

# Doing Business in Nunavut: Complying With Nunavut's Language Laws

April 08, 2019

Team North

If you do business in Nunavut – or you are planning to – you need to be aware of your legal obligations for language and communication. The Inuit Languages Protection Act (ILPA) and Official Languages Act (OLA) are Nunavut's language laws. They create rules for the public and private sectors, including businesses, in order to preserve and promote the use of the “Inuit language” in the territory (i.e., Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun, or together Inuktut).

Under ILPA, a “private sector body” is defined as any “corporation, partnership, sole-proprietorship, society, association, cooperative, union or other non-government entity operating in Nunavut”.

## What Does Your Business Need To Do To Comply?

In order to comply with ILPA, all businesses operating in Nunavut must ensure that:

- Inuit language text is displayed at least as prominently as any other language for:
  - Public signs;
  - Posters; and
  - Advertising.
- Services available to the public can be provided in the Inuit language for:
  - Reception services; and
  - Customer and client services.

Inuit language text may be displayed in either syllabics or roman orthography.

## Essential and Other Special Services

Some businesses and organizations have additional requirements if they are considered essential, or provide important services:

- Essential services include:

- Emergency, rescue or similarly urgent services or interventions, including intake or dispatch services; and
- Health, medical and pharmaceutical services.
- Household, residential or hospitality services include:
  - Restaurant, hotel, lodging, residential or housing services; and
  - Basic services to a household, including the supply of electricity, fuel, water and telecommunications.

In addition to the general requirements, these businesses and organizations must also ensure that other services are available to the public in the Inuit language, both orally and in writing: invoices, monthly bills, notices, warnings and instructions to the customers or users.

## Exceptions

In some circumstances, businesses and organizations may be exempt from some or all of the language requirements if their purpose is to promote or provide non-Inuit linguistic or cultural services (e.g., a francophone language service), or doing so would result in “undue hardship” to the business or organization. The Nunavut Language Commissioner and the Nunavut Court of Justice determine whether a business may be exempt, or can apply less onerous language requirements.

## Inuit Language Plan

Businesses and organizations can also outline their policies and manage compliance with the language laws through a Language Plan. These plans are not mandatory, but can be a tool to demonstrate a proactive approach to compliance and assist in communicating with and serving unilingual Inuit language clients and customers.

## Effects of Non-Compliance

Complaints against a business or organization can be made to the Nunavut Language Commissioner. The Language Commissioner can investigate any business or organization for non-compliance with the language laws. In cases of non-compliance, the Language Commissioner can require the business or organization to take specific measures or adopt policies and practices. A complainant can also apply to the Nunavut Court of Justice for any remedy that is “appropriate and just in the circumstances”, including monetary awards.

Non-compliance can also negatively affect the reputation or image of a business or organization. Further, responding to complaints can take up valuable administrative time and resources. Pro-active efforts to comply will likely be well received by the community and reflect positively on the business or organization. In short, ensuring you are complying with the language laws is good for business.

Contact the lawyers at BLG if you have any questions about complying with Nunavut’s language laws, or you have any other legal issues relating to your business operations in the territory.

By

Stephen Shaddock

Expertise

Team North®

---

## BLG | Canada's Law Firm

As the largest, truly full-service Canadian law firm, Borden Ladner Gervais LLP (BLG) delivers practical legal advice for domestic and international clients across more practices and industries than any Canadian firm. With over 800 lawyers, intellectual property agents and other professionals, BLG serves the legal needs of businesses and institutions across Canada and beyond – from M&A and capital markets, to disputes, financing, and trademark & patent registration.

[blg.com](http://blg.com)

## BLG Offices

### Calgary

Centennial Place, East Tower  
520 3rd Avenue S.W.  
Calgary, AB, Canada  
T2P 0R3  
  
T 403.232.9500  
F 403.266.1395

### Ottawa

World Exchange Plaza  
100 Queen Street  
Ottawa, ON, Canada  
K1P 1J9  
  
T 613.237.5160  
F 613.230.8842

### Vancouver

1200 Waterfront Centre  
200 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, BC, Canada  
V7X 1T2  
  
T 604.687.5744  
F 604.687.1415

### Montréal

1000 De La Gauchetière Street West  
Suite 900  
Montréal, QC, Canada  
H3B 5H4  
  
T 514.954.2555  
F 514.879.9015

### Toronto

Bay Adelaide Centre, East Tower  
22 Adelaide Street West  
Toronto, ON, Canada  
M5H 4E3  
  
T 416.367.6000  
F 416.367.6749

The information contained herein is of a general nature and is not intended to constitute legal advice, a complete statement of the law, or an opinion on any subject. No one should act upon it or refrain from acting without a thorough examination of the law after the facts of a specific situation are considered. You are urged to consult your legal adviser in cases of specific questions or concerns. BLG does not warrant or guarantee the accuracy, currency or completeness of this publication. No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior written permission of Borden Ladner Gervais LLP. If this publication was sent to you by BLG and you do not wish to receive further publications from BLG, you may ask to remove your contact information from our mailing lists by emailing [unsubscribe@blg.com](mailto:unsubscribe@blg.com) or manage your subscription preferences at [blg.com/MyPreferences](http://blg.com/MyPreferences). If you feel you have received this message in error please contact [communications@blg.com](mailto:communications@blg.com). BLG's privacy policy for publications may be found at [blg.com/en/privacy](http://blg.com/en/privacy).

© 2026 Borden Ladner Gervais LLP. Borden Ladner Gervais LLP is an Ontario Limited Liability Partnership.