On the Map

A History of
Voice of English-speaking Québec

VEQ
Voice of English-speaking Québec

On the Map: A History of Voice of English-speaking Québec is part of the Regional Development Network "Organizational Histories" series of publications. Looking back helps understand organizations as they were when they were founded, provides a sense of context for current missions and mandates, and projects identities and approaches into the future. Regional community development associations serving the English-language minority population often serve outlying areas and dispersed populations, they operate in numerous sectors, and they mobilize small communities ultimately to ensure equity and access across the province. Their history is also the history of Quebec.

Greater Quebec City

Voice of English-speaking Québec

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Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise
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Investing in community

RDN member organizations play a leading role in supporting and strengthening English-speaking minority communities in Quebec. Their essential work contributes to cultural vitality, community resilience, and access to services that support their development and long-term sustainability. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to this mission!

THE HONORABLE

Marc Miller

Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien

Shaped by commitment

Quebec English-language community organizations have a rich history, shaped by commitment and resilience, and in the spirit of dialogue. This booklet is a testament to their important contribution to Quebec society. The Government of Quebec is proud to support these efforts to honour the past, and commends these communities for their dedication.

Christopher Skeete

MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR RELATIONS WITH ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS

Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise

Québec

The English presence in Quebec

The English presence in Quebec is a patchwork quilt, an island in the archipelago that is Quebec in North America. For years, for decades, and even for centuries, scattered groups of English speakers have worked to grow thriving communities—places where we help each other, where we look to our elders and look out for our little ones, where we fight for our rights and for what's right. Across the province, we have worked to build places that feel like home.

The work to build, to represent, and to grow has been a labour of love by so many community members. That community has also been supported by a number of agencies and institutions, some of which are named in these pages. In the early days, the Secretary of State offered funding; in later years, the Government of Canada has been seminal to the community's stability, including through Department of Canadian Heritage programs for official language minority communities and funding from Health Canada. More recently, the provincial Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise has also contributed. In every region, various municipal and regional bodies find ways to help. Many hands make light work.

The nineteen community development organizations that make up the membership of the Regional Development Network represent towns, MRCs, and regions across the province. The oldest among them was founded over fifty years ago; the youngest is only seven years old. These regional groups have a wide spectrum of programming, including health and social services, culture and heritage, activities for seniors, youth, and children, education, employment, social enterprise… After all, in a village, everyone is something of a jack of all trades. That expertise also comes from listening—to what community members have to say, to what's needed, and to opportunities as they arise.

In more recent years, we have worked to put our communities on the map. The English-speaking population of Quebec has undergone extraordinary changes, and we are more diverse than ever. But whether home is nestled in the north, perched in the Appalachians, or staring out to sea, we share the same concerns, and the same ties that bind. And as we stitch together our communities, as we drift away and back, as we carve out a space for ourselves and our children, we take a moment to pause, to look around; we take a moment to both celebrate our roots and welcome the future.

Voice of English-speaking Québec is a nonprofit community development organization that represents the English-speaking community in the Greater Quebec City region.

The Quebec City region is particular in several ways: it includes both English speakers whose ancestors arrived centuries ago as well as more recent immigrants. It consists of urban, rural, and military communities. It is the seat of provincial government, and, as such, frequently requires local organizations to act as interlocutors on ongoing political issues. And, most notably, it is overwhelmingly Francophone, so that minority English speakers must balance linguistic and cultural integration with maintaining their own sense of identity, through celebrations, visibility, and advocacy. For over four decades, VEQ has been instrumental in gathering community members and English-language institutions in and around Quebec City, unifying and representing the minority-language population in key sectors such as education, health and social services, and newcomer integration.

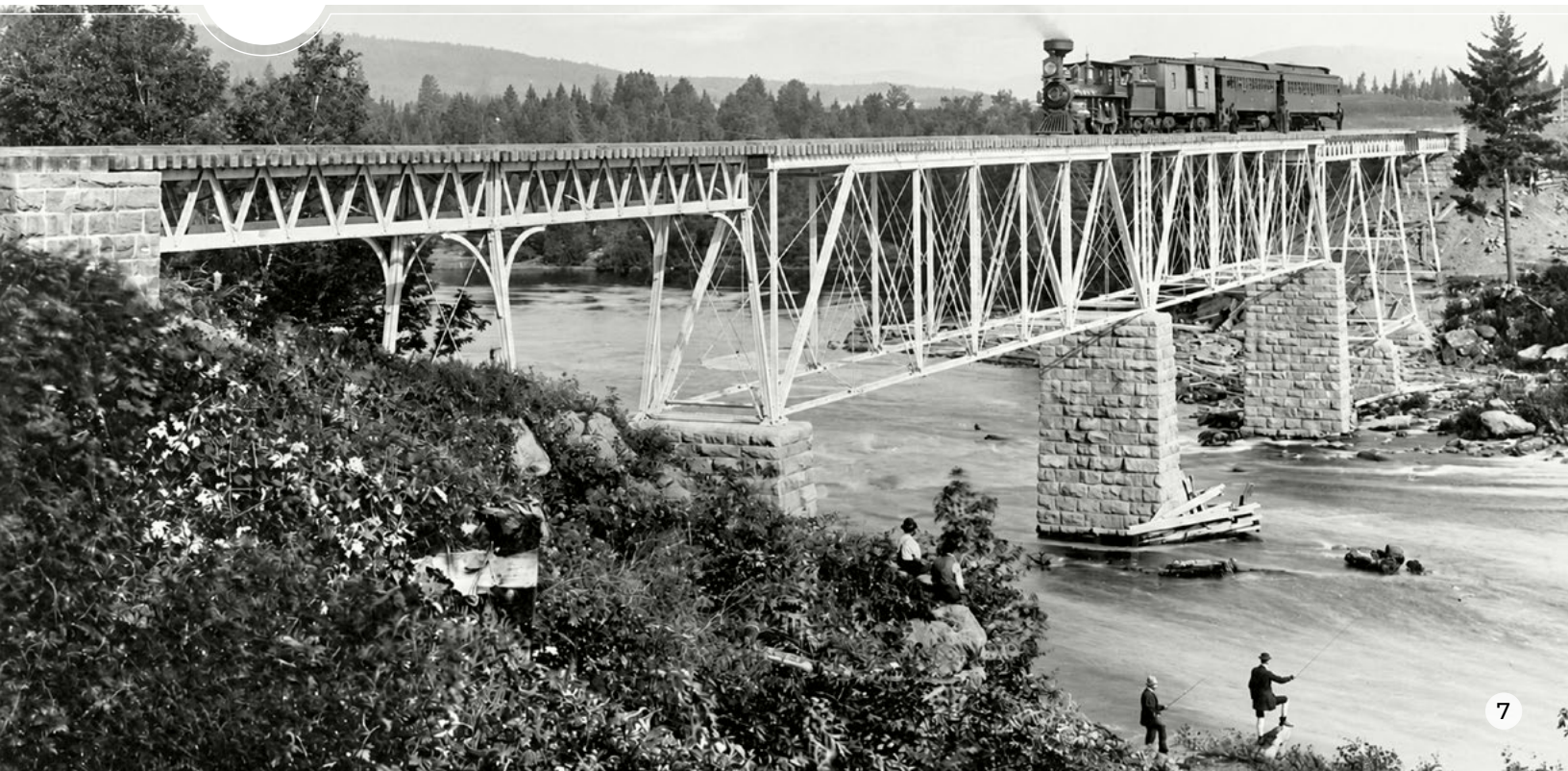
Foundations

Before the river turns briny, opens out into its estuary, and flows out to sea, the St. Lawrence narrows and ancient rock rises up into the promontory that forms the emblematic cliffs of one of Canada's oldest European settlements, and among its most photogenic.

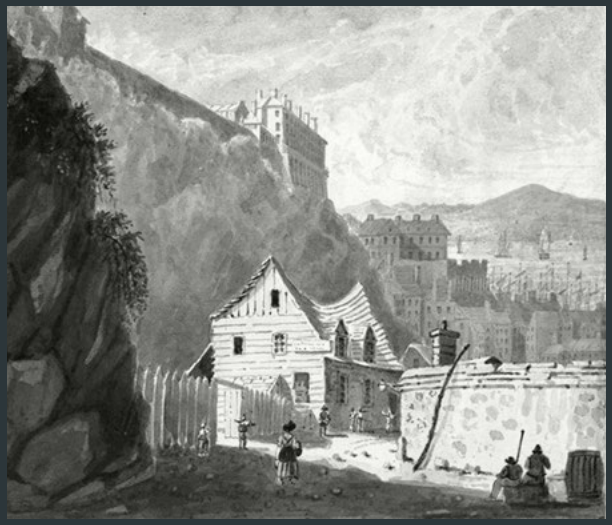
The earliest dated traces of human occupation in the area go back at least five thousand years: then, as in more recent settlement, people came for the waterways, stayed for the arable land, and capitalized on the strategic strength of the location. The name of the current provincial capital is derived from the Algonquian word "kebec," referring to the place where the river narrows. The territory has been inhabited for thousands of years by the Wôbanaki and the Wolastoqiyik peoples; it is also home to the Wendat Nation, who were driven east in the seventeenth century.

Jacques Cartier first landed in the village of Stadacona in 1535, returning a few years later to build a fort. Quebec City itself was established as a trading post by Samuel de Champlain in 1608. Skirmishes with English troops started not long after, culminating in the battle of the Plains of Abraham. The early British and Scottish presence, as well as later waves of Irish settlers, evolved alongside the French. The city's architecture remains a stoic stone testament to three hundred years of cohabitation, with Martello towers, fortifications, and endless church steeples; there are even shamrocks hammered into the ironwork of the Château Frontenac. The military, seasonal, and religious traditions of English speakers intermingled with French customs, weaving an intricate tapestry: the seams still tug at the mention of the British conquest, English speakers have had to jockey among the cultural dominance of the fleur-de-lys, and, increasingly, the fabric is diversely international. In spite of its complexities, however, the cultural fabric of Quebec City is twined tightly together.

The nineteenth century was a boom time for Quebec City, notably because of the local timber and shipbuilding industries. In the late 1800s, however, the railroad and the St. Lawrence Seaway



ECOLIERS



were developed, and the English-speaking economic and merchant classes left in droves, primarily for Montreal. Still, in the 1870s, almost half the population of Quebec City was made up of English speakers, and fully one fifth were Irish (by some calculations, approximately forty percent of current residents of the city have Irish roots, a proportion that may increase even more in mid-March!). As the century turned, the English speakers who stayed built many key community institutions, such as the *Quebec Gazette* (which became the *Chronicle Telegraph*), Morrin College (now the Morrin Centre) and the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, Saint Patrick's Church, the Catholic boys' Saint Patrick's School and the Leonard School for girls, the Victoria Protestant School and the Girls' High School, Saint Brigid's Home, Jeffery Hale's Hospital... Some of these were consolidated throughout the twentieth century, for instance following the dissolution of religious divisions in education, and others still were created, such as St. Lawrence College (now a campus of Champlain Regional College).

The early British and Scottish presence, as well as later waves of Irish settlers, evolved alongside the French.

The Quiet Revolution in the sixties contributed to a second major exodus—three hundred thousand English speakers left the province in the years that followed—with Bill 101 and the first referendum exacerbating many Anglo-Quebecers' sense of exclusion. In Quebec City, after a period of rapid demographic decline, the numbers of English speakers levelled out in the 1970s, and, by 1981, were holding steady at nearly three percent of the city's total population. As well as the institutional stalwarts, a number of small groups served and supported the linguistic minority. They were doing valiant work, but often facing separate issues, and there was a growing sense in the community that an organization was needed to bring them all together and speak with a single voice on issues that affected all Anglophones.

In 1981, a group of community organizers, including publishers of the English-language weekly the *Quebec Chronicle Telegraph* David Cannon, Robert Dawson, and Ross Rourke, took the need for collaboration to heart, and founded the association that would become the Voice of English-speaking Québec.

People & Partnerships

The organization that was then called the Voice of English Québec was federally incorporated on January 21, 1981, with **William Bartlett**, **Robert Dawson**, and **Kevin O'Farrell** on the first board of directors. **Mary Woods**, who ran the Quebec City YWCA, was involved, as were **Ross Rourke** and **David Cannon**, and the new organization shared a building with the ***Quebec Chronicle Telegraph*** on Holland Avenue; the newspaper's offices were in the basement.

VEQ was founded with four guiding principles: fostering the development of Quebec City's English-speaking population; encouraging cooperation among English-speaking community organizations; supporting existing English-language institutions; and identifying the community's most pressing needs and formulating recommendations as to how they might be met.

Jennifer Hobbs-Robert had lived in Quebec City as a young woman, attending high school at **Saint Patrick's**, completing an internship at **St. Lawrence College**, and working as a student nurse at **Saint Brigid's Home**. She had also spent some time in Toronto as a camp counsellor for the YMCA and YWCA, which was where she met Mary Woods. In 1981, Hobbs-Robert had just

Jennifer Hobbs-Robert

FIRST VEQ COORDINATOR

VEQ has always been a partner in anything that goes on in Quebec City with regards to the English-speaking population. They're in the know, and they support in any way they can.

returned to Quebec City when Woods reached out to her: a new community development organization was looking for a coordinator, she said, and would she like to apply. As the organization's founding staff member, Hobbs-Robert didn't have much to work with. "They set me up in an office," she remembers, "a very little office. I had a telephone—a rotary, in those days—and a telephone book. And I had a chair and I had a desk. And they said, just do your best and just see what you can try to do get information about the community." The first order of business was to establish what the needs of the English-speaking community were, and to develop means to make that community more congruent. Hobbs-Robert ended up going back to her primary profession of nursing after a year, and pursuing a stellar career in public health, but not before she laid the groundwork for what would become the backbone of VEQ: community collaboration, and a little tool called the Community Calendar, which is still around after forty-four years. The success of VEQ as a community hub, says Hobbs-Robert, "is really due to the commitment of the communities, and the commitment of the board of directors. They just kept going, and really believed in the greater cause."

As well as input from members of the Quebec City English-speaking community, VEQ had support from across the province. The group based in Thetford Mines, which at the time was called the **Megantic Community Development Corporation**, was an especially important early partner, Hobbs-Robert

Razvan Petre

CURRENT VEQ PRESIDENT

VEQ has amazing people, and almost no turnover. For years and years, we've had the same people, still engaged, still wanting to do more, being there at every event, participating, and helping.

Dominique Paddack

VEQ PROJECT COORDINATOR, SHANNON OFFICE

We've really been able to give back to the English-speaking community through all the different activities that we have. We always get a lot of feedback: people are so happy that we're here.

recalls, naming **Aline Visser** and **Peter Whitcomb**, as was the **CLSC René-Cassin** in Montreal. “They were just starting a seniors’ day centre at that point,” Hobbs-Robert says, “and the way they had gone around and obtained their information for English-speaking groups was interesting.”

English speakers in Quebec City had a long history of community support: the Catholic Saint Brigid’s Home was founded in 1856 to help orphans, the poor, and the elderly, and the Protestant **Jeffery Hale Hospital**, named for its principal benefactor, had been operating since 1865. Other organizations rallied around VEQ as well: 50+ clubs, church groups, the **St. Brigid’s Guild**, and community centres in the nearby towns of Stoneham, Shannon, and Donnacona and on the Valcartier military base were among VEQ’s earliest collaborators.

The young association was already professionalizing, and shortly hired its first executive director, **Kevin Saville**. Saville then hired **Richard Walling**, who knew the community well: he’d attended school in Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier, at St. Patrick’s High School, and at St. Lawrence College. He’d

gone out west for a year after university, and, when he came back to Quebec, his first job was at VEQ, as program director of health and social services. Within a few months, he'd succeeded Saville at the helm of the fledgling organization.

In the early eighties, the English-speaking community was at a low demographic ebb, Walling says: "After the first referendum in 1980 and with various pieces of language legislation, starting with Bill 22 in the seventies, and then Bill 101, the community felt quite vulnerable." The emphasis was to rebuild, and to become "an asset to the majority population of Quebec City." Old sectarian divisions also complicated matters. "You had the English Catholic high school, which was St. Pat's, you had the Protestant school and the Protestant school board. You had Jeffery Hale, which was a very Protestant hospital, and then St. Brigid's Home," he explains. "Communities tended to gravitate around those institutions. What VEQ started to do was bring those players together to redefine the community." Yet, for all the challenges, Walling says, "the early years at VEQ were exciting. People were coming together, celebrating together, and understanding that the future of the community depended on the community defining itself and advocating for its needs on a larger scale."

Walling left VEQ after two years, and has gone on to contribute enormously to the city and the province in his career in health and social services. When

Danie Desrochers

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TIME VEQ PARTNER OPTION TRAVAIL

VEQ is the go-to organization for the English-speaking community in Quebec City. Working with them is always easy and enjoyable, and they do high-quality work.

Helen Walling

FORMER VEQ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

VEQ is people who have vision, they have heart and soul.

the **Holland Centre** (now **JH Partners**) was created in 1991, Walling became executive director of that organization, which remains a key partner for VEQ, among many other groups.

Helen Meredith was first hired at VEQ in 1985, as a program director; in 1987, she ended up filling the leadership left vacant after Walling's departure, until 1989. The now late **Isabel Sullivan** followed, and then **Pierre Barbeau**, and **Leon Jackson**.

Back then, VEQ was still a shoestring operation, patching together what they could in project funding.

Helen Walling first became involved with VEQ early on. Originally from Quebec City, she had been away for a few years, then came back, working for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. In the mid-nineties, while Barbeau was executive director, Walling began volunteering for VEQ, notably serving as chair of the Fall Fest committee. When the executive director's position was posted in 1999, she applied, serving for nine years. Back then, VEQ was still a shoestring operation, Walling remembers, with a small staff, and operating on less than a hundred thousand dollars annually in core support and patching together what they could in project funding. One of those projects, importantly, was an initiative to help newcomers integrate, mostly people who moved to the region from other provinces in Canada. "It was a one-year shot with Canadian Heritage," she says. "And it's just continued year after year."

The organization also adapted as the community evolved: to be more in line with the population VEQ served, its name was changed to Voice of English-speaking Québec in 2003.

When Walling left in 2008, **Jean-Sébastien Jolin Gignac** stepped in, and eventually also moved on to work for Jeffery Hale Community Partners. Meanwhile, a young woman named **Brigitte Wellens** had joined the board. She was working in the lumber and construction industries, and an opportunity came up for a women's mentorship program, Leaders and Decision-makers, through the YWCA. **Catherine Huard**, who was the program lead, recommended Wellens, who was introduced to VEQ board member **Ann Martell**. Wellens joined as a silent observer—though, as

she says, she immediately got quite involved: “I wasn’t so silent all the time!” She soon became a volunteer as well, serving on the newcomers committee. In 2015, when Jolin Gignac was leaving, Wellens was on the executive committee tasked with hiring the new director, but then-board president **Taylor Ireland** and outgoing executive director Jolin Gignac convinced Wellens to put her own name forward. When she was hired, she brought the structure of her experience in the private sector. “The organizational culture of a not-for-profit organization is completely different than the private world,” she remembers, but her work in male-dominated fields also prepared her for a community whose leadership had traditionally been quite gendered.

In the years since, Wellens has built a team and developed strong links across the nonprofit network. As executive director, she serves on numerous other boards, representing VEQ and the English-speaking population: “If you want something done, ask the busiest person,” she jokes. That engagement has been true since the beginning: from community members to volunteers, to board members, to partners, everyone is busy making Voice of English-speaking Quebec vibrant, responsive, and relevant.

“If you want something done, ask the busiest person!”

Richard Walling

FORMER VEQ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

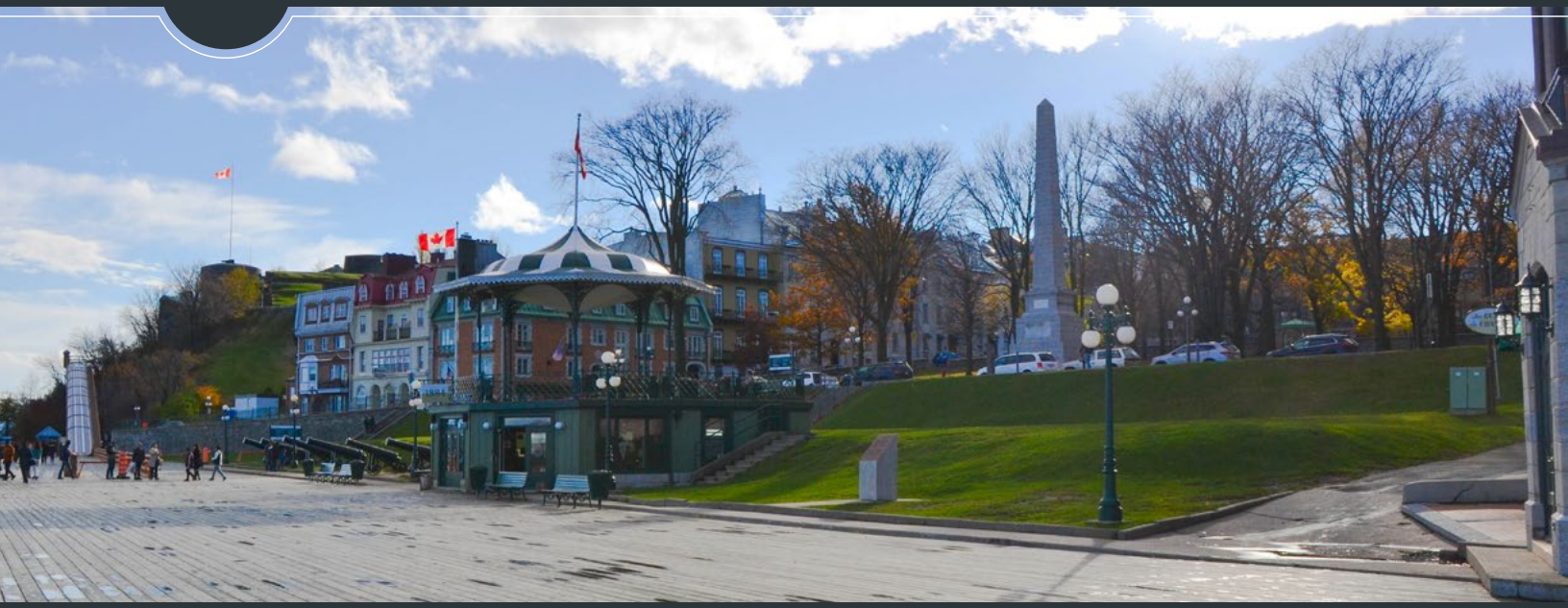
VEQ traditionally has played an important role. It brought people together to understand and define what the community was, and it started creating more events. The community is very vibrant, very present.

Brigitte Wellens

CURRENT VEQ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

VEQ acts as a bridge to community services, activities and resources, and programming offered by both English- and French-language partners, in a host of sectors.

Growing together



Projects & Progress

WELCOME HOME

VEQ's newcomers program, one of the organization's oldest initiatives, has become an increasingly important part of sustaining the English-speaking community in the greater Quebec City region. Over the past several years, newcomers have accounted for a significant share of the community's growth, with roughly twenty to twenty-five percent of the population renewed by newcomers during each five-year census cycle. The changing demographics have also changed the nature of VEQ's work, as newcomers arrive with very different backgrounds, needs, and expectations. Historically, many newcomers were from the United States or elsewhere in Canada, but today approximately seventy to eighty percent are immigrants from around the world. Some are pursuing higher education or professional careers, and primarily need help establishing themselves in Quebec's French-speaking society. Others arrive with little knowledge of the province and need support navigating basic services, healthcare, childcare, housing, employment, and immigration-related systems. For many, English is a second or even a third language, but provides an important point of entry into the community. VEQ dispenses information and referrals, helping newcomers understand where to turn while also providing a welcoming connection to the local English-speaking community. The organization also offers personalized assistance through its Newcomers Coordinator and offers a Welcome Kit designed to help newcomers settle more quickly. Community events and activities further encourage newcomers to build relationships and become part of community life.

Some newcomers need support navigating basic services, healthcare, childcare, housing, employment, and immigration-related systems.

REGIONAL SUPPORT

VEQ's work extends beyond Quebec City itself, reaching English-speaking communities throughout the surrounding region. VEQ operates a satellite office in the town of Shannon, with two staff, offering the same range of services available through its main office, which helps ensure that residents throughout the region can access support and resources closer to home. The regional approach is particularly important because English-speaking residents are often spread across smaller municipalities rather than concentrated in one area. In the area north of Quebec City, VEQ has identified a number of pockets of English speakers, including in Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier, Sainte-Catherine-de-la-Jacques-Cartier, Stoneham-et-Tewkesbury, as well as Shannon. The presence of the military base at Valcartier, which has a population of approximately five thousand, also contributes to the region's diverse and changing English-speaking population. These communities have their own histories and connections to the English-speaking community. Shannon and Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier, for example, have deep Irish roots, a history that is reflected among some of the seniors VEQ works with today, many of whom have family connections to these communities and their Irish heritage. By maintaining a presence in these smaller municipalities, VEQ is able to better understand the particular needs of residents outside the city and develop relationships within the communities themselves.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

VEQ runs an extensive range of community activities in Quebec City and in towns in the wider region, including a choir, the Out & About program for seniors, chair yoga, a knitting group, arts and crafts, a community kitchen, storytimes, and podcasts, to name only a few.

Of the initiatives that help bring together English speakers, Fall Fest is especially popular. The event's origins date back to the early 1980s, when the first Fall Fest was held as a large-scale community celebration. In its early years, the festival was a major public event, with streets closed for huge music, entertainment, and community activities; at its peak, as many as fifteen thousand people attended. Over the years, the character and scale of Fall Fest changed, and, at one point, the board made the difficult decision to discontinue the event. Community members, however, clamoured for its return, and demonstrated their interest and involvement by participating, volunteering, hosting tables, and helping bring Fall Fest back. Today, Fall Fest is an opportunity to strengthen connections among English-speaking residents, community organizations, cultural groups, local businesses, and newcomers. Recent editions have included information booths, markets, children's activities, live performances, and cultural presentations. The event's evolution from a massive street festival to its community-driven revival illustrates an important lesson about community building: programs and gatherings are meaningful not because of their size, but because people take ownership of them and show up for one another.

VEQ

Organizational recognition from the Ville de Québec

Newcomers Program

Recognition from Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser

Recognition from the Ville de Québec

Changes & Challenges

Bringing together a wide range of organizations working to support the English-speaking minority was an early challenge for VEQ. As the community came together, the linguistic inflections of provincial politics created hurdles that unified them in their struggle.

The English-speaking population has seen some dramatic demographic shifts. Around the turn of the twentieth century, English speakers in Quebec accounted for about forty percent of the population of the city. As it did in the rest of the province, Bill 101 radically shaped the face of the community. When former VEQ executive director Richard Walling compiled the first demographic profile of the English-speaking community in 1984 with Jan Warnke, the numbers had declined to just over eleven thousand people, approximately two percent of the city's total population. According to the latest census, it has since grown to approximately seventeen thousand people. Walling notes that the community has also become more diverse, shifting from people born here to a population increasingly shaped by immigration and visible minority groups: "The community has evolved, and the institutional structures and landscape have changed over VEQ's forty years."

The political situation shifted in the latter half of the twentieth century, and English speakers in Quebec City adapted to the Francophone majority. As current executive director Brigitte Wellens notes, "with such a small population, residents were mostly bilingual. Folks were very respectful of the 'fait français'." Walling concurs: "We tell people, you can't really move to Quebec City and expect to live in English. You can have access to a whole variety of services and activities in English, but in the day to day, basically we're in a French environment."

In striking that linguistic and identitary balancing act, VEQ, it was always understood, was "first and foremost, aiming to be part of the solution," Wellens says, citing what is often referred to as the "Quebec City way": "It was and still is the way VEQ approaches advocacy and representation—a collaborative, multisectoral approach that aims to focus on solution-driven change to address difficulties imposed by the politics of the times."

The community has also become more diverse, shifting from people born here to a population increasingly shaped by immigration.

Those solutions sometimes required putting up a fight. For instance, when Dollard-des-Ormeaux School in Shannon was threatened with closure in 2005, the community rallied, and the school today is more dynamic than ever. As Helen Walling, who was executive director at the time, remembers, "the board had agreed to support it, and two volunteers, the Donnelly brothers, got very involved." It was hard work, she says, but they ended up not only saving the school, but expanding the available educational services. More recently, the community's advocacy efforts have led to plans for a consolidated English high school. Aging infrastructure and modern pedagogical requirements more than warrant new facilities that can compete with the French-language polyvalente, says Wellens, "so that people who have a certificate of eligibility will want to send their kids to English school." For older students, advocacy efforts such as those by the Friends of St. Lawrence have maintained the local community's involvement to make the CEGEP more responsive to emerging needs.

As well as ensuring a stable educational foundation, access to health and social services has always been a key concern in the minority-language community, as far back as the early nineteenth century. While today the vast majority of English speakers in Quebec City are linguistically and culturally integrated, VEQ's founding coordinator Jennifer Hobbs-Robert says, in certain circumstances, mother tongue is crucial: "As you age, you need things to be provided to you in your primary language. We see it time and time again." Hobbs-Robert, with decades of experience in the public healthcare system, cites illness, relocation, and end-of-life care as key moments in terms of communication, comprehension, and self-expression.

VEQ has always worked to make the individual effects of policy decisions visible, and has also frequently intervened at the government level. During the 2015 health and social services reform saga, VEQ made a presentation to the National Assembly with Townshippers' Association on behalf of the community to argue against Bill 10. Echoing the fears articulated by organizations across the province, VEQ and Townshippers' contended that the legislation's proposed centralization of decision-making would not only not lead to the desired efficiency in the public system, but that it would imperil culturally specific healthcare institutions, including those that had been serving Quebec City English speakers for nearly two hundred years. As then-Townshippers' president Gerry Cutting said at the time in a joint press release, "given that all the institutions will be regrouped under one governing body, we have to ask how access to services in English will be guaranteed in the future especially if there is no provision for representation from the local English communities." The coordinated effort led to significant gains for the community, such as safeguards for the linguistic minority, including the Jeffery Hale Hospital being designated in the law and allowed to maintain an advisory committee.

The schools and health and social services institutions serving the English-speaking population, and indeed the organizations themselves, have had to adapt as the community has changed. For over two decades already, newcomer services have been an important part of VEQ's programming. However, the demographics of that group, and its needs, have shifted. While new members of the Quebec City community used to arrive mostly from other provinces, today, newcomers who need VEQ's help integrating come from everywhere in the world. "Since those early days of VEQ representing well-established historic Anglophones in Quebec City, the community has evolved enormously," Wellens says. When she started, "despite VEQ being a very solid and effective board and organization, it did not quite represent the increasingly diverse community that called Quebec City home." Their numbers have grown, Wellens explains, as "Quebec City's beauty, safety, and the French language have made it a very attractive and affordable place to live." The military base at Valcartier also increases the number of new English speakers who need services and support, as do the renowned academic and research offerings at Université Laval. Over the years, Wellens says, "VEQ went from serving between four to five hundred newcomers per year, to over eleven hundred in 2025." The organization's current board leadership reflects its programming success: VEQ's current president, Razvan Petre, was himself a newcomer to the city, he says, "when my wife saw a post

on Facebook about VEQ offering newcomer sessions and sharing useful information on language, the weather, services…" Newcomer services are invaluable, Petre, a Romanian immigrant, stresses. While recent legislation means newcomers must speak French within six months, that timeline isn't enough: "After six months, we are still lost in space." Although Petre speaks French as well as English, his experience with VEQ's newcomers program was so positive that he decided to get involved with the organization, eventually joining the board and becoming president. For him, the needs within the community are the same, no matter when people got here: "In the end, we are all immigrants. If we are not Indigenous, we are immigrants from different years—hundreds of years, twenty years. We are in the same boat."

While the vast majority of English speakers are linguistically and culturally integrated, in certain circumstances, mother tongue is crucial.

The experiences of English speakers as a minority population, whether their ancestors arrived centuries ago or whether they came to the region more recently, still need to be identified and represented, including to governments, to partners, and to the general community. Community visibility has long been an issue, says Helen Walling: "People sometimes don't understand that English speakers are a minority."

In the wider region, says project coordinator Dominique Paddack, who is from the United States himself, "it's been important to get our name and our visibility out there with local municipalities, with the local schools, with the military family recource centre."

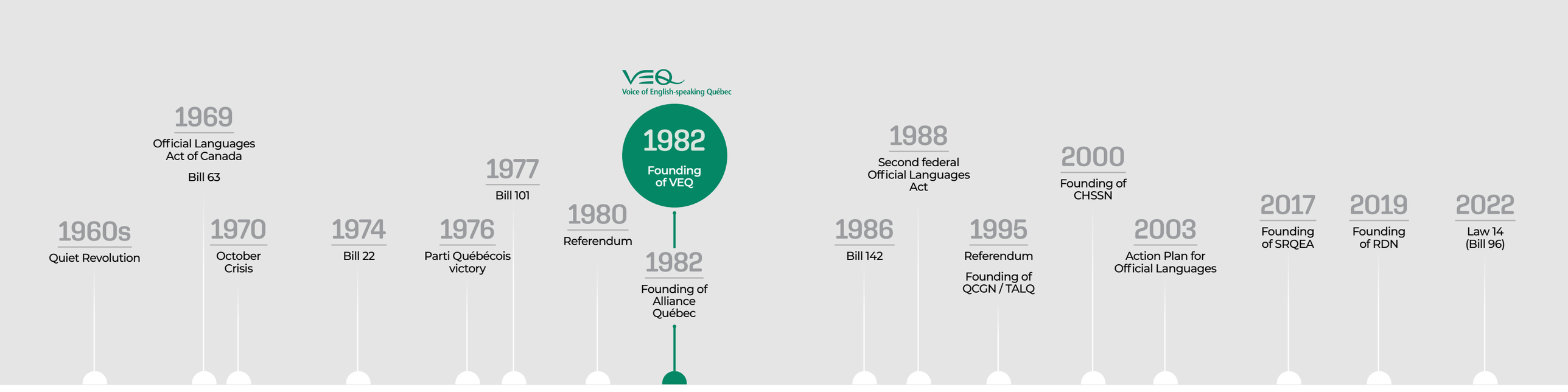
VEQ's long history of advocacy and representation efforts has paid off, notably in 2014, when the executive director at the time, Jean-Sébastien Jolin-Gignac, along with the VEQ staff and board, successfully worked to get official recognition from the Quebec City administration—a gesture that meant that VEQ's contributions were noticed and appreciated, and which recognized the input of English speakers as an important part of what defines Quebec City.

Legacy & Leadership

From the very beginning, Voice of English-speaking Québec has sought a balance between service and advocacy, prioritizing community programming or representation depending on the winds of political change, on demographic evolution, and on community needs. In either case, the organization's direction comes from the community itself, including the board and the staff. As current president Razvan Petre emphasizes, every last volunteer wants to be there, contributing: "No one is forcing us! We are doing this out of pleasure."

Every last volunteer wants to be there, contributing.

The plan for now is to stay the course, serving seniors, families, and newcomers, promoting access to services and care in English, and reaching out to the French-speaking majority. For all the work VEQ does to build those linguistic bridges, and even acknowledging the primacy of French in Quebec City, if current executive director Brigitte Wellens had her druthers, she would wish for more bilingualism, and more recognition of English. "I would protect French, but I would make sure English is on an equal footing, and that people can speak both languages with assurance and confidence, and not be afraid to exist in the community." After all, English speakers were foundational in the region, and have continued to be an important part of the city's success. "We are part of the reason why Quebec City is doing so well," Wellens says, "so stop asking people where they're from! We're from around the block."


1960s
Quiet Revolution
1969
Official Languages Act of Canada
Bill 63
1970
October Crisis
1974
Bill 22
1976
Parti Québécois victory
1977
Bill 101
1980
Referendum
VEQ
Voice of English-speaking Québec
1982
Founding of VEQ
1982
Founding of Alliance Québec
1986
Bill 142
1988
Second federal Official Languages Act
1995
Referendum
Founding of QCGN / TALQ
2000
Founding of CHSSN
2003
Action Plan for Official Languages
2017
Founding of SRQEA
2019
Founding of RDN
2022
Law 14 (Bill 96)