

II BACKGROUND

- In a report released in 2000 and a follow-up report in 2003, the Commissioner of Official Languages found that the Canadian sport system did not reflect the bilingual character of Canada. In light of the Commissioner’s recommendations and in consultation with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Sport Canada implemented numerous initiatives to respond to all the Commissioner’s recommendations and to increase bilingualism in Sport Canada and the Canadian sport system. At the recommendation of the Commissioner of Official Languages in her 2003 Follow-Up Report, Sport Canada conducted an independent study to determine whether high-performance athletes were confronted with linguistic barriers that could put them at a disadvantage in developing their talent.
- The report on this study, *Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport – Study 2005*, was released in 2006. The study found no clear evidence demonstrating the existence of linguistic barriers. This was corroborated by the 2000 report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, *Official Languages in the Canadian Sports System*, which did not find any evidence of discrimination. Essentially, the authors of the Report found that the barriers facing high-performance athletes are more geographical and financial. However, there is clearly a need to continue enhancing the use of both official languages in the Canadian sport system, since the study

showed that access and services in both official languages could be improved in some areas. The Report also concluded that if there were linguistic barriers, they would likely occur and would have been overcome before the athlete reaches the national team level. This development period for athletes, which is at the provincial/territorial, regional and community levels, does not come under federal jurisdiction.

- The 14 recommendations from the Report entitled *Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport – Study 2005* are included in Appendix A of this Action Plan.
- In 2006, Sport Canada set up the Sport Canada Ad Hoc Committee on Official Languages, whose mandate was to share good practices and to recommend initiatives for Sport Canada to consider when developing an action plan to respond to the 14 recommendations. The Ad Hoc Committee included representatives from the provinces/territories, National sport organizations, Canadian sport centres and Multisport service organizations, various branches of Canadian Heritage (Official Languages Programs, Sport Canada and Communications), athletes, Official-Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Sport Canada Ad Hoc Committee on Official Languages completed its mandate in 2007.

III METHODOLOGY

The Action Plan is presented thematically with six major objectives that incorporate the proposed measures.

Since many of the recommendations from the Report are an extension of earlier recommendations by the Commissioner of Official Languages, Sport Canada has already undertaken some of the initiatives outlined in this action plan since the Report was released.

Initiatives already undertaken by Sport Canada are marked with an asterisk, whereas new initiatives are in text boxes.

In this action plan, unless specifically indicated otherwise, the term “sport organizations” is used as a generic to designate the National sport organizations (NSOs), the Multisport service organizations (MSOs) and the Canadian sport centres (CSCs), which are all national level organizations in sport.

IV SPORT CANADA PARTNERS

The Report presents a series of recommendations for Canadian Heritage (Sport Canada), but it also applies to the sport community and other orders of government, including provincial/territorial governments. In implementing its Action Plan, Sport Canada must work in collaboration with its various partners, namely the following:

- Provincial/territorial governments, the Federal-Provincial and Territorial Sport Committee (FPTSC) and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC);
- Sport organizations: Multisport service organizations, Canadian sport centres and National sport organizations;
- Athletes and coaches;
- Official-Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) organizations;
- The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages;
- Various stakeholders within Canadian Heritage.

OBJECTIVE ONE

Increase internal linguistic capacity at Sport Canada

*** Measure 1**

Review and standardize the linguistic profile for positions at Sport Canada according to organizational needs and federal government requirements in order to ensure that employees who communicate with clients are able to offer services in both official languages. (Addresses Recommendation 2 of the Report)

- Measure implemented: Review and standardization completed—97.6% of the positions at SC are classified as bilingual at various levels.

*** Measure 2**

Develop and implement a strategy to maintain official language skills so that bilingual employees can practice and maintain their achieved level of bilingualism. (Addresses Recommendation 2 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: In 2007, Sport Canada developed and implemented an official languages retention strategy. Sport Canada employees are encouraged to practise and improve their second official language through the various activities and tools made available to them by Sport Canada, for example, group language sessions with a language teacher, useful Internet links, and English and French days.

*** Measure 3**

Take steps to ensure that Sport Canada staff can serve clients and the public in their preferred official language. (Addresses Recommendation 2 of the Report)

- Measure implemented: Every year, Sport Canada develops a human resources plan that reflects official languages requirements; it ensures that the people it hires (permanent or acting) meet the language requirements for the positions; it also provides language training opportunities. In 2007–08, Sport Canada hired a private language teacher to work on site with some of its employees.

Legend: * Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
Text box New proposed measures

OBJECTIVE TWO

Advance the status and use of official languages within the Canadian sport system.

*** Measure 1**

Provide targeted funding to sport organizations at the national level as part of their contribution agreements with Sport Canada to help them become more bilingual and support efforts to meet their contractual obligations to Sport Canada with respect to official languages. (Addresses Recommendations 1, 5 and 6 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: As part of their contribution agreements, the sport organizations receive additional targeted funding from Sport Canada for specific activities relating to language training, interpretation, translation of their Web sites and any other documents concerning their mandate. Sport Canada continues to provide targeted funding to sport organizations.

Measure 2

Evaluate the possibility and usefulness of providing sport organizations with access to online language training, which could be used by the staff of these organizations and by coaches. (Addresses Recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Report)

Measure 3

Develop a collection of best practices to support sport organizations in addressing official language issues. This initiative could be included as a heading on the Sport Canada Web site. (Addresses Recommendations 4 and 5 of the Report)

Legend: * Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
Text box New proposed measures

OBJECTIVE THREE

Enhance the vitality of Official-Language Minority Communities (OLMCs), particularly through athletes and coaches.

* Measure 1

Encourage carded athletes to request services in their preferred official language from sport organizations. (Addresses Recommendation 8 of the Report)

- Measure implemented: In the letter sent to carded athletes confirming their funding, Sport Canada encourages athletes to request services in their preferred official language.

* Measure 2

Explore potential strategic alliances between OLMCs and Canadian sport centres to facilitate the social integration of high-performance athletes who are required to live in another language and culture in order to pursue their sport training. (Addresses Recommendations 9 & 10 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: Sport Canada has launched a collaborative pilot project with the Canadian Sport Centre in Calgary and four organizations from Alberta's OLMC. At the first meeting, participants learned about the mandates of the other organizations and explored potential services. The next step will be to consult with athletes registered at the Canadian Sport Centre in Calgary to determine their needs and interests.

* Measure 3

Facilitate the formation of strategic alliances between official-language minority communities (OLMCs) and sport organizations in order to work together and possibly in the organization of hosting sport events in Canada. (Addresses Recommendation 10 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: Sport Canada plays a leadership role in encouraging the participation of OLMCs in the organization of hosting major multi-sport events. In its multiparty agreements for hosting some major multi-sport events (e.g., Canada Games), Sport Canada adds a provision under which the Host Society agrees to actively recruit members of the official-language minority community (OLMC) in order to encourage their participation in the organization of the event. Sport Canada acts as a facilitator to establish this cooperative relationship among various stakeholders.

Legend:	*	Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
	Text box	New proposed measures

OBJECTIVE FOUR

Obtain more accurate data about the language skills of coaches and athletes

* Measure 1

Monitor the National sport organizations' bilingual coaching capacity. A sufficient level of bilingualism is required to ensure that athletes are able to communicate in their preferred official language. (Addresses Recommendations 3, 7 and 13 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: Sport Canada gathers annual data from National sport organizations to determine the number of bilingual coaches and the coaches' preferred language and mother tongue in order to ensure that organizations have coaching capacity in both official languages.

* Measure 2

Conduct a survey of coaches to provide Sport Canada with additional data on the language issues of coaches in Canada. (Addresses Recommendations 3, 7 and 13 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: Sport Canada has contributed additional funding to the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) to conduct a survey on the status of coaches in Canada in 2008. Sport Canada has asked the CAC to ensure that the issues of potential linguistic barriers and interest in language training are raised in the survey.

* Measure 3

Collect more accurate data on the linguistic representation of high-performance athletes. (Addresses Recommendation 7 of the Report)

- Measure in progress: Sport Canada has modified the funding application form in its Athlete Assistance Program to ask carded athletes to provide information about their preferred language, mother tongue and whether they are bilingual.

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Legend: * Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
Text box New proposed measures

Measure 4

Explore with the Coaching Association of Canada the possibility of assessing the number of active coaches in Canada who are able to work in both of Canada's official languages. (Addresses Recommendations 7 and 13 of the Report)

Measure 5

Follow up with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages on its discussions with Statistics Canada to develop a common definition of "Anglophone" and "Francophone" for the purpose of collecting consistent and comparable data with respect to the linguistic representation of athletes and coaches. (Addresses Recommendation 7 of the report)

Legend: *

Text box

Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada

New proposed measures

OBJECTIVE FIVE

Monitor the progress of official languages within the sport system

* Measure 1

Develop tools that will enable Sport Canada to monitor the progress and performance of sport organizations with respect to official languages, particularly services and communications to the public, to athletes and to coaches, and bilingual Web sites.

(Addresses Recommendations 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Report)

- Measures being implemented: Sport Canada has developed and established accountability standards and performance indicators for National sport organizations, for Canadian sport centres and for Multisport service organizations. Some of these standards address specifically official languages expectations and Sport Canada monitors progress in this regard.

* Measure 2

Take necessary action with sport organizations to ensure compliance with their contractual obligations with respect to official languages. (Addresses Recommendation 5 of the Report)

- Measures being implemented: Sport Canada provides advice and makes recommendations to organizations to help them address official languages issues. Sport Canada informs organizations that they could be subject to financial penalties (funding withheld) if they do not demonstrate a firm commitment to meeting their contractual obligations with respect to official languages.

* Measure 3

Evaluate the satisfaction of members of sport organizations regarding the quality of services they receive in their preferred official language. (Addresses Recommendation 4 of the Report)

- Measure being implemented: Under its accountability standards and performance indicators, Sport Canada asks sport organizations to conduct an annual survey of their members about the quality of services received in their preferred language.

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Legend: * Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
Text box New proposed measures

Measure 4

Through a Status of the Athletes Survey to be done in 2009-10, evaluate the quality of services provided in the athletes' preferred language and address the issue of the social and economic impacts that they face. (Addresses Recommendations 4 and 14 of the Report)

Measure 5

Evaluate the need and usefulness of a social marketing program directed at athletes, after receiving the results of the athletes' survey in 2010. (Addresses Recommendation 8 of the Report)

Legend: * Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
Text box New proposed measures

OBJECTIVE SIX

Cooperate with provincial and territorial governments on official languages

NOTE: Sport Canada has jurisdiction over sport organizations at the national level and high-performance athletes. Since some of the recommendations apply to levels of competition that are under provincial/territorial jurisdiction, Sport Canada can only offer to collaborate with provincial and territorial governments in responding to the recommendations from the study that apply to their responsibilities.

* Measure 1

Inform provincial and territorial governments of the results and recommendations from the Report entitled *Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport- Study 2005* (Addresses Recommendation 11 of the Report)

- Measure implemented and completed: Sport Canada sent a copy of the Study report to the provincial and territorial governments and invited representatives to sit on Sport Canada's Ad Hoc Committee on Official Languages. Two provincial representatives participated on the Ad Hoc Committee, which provided input to Sport Canada for this action plan.

Measure 2

Share the Report entitled *Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport – Study 2005* and its recommendations with the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee (FPTSC) and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC). (Addresses Recommendation 11 of the Report)

Measure 3

Offer to provide advice and information to provincial/territorial governments interested in assessing whether linguistic barriers exist in sport at their level of responsibility and to discuss possible measures that could be taken to address this issue. (Addresses Recommendation 12 of the Report)

Measure 4

Offer advice and information to provinces and territories that are interested in raising awareness about bilingualism at the provincial/territorial level of competition. (Addresses Recommendation 8 of the Report)

Legend: * Measures already undertaken by Sport Canada
Text box New proposed measures

VI APPENDIX A

This text is an excerpt from the Report

Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport – Study 2005

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sport Canada – Short Term Recommendations (one to three years)

1. This study found that staff members at NSOs and CSCs are generally open to learning both official languages, and so should be encouraged to do so to the extent possible. Sport Canada should assist and strongly encourage NSOs and CSCs to implement voluntary language training for management staff, particularly senior staff and those who come into direct contact with athletes.
2. Sport Canada has made significant progress with respect to increasing its internal linguistic capacity. By all reports, Sport Canada currently has an adequate level of bilingual capacity among its staff. There should be a continued and consistent effort on the part of Sport Canada to lead by example. If a Sport Canada staff member interfaces with client groups, then s/he must be bilingual. One cannot expect NSOs, CSCs and other partners in the Canadian sport system to meet their obligations if it is felt that Sport Canada is itself unable to meet these obligations.
3. Coaching is seen by athletes as the most important service or element of their development. Sport Canada should improve the monitoring of coaching capacity with respect to language. Sport Canada should strongly encourage larger NSOs and NSOs that require more than one coach per team or athlete to have bilingual coaching capacity. We caution Sport Canada against being overly prescriptive with respect to requiring NSOs to have bilingual coaching capacity due to the highly specialized nature of coaching expertise. In other words, an overly prescriptive approach may result in the most qualified and desirable coaches not being hired, to the detriment of athletes.
4. Sport Canada has generally made progress with respect to improving the level of bilingualism and delivery of bilingual services and supports to athletes on the part of NSOs. However, CSCs and NSOs continue to lack a sufficient level of bilingualism, and there are strong signs that the quality of services and supports provided may be lacking in some cases. The CSCs are a key contact point for high performance athletes. There continue to be signs that not all CSCs are able or willing to fully respond to the needs of athletes. Sport Canada must undertake to work with the CSCs to increase their level of bilingualism as well as their commitment to bilingualism. We note that attention must be paid to the quality of services provided in both official languages. This study found strong evidence that the quality of services provided to athletes was not always seen as sufficient by the athletes themselves. The quality of services available to athletes must be equivalent in both official languages.

5. Although Sport Canada has made progress with respect to assisting and encouraging NSOs to become more bilingual, there remains work to be done with respect to some NSOs. Sport Canada should continue its efforts with all NSOs; however, efforts should be more focused on NSOs that have been less successful or more reticent about increasing their level of bilingualism. These efforts should focus primarily on providing the NSOs with the necessary tools to increase bilingualism within the organization and, secondly, on any necessary sanctions where merited.
6. Websites represent a first line of contact or interface between the public and athletes and NSOs. Websites are often a key source of information for both the general public and athletes (for example, newsletters are frequently published on NSO websites). This study found that many NSO websites were not fully bilingual. Sport Canada should work with NSOs on a consistent basis to ensure that websites are fully bilingual and that all information is available in both official languages.

Sport Canada – Long-term Recommendations (three to five years)

7. There is currently a lack of data on the linguistic preferences and abilities of coaches and athletes. Sport Canada, the Commissioner of Official Languages and Statistics Canada should work together on a common definition of Francophone and Anglophone for the purposes of collecting consistent and comparable data. This would allow for fair and accurate tracking with respect to the linguistic representation of athletes and coaches.
8. Sport Canada should implement a social marketing program directed at athletes. This program should inform athletes that services are available in both official languages and encourage athletes to request services in their preferred language. This social marketing program should also inform athletes about the importance of official languages in sport and respect for official languages. This social marketing program should be directed at athletes at all levels, including provincial. As well, the program should work with PSOs, particularly in Quebec, to ensure that athletes moving from the provincial levels of competition to the national level are aware of their rights with respect to the provision of services in their preferred official language. We note that, before implementing such a social marketing program, Sport Canada must ensure that all the necessary services are readily available in both official languages, particularly at the Canadian Sport Centres, i.e., that Sport Canada has fully and successfully implemented the above recommendation number 4. We note that the Athlete Dispute Resolution Mechanism (ADR) is a key part of the new Sport Act (Bill C12 - An Act to Promote Physical Activity and Sport). The potential for a formal complaint about language rights is clear in Bill C12, and Sport Canada, NSOs and CSCs need to respond to this possibility, given some of the findings of this study.
9. Athletes, both Francophones and Anglophones, face difficulties in moving from one region of Canada to another. The transition is often much more difficult if the move requires the athlete to live in another language and culture. Although it should not be seen as a solution or substitute for providing athletes with services

in both official languages, mentoring or partnering athletes with an athlete who has undergone a similar transition would make the transition emotionally less difficult for athletes. This mentoring could be done with the assistance of the CSC staff responsible for athlete intake.

10. Sport Canada should form strategic alliances with organizations within official language minority communities across Canada. These organizations could provide assistance in integrating athletes socially as well as providing other support services. These strategic alliances would also assist NSOs and CSCs with developing a base of minority official language volunteers for events and boards of directors. Such an alliance would assist in further integrating Anglophones and Francophones into the sport system across Canada. We note that Canadian Heritage currently has a number of funding programs that work with official language minority communities, so Sport Canada could, in the immediate term, seek advice and guidance from these programs on how to approach official language minority communities.

Sport Canada in Collaboration with Sport Governing Bodies

11. Sport Canada, in collaboration with its partners in the sport system, should assess the impacts of linguistic barriers on athletes at the provincial level, particularly the elite provincial level. This study should seek to assess whether linguistic barriers exist, when they manifest themselves, how they impact athletes and what can be done to mitigate these impacts. It must, however, be recognized that Sport Canada has no jurisdiction over the provincial or territorial sport systems, so any efforts made at the provincial or territorial level require the full cooperation of the provinces and territories. Sport Canada should assess the potential for increasing the level of bilingualism in the Canadian sport system, including the provincial and territorial level, through the partnership agreements built into the Canadian Sport Policy.
12. Sport Canada, in partnership with provincial sport governing bodies and provincial sport organizations, should undertake a social marketing program to encourage increased bilingualism at the provincial/territorial level of competition. Such a social marketing approach would serve to increase awareness of the issue, particularly among junior elite level coaches and athletes.
13. Sport Canada should work with the Coaching Association of Canada and NSOs to develop a linguistic profile of coaching capacity within Canada. This profile should be updated periodically (once every three years) to monitor progress with respect to the bilingual capacity of the coaching population in Canada. The focus of this recommendation should be level three and level four coaches; however, the possibility of including level two coaches should be assessed by the CAC and Sport Canada. This linguistic profile of coaches in Canada should be used to strongly encourage NSOs to ensure coaching capacity in both official languages. This study found that some NSOs argue that there are only a limited number of qualified bilingual coaches in Canada. Data on the linguistic capacity of coaches would serve to refute or support that argument.

Other Issues and Recommendations

14. Although not the focus of this study, this study found evidence that financial barriers were found to be by far the most significant barriers faced by the highest proportion of athletes at all levels of competition. If the mission of Sport Canada is to enhance opportunities for Canadians to participate and excel in sport, then greater attention must be paid to the financial aspects of sport. Sport Canada should work with its partners to assess the impacts of financial barriers on athletes at all levels of competition.