

Building the Francophone Workforce in Sarnia Lambton

Community Action Plan January 2026



Acknowledgments

The views expressed in this publication are the views of the Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board (SLWDB) and do not necessarily reflect those of the province. The Government of Ontario and its agencies are in no way bound by any recommendations contained in this document.

Mission

SLWDB is a diverse and dedicated organization, committed to identifying needs and facilitating solutions to attract, train, and retain a viable workforce through community partnerships.

Vision

Growing Sarnia Lambton's workforce for tomorrow's economy. SLWDB leads Sarnia Lambton in its approach to workforce development and labour market planning. The team actively engages organizations and community partners in local labour market projects. SLWDB also conducts consultations with business owners throughout the year in order to identify needs and facilitate solutions to grow the local workforce.

Network

SLWDB is one of 26 local planning board areas that make up Workforce Planning Ontario that are funded to conduct and disseminate local labour market research and engage community stakeholders in a planning process that supports local solutions to local issues.

Canada 

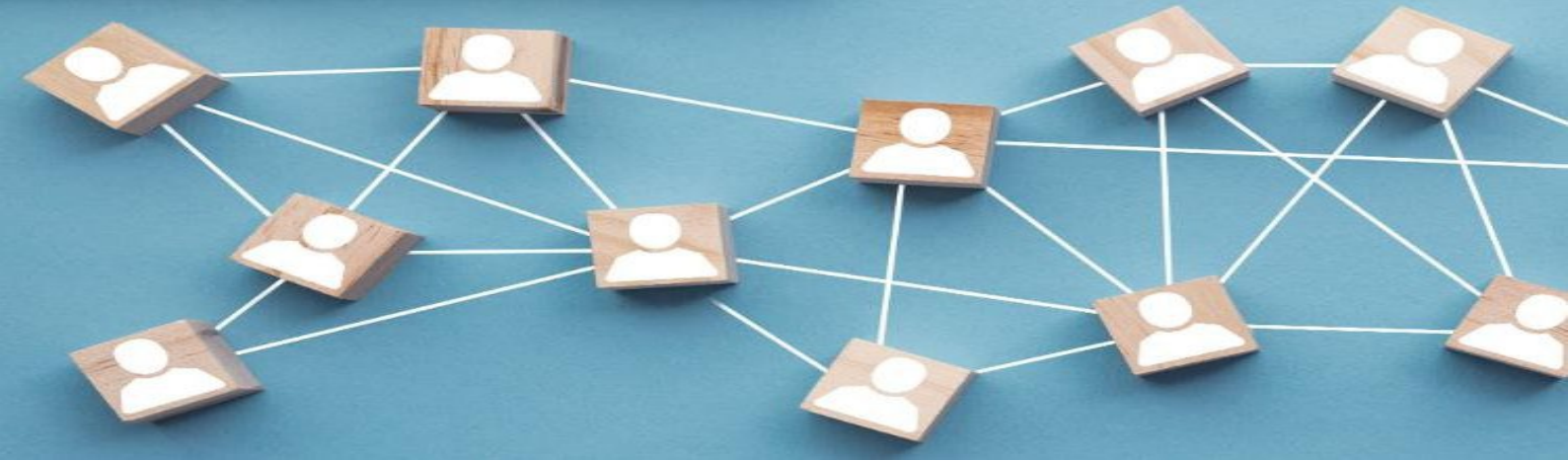
EMPLOYMENT
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Executive Summary

In 2025, the Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board launched the Building the Francophone Workforce in Sarnia Lambton project to better understand and address the region's growing need for bilingual and francophone talent. This initiative was developed in response to Sarnia Lambton's recent designation as a French Language Community and the expectation for organizations to offer accessible, high-quality services in both French and English.

As part of this project, SLWDB conducted consultations with organizations across multiple sectors, including health care, social services, education, long-term care, settlement, and public administration, to learn about their experiences with recruiting, hiring, and retaining French-speaking staff. These conversations highlighted challenges such as limited access to bilingual candidates, uncertainty about required language levels, and the need for stronger internal support systems.

Drawing on these findings, this Community Action Plan outlines practical, actionable strategies to help employers strengthen recruitment, build internal capacity, and create more welcoming, francophone-friendly workplaces. The recommendations aim to support employers and contribute to a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable francophone workforce in Sarnia Lambton.

Introduction

In 2021, the Ministry of Francophone Affairs launched the Francophone Economic Development Strategy, aimed at increasing the footprint of the francophone community and workforce in Canada. In November 2024, Sarnia Lambton was designated as a French Language Community, recognizing both its historical francophone presence and the growing number of francophone newcomers settling in the region. This designation also reflects the growing expectation that organizations, particularly those in healthcare, social services, education, and public administration, are prepared to offer accessible, high-quality services in French and English.

Demand for French-speaking candidates has increased significantly, from 394 positions posted between December 2020 and December 2021 to 622 positions posted between December 2022 and December 2023. This trend continues, with 679 French-speaking positions posted in Sarnia Lambton in 2023–2024. (Work in Sarnia Lambton Job Demand Report, www.slwdb.org/wisl).

Although this designation is a positive step toward increasing diversity in the local workforce, employers consistently report challenges in recruiting, hiring, and retaining francophone and bilingual staff. Many organizations depend on only one or two bilingual employees who struggle to meet growing service demands. Others wish to hire francophone candidates but do not know where to find them, how to communicate their needs, or how to support them once hired.

At the same time, francophone residents and newcomers often face barriers to entering the workforce, including limited awareness of bilingual job opportunities, a lack of clarity regarding required language levels, and workplaces that are not fully equipped to support French-speaking employees. For this reason, SLWDB launched the Building the Francophone Workforce in Sarnia Lambton project, aimed at understanding the specific challenges faced by both employers and francophone job seekers and identifying practical strategies to improve recruitment, integration, and retention across the region.

This Community Action Plan exists to support the growth of the francophone workforce and help close the gap between employers and French-speaking job seekers. More specifically, it aims to enable employers to:

- Attract francophone and bilingual applicants
- Strengthen internal capacity to offer services in French
- Retain francophone workers through welcoming and inclusive workplaces
- Contribute to a sustainable local francophone workforce

The recommendations in this plan reflect the needs, ideas, and experiences expressed by employers throughout the consultation process.

Methodology

This Action Plan is informed by qualitative insights gathered through consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders across Sarnia Lambton. Input was collected from representatives working in sectors such as health care, social and community services, education, early childhood programs, employment and settlement services, and federal and regional agencies. Their collective perspectives helped shape the priorities and recommendations presented in this plan, without identifying any individual organization or participant.

Each consultation explored current francophone staffing needs, recruitment barriers, internal organizational practices, and ideas for strengthening bilingual capacity. The consultation transcripts were reviewed and analyzed using a qualitative coding process to identify recurring issues, opportunities, and patterns across sectors. Detailed summaries were then compared and refined to ensure consistency, and emerging insights were organized into thematic categories. The codes and thematic groupings generated through this process formed the backbone of the recommendations.





WE'RE HIRING!
NOUS EMBAUCHONS

Actionable Recommendations for Employers

Action 1. Improve Hiring Practices and Expand Recruitment Strategies

Issues Identified by Stakeholders:

- Lack of candidates applying with French language skills
- Postings appearing in English suggest French language skills are not necessary
- Not enough local applicants with French language skills.
- Employers over or underestimate the level of French language skills needed

Recommendations

1. Post job opportunities in both English and French

A fully bilingual job posting, one complete version in French and one complete version in English, clearly signals to candidates that French is genuinely valued and that both languages are welcomed in the workplace.

How to do it:

- Provide *two full versions* of the posting: one in French and one in English
- Use bilingual job titles when possible
- Clearly state whether French is required or considered an asset
- Specify which tasks or responsibilities involve using French

Why it helps:

Offering the posting in both languages increases visibility among francophones and newcomers, reduces confusion about language expectations, and builds trust even before the interview stage.

2. Clearly define the level of French required for the job

Many employers assume that bilingual staff must have “perfect” French, when what is needed is the appropriate level of proficiency for the tasks involved. Candidates do not need to be fully fluent if they have a sufficient foundation in French and the ability to continue upskilling.

A simple scale can help set realistic expectations:

- **Basic:** greetings, reception, simple interactions
- **Functional:** everyday conversations, simple documentation
- **Professional:** full service delivery in French
- **Clinical:** specialized terminology in health or mental-health contexts

Why it helps:

Clarifying the required level prevents employers from unintentionally excluding strong candidates who have the necessary base to perform the role and can continue developing their French. It also supports more realistic and effective screening processes for HR teams.

3. Advertise roles through francophone networks

Many employers only post jobs on mainstream platforms and miss the francophone community entirely.

Share postings with:

- Centre communautaire francophone
- Local French and French Immersion schools
- Francophone employment agencies
- Community organizations serving newcomers

Why it helps:

These organizations already have access to francophone audiences and can help direct candidates your way.

4. Participate in Francophone job fairs

These events offer face-to-face access to bilingual candidates and raise employer visibility.

Why it helps:

Candidates who may not apply online can learn about your organization in person, improving the likelihood of applications.

5. Work with IRCC for international francophone recruitment

Many employers are not aware that the Francophone Mobility Program (FIMP) allows them to hire international francophone candidates without an LMIA*(see Appendix A).

Ideal for roles in:

- Health care
- Long-term care
- Early Childhood Education
- Social services

Why it helps:

It expands the talent pool beyond local candidates and supports long-term staffing needs.

6. Partner with colleges and universities

Post-secondary institutions can adapt existing programs or develop new bilingual pathways when there is a clear gap in French-language skills within the community. By collaborating with educators, employers, and community partners can help shape training opportunities that strengthen the local francophone workforce and support long-term recruitment needs.

Employers can:

- Request French or bilingual pathways
- Offer student placements
- Participate in career days

Why it helps:

These partnerships build future talent pipelines and increase the number of bilingual graduates entering the local workforce.

Action 2. Building Capacity

Issues Identified by Stakeholders

- Recruitment alone cannot meet current and future demand for bilingual staff

- Employers identified upskilling existing employees as a more effective approach than relying solely on francophone recruitment
- Bilingual staff are often overextended when they are the only French-speaking employees, affecting well-being, retention, and service quality

Recommendations

1. Offer French-language training to existing staff

Providing access to French training demonstrates commitment and builds bilingual capacity over time.

Effective strategies include:

- Covering employee time or course fees
- Offering sector-specific French (health, social services, administration)
- Hosting lunch-hour French conversation groups
- Encouraging peer learning

Why it helps:

Staff feel valued, more confident, and better supported in providing bilingual services.

2. Prevent overload and burnout for bilingual employees

Across consultations, bilingual employees reported carrying a disproportionate amount of work.

Employers can help by:

- Rotating bilingual duties
- Recognizing bilingual skills formally (stipends, advancement opportunities)
- Setting limits on translation work
- Using external interpretation services

Why it helps:

Retains the bilingual staff you already have and promotes a fairer, more supportive workplace.

3. Implement an Active Offer Protocol

Francophone clients should clearly and automatically know they can receive service in French.

Employers can:

- Use the “Bonjour/Hello” greeting
- Display bilingual signage
- Route French calls/emails to bilingual staff
- Ensure reception staff understand the process

Why it helps:

It builds trust and aligns with expectations under French Language Services (FLS) policies.

Action 3. Build a Francophone-Friendly Workplace Culture

Issues Identified by Stakeholders

- Retention emerged as a significant challenge identified by employers
- Francophone and bilingual workers are more likely to stay when they feel supported and connected in the workplace
- Social isolation, limited French-language support, and unclear workplace expectations can affect retention and job satisfaction

Recommendations

1. Celebrate bilingualism

Small gestures can have a meaningful impact on workplace culture.

Employers can:

- Recognize bilingual staff
- Celebrate francophone cultural events
- Encourage French communication internally

Why it helps:

It reinforces that bilingualism is valued and builds a sense of belonging for francophone employees.

2. Support newcomer integration

Francophone newcomers often struggle with isolation and navigating unfamiliar systems.

Employers can:

- Provide onboarding in French
- Pair newcomers with mentors
- Allow flexibility for language learning

Why it helps:

A supportive environment improves retention, confidence, and long-term engagement.

3. Track bilingual service needs

Understanding how and when French is used helps employers plan staffing more effectively.

Employers should track:

- Preferred service language
- Frequency of French interactions
- Roles with the highest bilingual demand

Why it helps:

Tracking needs ensures staffing decisions are data-informed and aligned with service expectations.

Conclusion

Sarnia Lambton's designation as a French language community creates meaningful opportunities for employers, but also new expectations. Strengthening the francophone workforce is not only a matter of compliance; it is a pathway to better service delivery, stronger community trust, and a more diverse and resilient workforce. The recommendations in this Community Action Plan are practical, achievable, and grounded in local employer experience. By implementing even a few of these actions, employers can:

- Improve recruitment outcomes
- Strengthen internal capacity
- Create a supportive, bilingual-friendly workplace culture
- Contribute to the long-term sustainability of the region's francophone workforce

Together, these actions position Sarnia Lambton to meet the needs of its residents better while attracting and retaining francophone talent. Building a strong bilingual workforce is not a one-time effort; it is an ongoing commitment that requires collaboration, investment, and leadership across all sectors.

This Community Action Plan is an invitation to build a stronger, more inclusive labour market together, one that reflects the diversity of our region and supports a thriving francophone community for generations to come.

The image shows three light-colored wooden blocks stacked vertically. The top block has the word "Let's" written on it, the middle block has "work", and the bottom block has "together!". The text is written in a simple, hand-drawn style. The background is a blurred indoor setting with people.

Appendix A: Resources to Support the Francophone Workforce

Employers in Sarnia Lambton are not expected to build Francophone capacity alone. Several community organizations offer free services that support recruitment, onboarding, retention, language development, and cultural inclusion. These partners help employers access talent, training, and practical guidance.

Below is a list of key resources available in the region.

Centre communautaire francophone de Sarnia Lambton (CCFSL)

The Centre Communautaire Francophone de Sarnia Lambton (CCFSL) is a cornerstone for francophones and francophiles in the region. Since its founding, the organization has worked to promote and preserve the French language and francophone culture through a variety of services and activities.

Learn more: <https://ccfsarnia.com/>

Connexion Carrière

A trusted employment resource centre in Sarnia Lambton, offers free personalized support to both job seekers and employers.

Learn more: <https://ccfsarnia.com/emploi-franco/>

Sarnia-Lambton Local Immigration Partnership (SL-LIP)

Its purpose is to provide a centralized venue for discussions relating to the coordination and enhancement of current services and supports for immigrants and newcomers locally. The LIP Council also facilitates the implementation of the LIP Settlement Strategy, our community's plan to create a more welcoming and diverse Sarnia-Lambton.

Learn more: <https://liveinlambton.ca/local-immigration-partnership/>

Employment Ontario Service Providers

Employment Ontario provides individuals with access to the training, skills, and experience they need to achieve their goals. The program connects job seekers with employers and offers services across the province to support job search, employment, and training opportunities. Learn more: <https://www.slwdb.org/links/>

IRCC – Francophone Mobility Program (FIMP)

Ideal for filling hard-to-staff roles in health care, social services, ECE, and skilled trades. Learn more: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/hire-temporary-foreign/international-mobility-program.html>

Lambton College – French for the Workplace & Conversational Courses

Lambton College offers French courses focused on workplace communication and conversational skills, ideal for individuals looking to develop or improve their French language proficiency.

Learn more: <https://www.lambtoncollege.ca/programs/part-time/fren>

Collège Boréal – French as a Second Language

This program provides solid theoretical and practical training in French as a second language which allows the student to acquire the interaction skills necessary for their professional development.

Learn more: <https://collegeboreal.ca/en/formation/french-as-a-second-language/>

French Language Training Reimbursement Program (Health Sector)

Supports health care professionals who want to improve their French and interact directly with patients.

Learn more: <https://www.accueilfrancophone.com/articles-en/french-language-training-reimbursement-program>

French Language Evaluation & Training Services (Government of Ontario VOR)

Provides standardized French language evaluation and training services for provincial ministries and eligible agencies.

Learn more:

<https://www.doingbusiness.mgs.gov.on.ca/mbs/psb/psb.nsf/VORDetails?OpenForm&Lang=E N&unid=82B76BE9DD68ED4485258BC7006A63FA>

Le centre culturel francophone Jolliet

Le Centre culturel Jolliet is a non-profit organization whose mission is to strengthen and promote a sense of belonging within the francophone community.

<https://www.facebook.com/centrecultureljolliet>



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