



Ontario

Office of the French Language
Services Commissioner

**A study of Ontario's
French-Language Community Radio Stations:**
Key components of the vitality of francophone communities

April 2011

La voix d'accès. Your Voice Matters.



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Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Background	2
3. The MICRO	2
4. Community radio in Ontario	3
4.1. French-language community radio stations	3
4.2. Goals of community radio	3
4.3. Promoting local culture	4
4.4. Local events	5
5. Social impacts	6
5.1. A means of identification	6
5.2. Community engagement	9
5.3. More people listening to French-language radio	10
6. Economic impact and benefits	11
7. Key challenges	12
7.1. Precarious financial situation	12
7.2. Cancellation of the CRO program	13
8. Possible solutions	14
8.1. A policy and stable funding	14
8.2. The Aménagement Linguistique Policy (ALP)	15
8.3. Accent on youth	16
Conclusion	18
APPENDIX A	21
Role of key federal institutions	21
CRTC	21
Canadian Heritage	21
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	21

1. Introduction

For a community to feel protected, recognized and valued, it must be able to rely on the presence of well-organized agencies, sound legal and institutional structures, and educational and court systems that meet its needs.

In Ontario, the *French Language Services Act (FLSA)*, a quasi-constitutional law passed unanimously in 1986, gives Franco-Ontarians the right to receive government services in their language. The preamble of the FLSA states that “[...]the Legislative Assembly recognizes the contribution of the cultural heritage of the French-speaking population and wishes to preserve it for future generations.”

Taking guidance from the preceding statement, the Government of Ontario has been a trail-blazer in some of its policies and accomplishments with respect to the francophone community in recent years. Those measures include the introduction of the *Aménagement Linguistique Policy* (the first of its kind in Canada), the adoption of a new, more inclusive definition of the francophone population (another first), and granting independence and budgetary autonomy to Ontario’s French-language educational and cultural television network, TFO.

There is, however, one area where the provincial government is glaringly absent: French-language community radio. Yet community radio stations are not new. In Hearst, for example, the French-language community radio station existed even before the FLSA was enacted. It celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2008, and that important event did not go unnoticed by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

[TRANSLATION]

“This past weekend, we had the opportunity to celebrate 20 years of success for Hearst’s CINN-FM, a community radio station that has been part of the community for 20 years. It is very important to have such an organization in our community in Hearst and the surrounding area. [...] More importantly, it is a community radio station, and that is the key. It gives the community a chance to see itself through radio and to get together and talk through radio. What is important for the community is to tell the residents of the Hearst area what is going on and what events are coming up and to have some way of bringing the area’s Francophones together.”¹

¹ A statement by Gilles Bisson, MPP for Timmins-James Bay, in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, November 24, 2008. Excerpt from Hansard available online: <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/39-1/1092.htm> (page consulted in April 2011).

For many communities outside major urban centres, community radio stations are more than broadcasters of local weather forecasts. They are the focal point of the communities they serve, helping to unite people from distant villages.

[TRANSLATION]

“In the past, people used to gather outside the church to talk about everything from soup to nuts. Now, radio provides the members of our communities with a forum where they can tell their stories meet their fellow residents and discuss the issues that interest and affect them.”²

In major urban areas, French community radio stations may serve different purposes, but it does not take away from their relevance. For instance, in Toronto, CHOQ-FM, provides a wide array of unique radio programming that appeal to the city’s diverse francophone community. Indeed, the station has shows that feature francophone hip-hop, a show for young Francophones of African descent, and several programs offering insightful political analysis on local, national and international issues.

2. Background

This study on French-language community radio was prompted by a letter received from the *Mouvement des Intervenants et des Intervenantes en Communication Radio de l’Ontario (MICRO)* that raised a certain number of concerns. In particular, the MICRO noted the lack of financial support from the provincial government — a failing that, according to the MICRO, represents a barrier to the development of French-language community radio stations in Ontario. In response to this letter, the Commissioner’s Office has studied the underlying reasons for this situation and has come up with possible solutions.

3. The MICRO

The MICRO was established in the early 1990s to serve as the collective voice of Ontario’s French-language community radio stations, representing them in their dealings with governments, community partners and businesses. It also acts for its members in negotiations with advertisers and national advertising agencies to obtain for them their fair share of advertising revenue.

The MICRO has six regular members, but its membership is expected to grow. Its goal is to help create several new French-language community radio stations in Ontario by 2014.

² Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada (ARC), Répertoire – *Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada : 10^e anniversaire du mouvement des radios*, Ottawa, ARC, 1995, p. 1.

4. Community radio in Ontario

4.1. French-language community radio stations

Ontario has six French-language community radio stations. They are located in Hearst (CINN 91.1 FM), Kapuskasing (CKGN 89.7 and 94.7 FM), Penetanguishene (CFRH 88.1 FM), Toronto (CHOQ 105.1 FM), Cornwall (CHOD 92.1 FM) and Ottawa (CJFO 94.5 FM).

These stations — all members of the MICRO — have a daily potential audience of over 330,000 Francophones (an audience that nearly doubled, in November 2010, when CJFO began broadcasting; prior to that, French-language community radio stations had a potential audience of 150,000).³

As well, there are French-language community radio stations in the planning stages, notably in the Niagara-Hamilton, Oshawa, Welland and Windsor areas.

4.2. Goals of community radio

With the globalization of information, we now have access to local, regional, national and international news simply by clicking a mouse or switching on the television. So we have every reason to wonder what role community radio stations play and what their aims are.

Neither public nor private, community radio is intended as a neighbourhood medium and serves as a kind of third way for those who want an alternative information source to complement traditional networks.

While each one has its own vision, community radio stations generally share the following goals: entertain, provide local information, give their audience a voice, and update — even educate — their listeners on various regional and national issues. They also provide a forum for local community organizations that usually do not get much exposure in the traditional media, and they operate with the support of many volunteers.

[TRANSLATION]

“French-language minority community radio stations are more than just entertainment media; they are instruments of community development. Canadian community radio broadcasting addresses local information needs, local culture and identity promotion needs and, in our case, the requirement to protect and promote a minority official language.”⁴

³ Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, *Francophone Community Profile of Ontario*, FCFA, 2009. Available online: http://www.fcfa.ca/profils/documents/ontario_en.pdf (page consulted in April 2011).

⁴ Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, brief presented at the Sommet des communautés francophones et acadiennes, 2007. Available online: <http://www.fcfa.ca/documents/541.pdf> (page consulted in April 2011).

However, each French-language community radio station in Ontario is unique in many respects. Some operate in areas with a large proportion of Francophones, while others serve widely scattered communities that make up only a small percentage of the population. Another important fact is that community radio also reaches and informs many Francophones who face literacy challenges.⁵

So the stations have to tailor their programming to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse communities they are part of.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) defines community radio stations in terms of their ownership, their programming and the market they serve. A community radio station is owned by a not-for-profit organization whose structure allows community members to join and take part in the station's management and programming. It must also reflect the diversity of the audiences it serves.

4.3. Promoting local culture

The CRTC's *Community Radio Policy* includes the following statement:

"The primary focus of a community radio station is to provide community access to the airwaves and to offer diverse programming that reflects the needs and interests of the community that the station is licensed to serve, including music by new and local talent; music not generally broadcast by commercial stations; spoken word programming [...]"⁶

This mission is taken very seriously by the province's French-language community radio stations. These stations actively support local artists — both new and emerging — through promotion and coverage, providing them with a certain level of visibility.

[TRANSLATION]

"It is false to claim that the Franco-Ontarian community is being served simply by having French-language radio stations in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. The Franco-Ontarian community, like other minority-language communities, needs to see itself reflected in its media outlets. Radio is an important vehicle for the promotion of minority culture, ideas and institutions to enhance the community's vitality."⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Available online: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2000/pb2000-13.htm> (page consulted in April 2011).

⁷ Excerpt from a letter sent to the CRTC by Lucien Bradet, president of the RCFO, on January 14, 2009.

4.4. Local events

With regard to local events, community radio stations have the distinct advantage of being very close to their audiences and their concerns, broadcasting programs dealing with political, cultural and social issues of a local nature. These programs are specifically designed for distinct audiences and have no equivalent elsewhere on the dial. Indeed, community radio occupies a very specific niche.

According to Caroll Jacques, director general of the *Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins* (Kirkland Lake office), local communities in Canada cannot rely on the CBC's French-language radio service to fill in the gaps:

“As for radio, there is CBON Sudbury in French which, due to recent and past cuts, no longer visits the regions. Once again, they report on Sudbury and the surrounding area but not on Kirkland Lake, unless there is a disaster. As for English radio stations, there is CJKL in Kirkland Lake and CJTT in Temiskaming Shores. On the Quebec side, there is Radio Ville-Marie that offers a few programs once per week but does not really serve the region.”⁸

A few local programs once a week, or even an hour a day, is clearly insufficient.⁹ The reason is that local content is extremely important for Francophones living in a minority situation. But in the absence of relevant local programming, Francophones in underserved communities will most likely turn to another source.

For example, if a listener in Toronto, at the end of the day, must choose between listening to a French-language newscast produced in Montreal and a newscast produced in Toronto, he or she may well opt for the English network. Why? Because a regional newscast from Toronto stands a better chance at providing this listener with information relevant to his or her day-to-day life, even if this information is provided in English.

While this choice may be an acceptable compromise for certain bilingual Francophones, it is not an acceptable alternative for unilingual Francophones, and certainly not acceptable from a community development perspective.

⁸ Testimony by Mr. Caroll Jacques, *Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins* (Kirkland Lake office), before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 40th Parliament, 2nd Session, May 11, 2009. Available online: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=2&DocId=3886244&File=0&Language=E#Int-2755687> (page consulted in April 2011).

⁹ For example, at the time this study went to print, Radio-Canada's audience in Windsor was allotted one hour of local programming, 5 days a week.

5. Social impacts

5.1. A means of identification

By definition, a community radio station focuses on the community it serves. It creates a special space for listeners who hear themselves reflected in the station they are listening to. Indeed, according to expert Bart Cammaerts, community radio's participatory nature "enables local communities to represent themselves."¹⁰

For Francophones, it is also a means of identification according to Statistics Canada:

[TRANSLATION]

"Research has shown that the use of French-language media is closely tied to francophone identity and the desire to be part of the francophone community [...]. These results are not proof of a cause-and-effect relationship. It is possible that French-language media use contributes to francophone identity-building, but it is also likely that people who already have a strong francophone identity choose French-language media more often than people with a weaker francophone identity. We believe that this is in fact a two-way relationship – in other words, that the use of French-language minority media is both a cause and an effect of francophone identity."¹¹

For others, like community education outreach worker Ginette Gratton, French-language community radio has the power to make what is seemingly invisible, visible, allowing these communities to exist publicly:

[TRANSLATION]

"If a community is invisible, it doesn't exist in actual fact. It exists only theoretically, in what people say. And gradually, its members assimilate to what they see around them. It's a natural reaction. Eventually, the day comes when they've forgotten who they were and the community ceases to exist."¹²

¹⁰ Bart Cammaerts : « Community radio in the West: a legacy of struggle for survival in a state and capitalist controlled media environment », in *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 71 (8), 2009, pp. 635-654.

¹¹ According to Statistics Canada's 2007 Survey on the Vitality of Official-Language Minorities, Francophones in south-eastern Ontario show a stronger sense of belonging to the francophone community (48 per cent), while the proportion of Francophones in the Greater Toronto Area, for example, who say that they belong primarily to the Anglophone group or some other group is higher than in other parts of the province.

¹² Ginette Gratton, "*Une radio communautaire : Un maillon de communication essentiel pour les francophones*", *La Nouvelle*, Embrun, April 2, 2009. Available online: <http://www.journallanouvelle.ca/Vie-communautaire/2009-04-02/article-786742/Une-radio-communautaire-Un-maillon-de-communication-essentiel-pour-les-francophones/1> (consulted in April 2011).

Language and identity are inextricably linked. If Ontario's francophone communities are to survive and flourish, their members must be able to live, grow and develop in French. That means not only being able to use French in private (at home), in the community (schools, associations) and in public settings (government services, signage, work, etc.) but it also requires perceiving that the French language is valued by government and is seen as useful for preserving cultural heritage. Francophone communities must be able to read, hear and see themselves in French in a relevant and useful way.

In other words, it is not just hearing French spoken that is important to the vitality of Ontario's francophone communities; it is also — and above all — the relevance of the message conveyed in French that affects the perception of francophone community members that French still, today, has a day-to-day *raison d'être*. As others have said, "being Francophone is a choice you make every day." For that choice to be valued by the individual member of a francophone community in Ontario, it is not always sufficient for the use of French to be an ideological choice — particularly in areas where assimilation pressure is high. The use of French must also satisfy a utilitarian need.

That utilitarian need may take the form of needed information about the weather when preparing for an activity, checking local road conditions before heading off to one's destination, finding out if schools are open or closed during a winter storm, or obtaining a listing of local events when planning to socialize. When this information is available in French, it validates a Francophone's choice to use the French language on a daily basis.

[TRANSLATION]

"[...] They (local and community media outlets) help to strengthen the identity of francophone communities by broadcasting local French-language cultural products or content and information that give the communities more than just a reflection of themselves, but a voice. Community radio stations and newspapers are not simply media outlets; they have a community development function. This is evident in the support that community radio stations provide to literacy campaigns and the promotion of local francophone tourism, for example. [...] Community media outlets organize non-media activities, such as fundraising for various local groups that foster sustainable community development."¹³

¹³ Annie Bédard, "Les médias et les organismes porte-parole des communautés francophones et acadiennes : rapports, synergies et tensions", in *Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens*, Summer 2007, pp. 19-22.

French-language community radio stations also help Francophones cope with feelings of isolation by telling them that they are not alone and that they belong to a strong community that still has a future.

Sociologists¹⁴ occasionally refer to this concept as “language legitimacy,” — i.e. an individual’s perception that his or her language enjoys public recognition. This legitimacy would be reinforced, for instance, when a Francophone hears a member of his or her community over the airwaves. In this particular instance, however, it is not so much the use of French that will affect the individual as the fact that communicating in French has relevance. In other words, it helps validate both a linguistic choice and a desire to belong to a community.

It is not hard to imagine how French-speaking Ontarians, in a minority setting, may switch to English and abandon the daily efforts required to maintain their attachment to the francophone community. When there is no institutional infrastructure, it is not surprising that the members of that community may try to fulfil their utilitarian needs by other means. Indeed, the attraction to the anglophone community becomes very strong when French services are not available.

When a member of the francophone community perceives that his or her language is valued and useful in the public sphere — for example, when he or she hears the community being talked about in French on community radio — he or she will consider this as an individual recognition. But that recognition also has a wider impact — on the entire francophone community — if it helps justify that individual’s choice of linguistic attachment on a daily basis. Conversely, an individual who has been assimilated because of the majority language’s power of attraction is contributing to the gradual erosion of an already fragile minority community.

Essentially the strength of community radio can help combat this erosion due its unique participatory nature — replacing what researcher Sara Beth Keough describes as the “homogenized placeless medium” of commercial radio by one that builds a symbiotic relationship between a station and its listeners.¹⁵

Finally, the participatory nature of community radio brings with it another benefit that is intrinsically linked to cultural identity. With community members behind the microphone, many of these stations end up communicating with their audiences in a language that may be tinged with regionalisms. That is particularly true in the case of stations in rural areas. This aspect of community radio helps listeners more readily identify with on-air personalities, which is desirable, according to researcher emeritus Florian Sauvageau:

¹⁴ See notably the brief entitled *Vers une nouvelle synergie d'action : sommet des communautés francophones et acadiennes*, presented by Rodrigue Landry, Eric and Christopher Forgues Traisnel to the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada in 2007.

¹⁵ Sara Beth Keough, “The importance of place in community radio broadcasting: A case study of WDVX, Knoxville, Tennessee”, (Case study) in *Journal of Cultural Geography* vol. 27 (1), 2010, pp 77-98.

[TRANSLATION]

“Until quite recently, journalists and program hosts who had strong regional accents were not allowed on the air [...]. Radio-Canada required international French to be used on all its stations [...]. I understand why you are less inclined to listen to a radio station that uses a language that is not the same as yours.”¹⁶

5.2. Community engagement

The role played by community radio is very important when it comes to citizen engagement. Indeed, according to Sharmeen Khan, “what sets these stations apart is how they rely on listeners to also [become] broadcasters.”¹⁷

In her paper entitled “Community Radio and the frequency of struggle,” Khan spoke with several community radio activists including members of the National Campus and Community Radio Association whose members are convinced that community radio plays a key role in citizen engagement.

“For many communities — including rural communities underserved by commercial media, new Canadians, minority language communities, cultural communities, the economically disadvantaged, and youth — community radio is the primary provider of local news, information and cultural content. Community radio serves a much different niche in a much different way than does commercial radio.”¹⁸

Engagement with members of one’s community is key to fighting assimilation. This is particularly important for young Francophones who are entering the critical stages of their self-identification. In many parts of Ontario, young Francophones are only a step away from opting out of what they may feel is a less useful language in their day-to-day interactions.

French-language community radio has the powerful potential of changing all that, by providing young people with an opportunity to take part in a French-speaking cultural space while learning about careers in broadcasting and putting into practice training available at the collegiate and university levels¹⁹. Its volunteers and co-op students learn the rudiments of journalism, radio production, recording and editing techniques, and even the writing and producing of radio advertising. And that leads to very positive outcomes.

¹⁶ Guylaine Proulx, “Le rôle de Radio-Canada auprès des communautés francophones du Canada : un entretien avec Florian Sauvageau”, in Michel Beauchamp and Thierry Watine, *Médias et milieux francophones*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006, p. 145.

¹⁷ Sharmeen Khan, “Community radio and the frequency of struggle”, in *Briarpatch*, June/July 2007.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ For instance, the *Cité collégiale* offers programs in broadcasting, journalism, public relations and communications. For more information: http://www.lacitec.on.ca/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6d32763e-5a0b-483d-adb3-503aa0641923&groupId=10251 (page consulted in April 2011).

Indeed, behind the microphone, young people readily adopt a new attitude towards speaking French, while in the schoolyard, on television, on the Internet and on MP3 players, English is rampant.

In certain areas community radio stations are set up in secondary schools, giving young people a voice and allowing them to produce programs that cater to their interests. That was true of a federally-funded project entitled “*Motiver la relève scolaire*” [encouraging student engagement]. Through this project, which received one year of funding from Canadian Heritage, students from six French-language schools in Ontario had an opportunity to work in radio with the support of local community radio station hosts.

The commissioner believes that programs like these are an effective way to engage young people with the larger francophone community and help combat assimilation as well as the exodus of young people from rural centres. This point will be addressed later in this report (see section 8.3).

5.3. More people listening to French-language radio

According to Statistics Canada's *Portrait of Official-Language Minorities in Canada: Francophones in Ontario*,²⁰ 84% of Francophones listen to radio and 62% of them do so only or mainly in English. Of course, there are differences between regions: for example, in south-eastern Ontario, more than a third of Francophones reported listening to radio only or mainly in French.

A lot of this has to do with the availability of local radio stations that offer relevant content for French-language listeners. The commissioner believes that if there were more of these French-language stations in the province (possibly community radio stations) listeners would be willing to give up English radio and opt for the French-language alternative. This belief is borne out by what happened with the launch of a French-language community radio station in south-eastern New Brunswick in the 1990s.

The case is a remarkable one. It is described by University of Moncton researchers Annette Boudreau and Lise Dubois as one of the biggest success stories in community radio.²¹ When the station began broadcasting, it reshaped the radio landscape in the region. Prior to its existence, audiences listened to English radio more than French radio:

²⁰ Jean-Pierre Corbeil and Sylvie Lafrenière, *Portrait of Official-Language Minorities in Canada: Francophones in Ontario*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2010.

²¹ Annette Boudreau and Lise Dubois, “La radio communautaire en milieu minoritaire : légitimation identitaire, diversification du marché linguistique et changement linguistique”, in Régine Delamotte-Legrand, (ed.) *Les Médiations langagières. Des discours aux acteurs sociaux*, Publications de l'Université de Rouen, Volume 2, 2004, p. 178.

[TRANSLATION]

“Listening habits have changed drastically since 1994: the community radio station is now reaching nearly 75% of its potential audience.”²²

In other words, French-language community radio stations have the potential of generating healthy listening habits.

There was a similar situation in Ontario when community radio stations began broadcasting in Cornwall and Kapuskasing. Indeed, since then, over 70 per cent of people surveyed in Cornwall and Kapuskasing say they listen to French-language radio more often than before.²³ This increase not only benefits the community radio stations but also, unquestionably, contributes to the vitality of Francophone communities and their members who listen to each other and hear each other speaking French.

6. Economic impact and benefits

The role played by community radio stations in their community's economy remains poorly understood. Yet French-language community radio stations outside Quebec generated more than \$20 million in the 1980s and 1990s, according to the *Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada*. These revenues were generated primarily from advertising sales and fundraising activities.

The MICRO estimates that its members' revenues are \$2 million a year. In addition, there are direct and indirect economic effects on local communities. According to the MICRO, salaries and wages paid to employees are a main contributor. Indeed, the MICRO reports that its members created about 20 direct full-time jobs and 10 indirect jobs.

There are, however, other economic benefits generated by the existence of these stations. These include the revenues generated for local suppliers of various goods and services used by these stations in their day-to-day operations.

Community radio stations also have an important impact on the local cultural industry. Mostly importantly, their contribution leads to a substantial increase in recordings by Franco-Ontarian artists, higher sales of concert tickets for their various performances and greater participation by Francophones in community events.²⁴ This view is supported by the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, led by the Honourable Maria Chaput, in their report published in 2009:

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, *supra* note 2, p. 8.

²⁴ Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, *Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages*, 1st Session, 39th Parliament, Issue No. 16, Ottawa, May 28, 2007, p. 7.

“Community radio stations and newspapers are important partners in the funding of community cultural events. Not only do they provide information that reflects the community, they build the capacity to live in French. They provide a rallying point where communities gather, innovate and create jobs in many sectors.”²⁵

In other words, the economic contribution of community radio stations changes the consumption patterns of Francophones and helps enhance their vitality.

7. Key challenges

The province’s French-language community radio stations face a number of difficulties, including limited financial means.

7.1. Precarious financial situation

The poor financial health of community radio stations is a recurring issue. That observation was made as early as 1988 in a study sponsored by the Government of Ontario. The study recognized that:

“... the current difficulties result primarily from a lack of coherent and integrated policies and planning at both federal and provincial levels of government.”²⁶

Further in the same report, its authors state:

“With a modicum of investment that reflected practical and responsive provincial policy, the community/campus radio sector could be developed to better serve the interests of the citizens of Ontario.”²⁷

Twenty years later, the financial situation of community radio stations is still far from rosy. Yet the benefits and other effects that are directly and indirectly associated with maintaining and operating community radio stations are not trivial.

These stations generate most of their revenue from advertising sales and fundraising campaigns. Thus, their financial health depends largely on their markets’ economic situation and the generosity of listeners who contribute through radiothons and other fundraising efforts.

²⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, *Francophone Arts and Culture: Living Life to its Fullest in Minority Settings*, Ottawa, 2nd session, 40th Parliament, June 2009, p. 15.

²⁶Kealy Wilkinson and Associates, *Community Radio in Ontario: A Dynamic Resource - An Uncertain Future*, Ministry of Culture and Communications, Ontario, 1988, p. 62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

According to the MICRO, three of the province's six French-language community radio stations have deficits. And because of their precarious, untenable situations, these radio stations have to continually revise their priorities, and sometimes, make hard choices — including those that have an impact on programming.

At present, the federal government's Official Languages Support Programs provide grants to community radio stations only during their start-up phases. At the provincial level, there is no policy or program specifically for community radio stations because of the government's disengagement, dating back to 1995.

7.2. Cancellation of the CRO program

In 1987, the Ministry of Culture and Communications of Ontario²⁸ undertook a study²⁹ of the current status of community radio stations and their development over a period of 15 years. That period coincided with the introduction of a federal program to support community radio stations and an increase in provincial grant applications by industry players.

At the time, various ministries had budgetary envelopes allocated to certain aspects of community radio, but there were no grants as such and no comprehensive policy concerning community radio stations.

The study concluded that the provincial government should recognize the importance of the services that community radio can provide and should — if it deemed it appropriate — foster its growth by adopting policies that would support federal initiatives. It also pointed out that the barriers to that growth were clearly identifiable and that the means to remove them were inexpensive and easy to put into place.³⁰

In response to the study, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade introduced the Community Radio Ontario (CRO) program in 1992, which had very clear goals:³¹

- to encourage and support the establishment of community radio stations;
- to stabilize existing stations;
- to improve the quality of programming at community radio stations;
- to help stations find other sources of funding for their activities.

²⁸ The responsibilities of this ministry were eventually redefined and this branch of government is now known as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

²⁹ Kealy Wilkinson and Associates, *op .cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3

³¹ Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, *Community Radio Ontario*, Brochure, Government of Ontario, Toronto, Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1994.

While the program did not offer any capital grants, it provided eligible French-language and Aboriginal-language community radio stations with operating grants and funding for one-time projects.

But the program was short-lived as a result of a series of budget cuts announced by the government of the day. That policy of austerity led to the elimination of many programs, including the Community Radio Ontario program, which was cancelled in 1995.

8. Possible solutions

The Commissioner believes that French-language community radio stations contribute to the vitality and survival of Ontario's francophone community. In that context, it is the opinion of the Commissioner that government support and partnership with these stations would certainly be appropriate and desirable.

8.1. A policy and stable funding

The benefits of community radio — such as promoting the language and culture of the Francophone community — were recognized and emphasized by the Government of Ontario in the Community Radio Ontario program.³² The program's average annual grant to community radio stations was \$25,000. Since the program was cancelled in 1995, there have been no other programs specifically designed to fund community radio stations in Ontario.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) only funds projects that meet its four well-established priorities: (i) enhanced success for students and learners, (ii) healthier and more physically active Ontarians, (iii) enhanced employment and economic potential for workers and their families, and (iv) support for volunteer organizations engaged in their communities. Radio stations can also apply to the Foundation for assistance with capital projects. However, those projects have a limited, one-time impact, since neither the Foundation nor any other provincial institution provides stable financial support or expertise to ensure that community radio stations are provided with a regular cash flow.

And the situation is not much easier when these stations are in their start-up phases. Indeed, at this critical period, only the federal Department of Canadian Heritage maintains its funding at 50% of set-up costs, leaving community radio stations to raise the other 50% from their communities in order to begin broadcasting.

³² Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, *op. cit.*

Given that more than 20 years have passed since the study conducted by the Ministry of Culture and Communication on the development of community radio stations, the Commissioner's Office believes that the current Ministry of Tourism and Culture should update the study.³³ That exercise would assess community radio stations' contribution to the province's cultural heritage and gauge the challenges that these stations face.

In view of community radio's role as a development tool and its social and economic benefits, the Commissioner also hopes that the Government of Ontario will adopt a community radio policy that will recognize its contribution to the Francophone community's vitality and growth.

Such a policy should also provide a start-up fund that would take into account the disparities and unique features of the markets in which French-language community radio stations operate with a view to alleviating their financial difficulties and encouraging their development.

8.2. The Aménagement Linguistique Policy (ALP)

The Government of Ontario introduced the *Aménagement Linguistique Policy* (ALP) in 2004. This policy helps Ontario's francophone students preserve their culture, boost their pride and improve their academic performance. It helps combat the assimilation of young Francophones by providing additional training for teachers dealing with the challenges of teaching in a minority-language setting.

The ALP encourages young people to take pride in their linguistic and cultural identity. It asserts that they must be given a prominent place in an authentic francophone cultural milieu that is open to the world through French-language media and cultural products that reflect their realities and concerns. It also encourages young Franco-Ontarians to participate in sports and extracurricular activities in French.

In addition, the ALP encourages community organizations — and in particular, community radio stations — to give young people a voice by inviting them to discuss topics that concern them.

At this time, the Ministry of Education does not provide grants to community radio stations under the ALP. However, it has indicated to the Commissioner's Office that it encourages French-language community radio stations to contact one of three community outreach officers of the *Élargir l'espace francophone* project [expanding the Francophone milieu] to develop partnerships with French-language schools. This project is a cooperative venture between the Ministry's French-Language Education Policy and Programs Branch and the *Centre canadien de leadership en évaluation (CLÉ)*.

³³ The Commissioner acknowledges the fact that there is a work unit with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade that deals with "information and communications technologies." However, the Commissioner believes that this question is more of a "cultural" issue.

The Commissioner believes that community radio stations should seize the opportunity offered by the Ministry of Education to build relationships and lay the groundwork for collaboration with French-language schools through the community outreach officers of the *Élargir l'espace francophone* project.

8.3. Accent on youth

In 2008, the Office of Francophone Affairs (OFA) conducted consultations and a market study with some 30 community organizations to develop a strategy suited to the needs and image of the province's young Francophones.³⁴ Aside from the fact that young people tend to consume English-language media, including radio, the study concluded that people aged 14 to 17 define themselves first and foremost as bilingual. That was the case for nearly 95% of young people surveyed.

"The risk of young people becoming detached from their community is one of the key issues of concern to all Ontarians. For Ontario's Francophones, this risk is accentuated by the problem of assimilation and the fact that the rate of language retention decreases with age."³⁵

Following the study, the Accent on Youth strategy was launched to encourage the use of French by young Francophones and motivate their participation in the development of their communities.

This government initiative relies on support from public and private organizations and a number of community groups. As soon as it was introduced, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the *Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne (FESFO)* and the Desjardins Group confirmed their participation. Since then, other alliances and partnerships have been formed. One of them is with the *Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario (AFMO)*, which together with the Office of Francophone Affairs launched a citizen participation project that allowed students from four different high schools to engage in municipal politics and share their points of view on local issues.

The Office is inviting French-language community radio stations to contact its staff to arrange an exploratory meeting. The Office has also told the Commissioner's Office that it will enthusiastically consider any new project focusing on the development of community radio, as part of its youth strategy. Anyone interested in submitting such a project may also receive the Office's help in approaching ministries likely to provide assistance.

The Commissioner encourages community radio stations to work closely with the Office of Francophone Affairs to explore possible solutions while enjoying its support and assistance in youth-oriented projects. To combat young people's growing attraction to English-language media and their subsequent

³⁴ For more details: http://www.ofa.gov.on.ca/docs/jeunesse_report.pdf (page consulted in April 2011).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

assimilation, community radio stations should engage youth audiences and offer programming that resonates with them and meets their expectations.

The Commissioner believes that community radio stations are an important instrument for the development of the Francophone community, serving as a vehicle of local culture and a showcase for present and future talent.

Conclusion

In this era of globalization, instant information and media concentration in the hands of a few large corporations, community radio stations play a critical role. They build relationships with their listeners through programming that focuses on coverage of local news, community information and cultural activities that are all too often ignored by other media outlets. They are part of the communities that they serve and their tangible contributions are felt, both socially and economically.

[TRANSLATION]

“Wherever these stations set up, community radio galvanizes the inner strength of the population; it becomes an instrument in the struggle against assimilation; it helps to protect local characteristics and promote cultural identity.”³⁶

However, its artisans point out that the lack of base funding is the greatest obstacle facing community radio stations, some of which are fighting for their survival. For others, this obstacle impedes their plans for growth.³⁷

The Government of Ontario should commit to help these stations. Otherwise, they will continue to struggle or may even — in some cases — disappear over the medium term, along with the unique services they provide to Francophone listeners. There is no shortage of horror stories involving stations that have barely avoided being shut down. One such unfortunate case was Cornwall’s CHOD-FM, which nearly lost its operating licence in January 2005 because of financial difficulties.³⁸

In 1992, the Government of Ontario recognized the importance of community radio stations and the role they play in fostering the vitality and survival of the francophone community. The reasons cited in the early 1990s for supporting community radio as an instrument of community development are still valid today. However, it is important to note that no program has been introduced to replace the defunct Community Radio Ontario program since its cancellation.

Moreover, while radio discovers and provides exposure for the artists of today and tomorrow, it has never been formally associated with the arts by the Government of Ontario. This deprives community radio stations of potential grants.

³⁶ Barbara Losier, “La Radio communautaire francophone au Canada. Une vue d’ensemble”, in Fernand Harvey (ed.) *Médias francophones hors Québec et identité. Analyses, essais et témoignages*, Québec, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1992, p. 196.

³⁷ CRTC summary report, *Campus and Community Radio Sector Informal stakeholder meetings in March-April 2009*, *Campus and Community Radio Sector*. Available online: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/radio/rp0904.htm> (page consulted in April 2011).

³⁸ Jean-François Dugas, “CHOD FM, voix francophone de l’Est ontarien”, *Le Droit*, April 3, 2009.

[TRANSLATION]

“French-language community radio is not a passing fancy. It is a vital link in the media structure that allows us to see ourselves at work and to tell the whole world that we exist.”³⁹

Tackling the many challenges facing French-language community radio stations in Ontario requires genuine cooperation between the stations themselves and the government ministries and agencies concerned.

³⁹ Ginette Gratton, *supra* note 13.

Considering that the preamble of the French Language Services Act indicates that the Legislative Assembly recognizes the contribution of the cultural heritage of the French-speaking population and wishes to preserve it for future generations;

Considering that Ontario's French-language community radio stations not only promote the francophone population's cultural heritage but are rightfully part of it;

Considering that a government study of the current status and future development of community radio stations was carried out more than 20 years ago;

Considering that this study concluded that only modest investments are needed to support the community radio sector in order to better serve the interests of Ontario's citizens; and

Considering that an Ontario community radio program was successfully implemented in 1992;

The Commissioner recommends

that the Government develop a new study to paint an accurate picture of the situation of Ontario's French-language community radio stations and that the study also propose concrete, permanent solutions to meet the specific needs of Francophones in the area of community radio.

APPENDIX A

Role of key federal institutions

While community radio stations fall within provincial jurisdiction, they have very close ties with certain federal institutions that dictate the regulatory framework within which they have to establish themselves and operate. Those institutions provide either financial or technical support.

CRTC

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), a federal agency, issues permits to operate community radio stations under the Broadcasting Act and the Community Radio Policy. Permit applications must meet a number of criteria, including financial capacity, technical capability and programming requirements. The process generally takes a number of years and requires much perseverance on the part of community groups that apply.

Canadian Heritage

The federal government, through Canadian Heritage, provides grants to minority-language community radio stations under the Community Life component of the Development of Official-Language Communities Program. The program is designed to foster the vitality of Canada's French-speaking and English-speaking minority communities and enable them to participate fully in all aspects of Canadian life.⁴⁰

The grants are currently limited to supporting community radio stations in their start-up phases, as was the case for Ottawa's new French-language community radio station, CJFO-FM, which began broadcasting in November 2010.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's French-language service (Radio-Canada) cooperates with some community radio programming undertakings by providing occasional training as well as technical and programming support. Not surprisingly, that cooperation varies from station to station and province to province.⁴¹ However, the MICRO disagrees, asserting that Radio-Canada provides no support to French-language community radio stations in Ontario.

With regard to programming, it is difficult to compare the CBC with community radio stations, because they occupy such different niches. In addition, the Crown corporation is having problems providing local programming following two waves of budget cuts, which, even today, limit its capacity to address the special needs of small French-speaking communities in Ontario.

⁴⁰ For more information: <http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1267730127653/1268917925906> (page consulted in April 2011).

⁴¹ For more information: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/backgrnd/language/ol0903-lo0903.htm> (page consulted in April 2011).