



The Law Foundation of Ontario
Building a better foundation for justice in Ontario

www.lawfoundation.on.ca

Linguistic and Rural Access to Justice Project

CONSULTATION GUIDE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the Consultation Guide for The Law Foundation of Ontario's *Linguistic and Rural Access to Justice Project*. It is intended to help organizations that want to discuss the issues with their clients. The full Guide and more information are available at www.lawfoundation.on.ca.

The Linguistic and Rural Access to Justice Project

This project is looking at ways to improve access to legal information and legal services for people who do not speak English or French and for people living in rural or remote communities of Ontario. The project will recommend how the Law Foundation, working in partnership with other organizations, can help improve access to justice in these areas. A final report with recommendations will be submitted to the Foundation in fall 2008.

The project is focusing on:

- people who do not speak English or French
- people who have a disability related to hearing or vision
- people who live in rural or remote areas of Ontario

The project is looking at two main needs for these groups:

- the need for basic legal **information**
- the need to connect with a lawyer, paralegal or community legal worker for **legal advice**

Linguistic Access

There are many people in Ontario whose first language is neither English nor French. According to the 2006 census, about 1.8 million people speak another language most often at home (97% of these people live in cities), and almost 270 thousand people cannot carry on a conversation in English or French.

If you do not speak English or French, you may need legal education materials translated into your own language and the help of a professional interpreter to communicate with your lawyer. If you are Deaf or blind, you have a right to the accommodations you need to access legal information and services short of undue hardship.

Some solutions that seem promising are: the use of multilingual materials and websites, multilingual telephone hotlines and referral services, language and sign language interpreters, and outreach programs that target specific language groups or persons with disabilities.

Rural or Remote Access

There are many different definitions of “rural.” According to the broadest definition, the 2006 census counted about 4.8 million rural Ontarians. In general, “remote” communities are defined by their distance from urban centres.

If you live in a rural or remote area of the province, you may face challenges in getting legal information and services. These include: few transportation options, poor roads and weather conditions; a lack of Internet access or cell phone service; a lack of social services; and difficulty ensuring your privacy. There is also a shortage of lawyers in these communities. While this project is not seeking ways to increase the number of lawyers or the availability of legal aid, it is looking at ways to connect people to legal resources.

Some solutions that seem promising are: locating legal information and services in places where people already go, special outreach programs, urban-rural partnerships, legal or general telephone information and referral, and videoconferencing.

Discussion Questions

The five questions below have been selected and adapted from the Consultation Guide. For the complete list of questions, please see the full Guide.

1. What would help people who do not speak English or French to obtain legal information or services? What would help people who have a hearing or vision disability?
2. What would help people to have access to interpreters so that they can communicate with their lawyers or legal workers in their own languages (other than English or French), or in sign language?
3. What would help people living in rural or remote communities to obtain legal information or services?
4. What are the best locations in rural or remote communities to provide legal information or services (e.g., libraries, health services, other community services)?
5. Do you have any other ideas to improve access to legal information and services for people who do not speak English or French or who live in rural or remote communities?

How to Provide Feedback

Please provide written feedback by **July 15, 2008** to The Law Foundation of Ontario:

- Electronically to the attention of Barb Stewart: bstewart@lawfoundation.on.ca
- By mail to 20 Queen Street West, Suite 3002, Box 19, Toronto, Ontario, M5H 3R3
- By fax to (416) 598-1526

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