

THE RECOGNITION OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES IN QUEBEC'S COMMEMORATION AND HERITAGE PRACTICES

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Commemoration shapes historical memory, reinforces cultural identity, and can ensure that diverse communities see their histories reflected in public life. **In 2022, the Quebec government introduced a new commemoration strategy, *Je me souviens*,⁴** named after the provincial motto. With a \$6.2 million budget over three years, and overseen by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications (MCC), the strategy aims to recognize the people, events, and places that have shaped Quebec's history. It is part of broader effort to institutionalize a particular vision of Quebec identity, including the creation of a national history museum. **How inclusive is this vision, and does it adequately reflect Quebec's diverse communities, including English speakers?**

This brief examines the Quebec commemoration strategy and a related online database of the province's cultural heritage, focusing on their representation of Quebec's English-speaking minority.

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⁴ The phrase means "I remember" in English.

Defining Commemoration

The strategy defines commemoration as a public, collective act of remembrance with a focus on historical figures, events, places, or facts.⁵ It identifies two main forms: **commemorative markers** (physical objects such as monuments and plaques or non-material indicators such as toponymic or heritage designations) and **commemorative events** (one-time or recurring activities like anniversaries, ceremonies, and publications). Commemoration is framed in the document as a way to strengthen collective memory, foster pride, and reinforce a shared sense of belonging to a community.⁶ It recognizes that values evolve and some commemorative practices may become contested.⁷

Objectives of the Strategy

The strategy responds to longstanding calls⁸ from heritage and advocacy groups for a unified government approach to commemoration. It is structured around two main areas of action: encouraging community engagement and improving coordination across ministries. The strategy proposes nine measures, including funding for local projects, establishing an advisory committee, fostering consultation with Indigenous communities, and developing a Quebec national commemoration program.⁹

In fall 2024, the provincial government adopted Bill 64 to create a new museum of Quebec history. Among its responsibilities, the museum is tasked with advising the MCC on commemorating the sites, people, and events that have “marked the history of the Quebec nation.”¹⁰ The museum’s director-general noted its role in supporting the commemoration strategy, particularly through the development of a calendar of commemorative activities—although the specifics of how the museum will fulfill this mandate have yet to be determined.¹¹

⁵ Quebec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, *Je me souviens : Stratégie québécoise de commémoration* (2022), 2, https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/culture-communications/publications-adm/strategie/Strategie_Commémoration.pdf.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸ See Quebec, Commission des biens culturels du Québec, *Pour une politique de commémoration au Québec : bilan et pistes de discussion* (1998); Groupe-conseil sur la Politique du patrimoine culturel du Québec, “Notre patrimoine, un présent du passé.” Proposition présentée à Madame Agnès Maltais, ministre de la Culture et des Communications, par le Groupe-conseil sous la présidence de Monsieur Roland Arpin (2000); Charles-Philippe Courtois, *Les commémorations historiques nationales au Québec. Recommandations pour une politique d’envergure* (Institut de recherche sur le Québec, 2011); Mouvement national des Québécoises et Québécois, *Pour une politique de commémorations historiques : bilan et recommandations faisant suite aux États généraux sur les commémorations historiques* (2016).

⁹ Quebec, *Stratégie*, 5-8.

¹⁰ *National Museums Act*, CQLR c. M-44, s. 27, <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/m-44>.

¹¹ Information shared during the online roundtable discussion “Les enjeux historiques et ethnologiques de la commémoration au musée,” March 4, 2025, Institut du patrimoine culturel, Université Laval, <https://celat.ca/activites/2025/03/04/table-ronde-les-enjeux-historiques-et-ethnologiques-de-la-commemoration-au-musee/>.

Defining “Community”

The strategy and its accompanying framework¹² position themselves as inclusive, aiming to reflect “the diverse groups that make up Quebec society and that have shaped its history.”¹³ Both promote **a pluralistic vision of Quebec identity**, recognizing contributions from Indigenous, immigrant, and other communities while reaffirming the province’s distinct Francophone character.¹⁴ Notably, the framework encourages commemoration efforts addressing historical injustices, tensions, and conflicts¹⁵ and recommends early involvement of community representatives in planning projects related to their histories.¹⁶

Both documents emphasize collaboration with First Nations and Inuit communities, recognized as Quebec’s original inhabitants with distinct cultural and political significance. To integrate their perspectives, the strategy proposes the creation of a permanent consultation body to work directly with Indigenous peoples on commemorative initiatives.¹⁷

However, in both documents, **the approach to diversity beyond Indigenous communities is less clearly defined**. While the strategy and framework express a commitment to including voices from “groups historically underrepresented in commemorative practices,”¹⁸ they do not specify which groups.

This vagueness extends to the strategy’s implementation structure. Our inquiries revealed that the advisory committee includes representatives of the MCC, the Mouvement national des Québécoises et Québécois, the Fédération québécoise des municipalités, the Fédération Histoire Québec, and the Union des municipalités du Québec.¹⁹ However, to our knowledge, the committee lacks stakeholders from minority communities, including English-speaking ones. If this is the case, such lack of representation suggests a disconnect between the strategy’s inclusive rhetoric and the composition of its consultative body.

¹² Quebec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, *Je me souviens : Cadre de référence pour la commémoration gouvernementale* (2022), <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/culture-communications/publications-adm/strategie/Cadre-Reference-Commemoration-Gouv.pdf>. This document, a *Reference Framework for Governmental Commemoration*, provides guidelines to support Quebec ministries and public agencies in planning and carrying out commemorative initiatives in a consistent manner.

¹³ Quebec, *Stratégie*, 8, our translation of “des différents groupes qui forment la société québécoise et qui ont marqué son histoire.”

¹⁴ Quebec, *Cadre de référence*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷ Quebec, *Stratégie*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, our translation of “groupes traditionnellement sous-représentés d’un point de vue commémoratif.”

¹⁹ The list of the Committee’s member organizations was obtained through an information request submitted to the MCC.

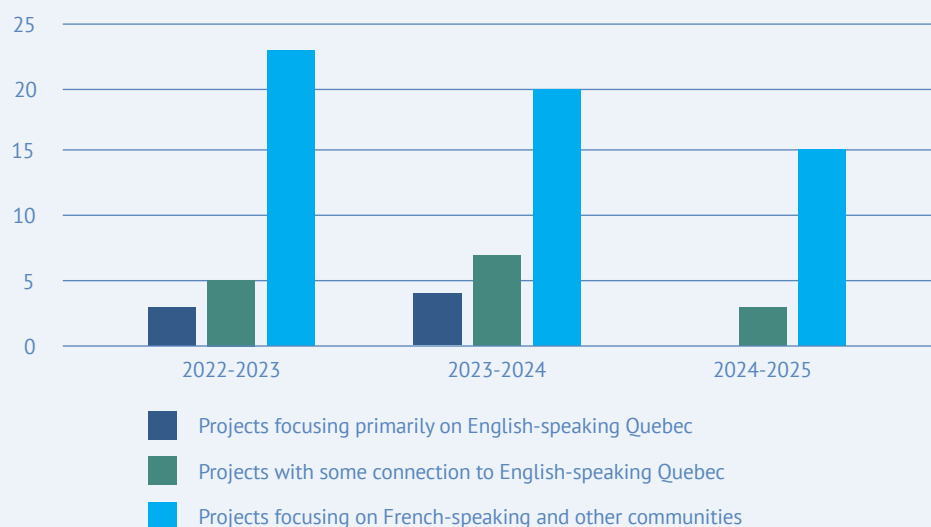
Representation of English-Speaking Quebec

To assess how government-led commemoration reflects English-speaking Quebecers, we looked at two sources: funded projects through the strategy's grant program and the Répertoire du patrimoine culturel du Québec, an online database of the province's cultural heritage.²⁰

Funded Projects²¹

Between 2022 and 2025, the MCC issued three calls for commemorative projects, distributing \$3.4 million in total.²² Of the 80 projects funded, 7 (8.75%) focused *specifically* on the history and heritage of English-speaking Quebec, and 15 (18.25%) included *some aspects* related to it (see Figure 1). Together, these account for 27.5% of all awarded projects (see Figure 2), indicating a strong overall inclusion of English-speaking Quebec history and heritage in the program. However, no projects directly related to English-speaking Quebec were funded in the latest round.

Figure 1.
Distribution of projects funded through the Quebec commemorative strategy

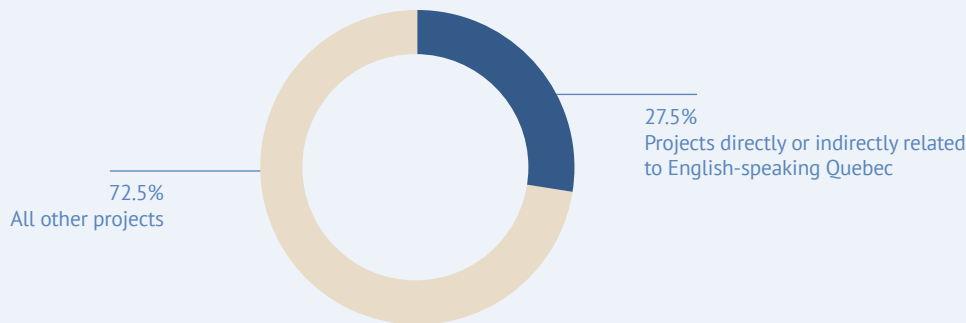


²⁰ Quebec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, Répertoire du patrimoine culturel du Québec, <https://www.patrimoine-culturel.gouv.qc.ca/rpcq/accueil.do?methode=afficher>.

²¹ The observations presented here regarding the funding program are limited as a result of unknown information. To draw stronger conclusions, further research could take into account the total number of applications, how many of them were related to the history and heritage of English-speaking Quebec, and the extent to which Anglophone heritage organizations were aware of and applied to the program.

²² For the full list of projects, see Quebec, Cabinet de la ministre de la Culture et des Communications, "Dévoilement de la première Stratégie québécoise de commémoration," *Cision*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.newswire.ca/fr/news-releases/devoilement-de-la-premiere-strategie-quebecoise-de-commemoration-867565486.html>; Quebec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, "Appel de projets pour le soutien aux initiatives de commémoration. Projets retenus pour 2023-2024," accessed April 16, 2025, <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/culture-communications/Aides-financieres/Commémoration/LI-projets-retenus-2023-2024.pdf>; and Quebec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, "Appel de projets pour le soutien aux initiatives de commémoration. Projets retenus pour 2024-2025," accessed April 16, 2025, <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/culture-communications/Aides-financieres/Commémoration/Liste-projets-retenus-2025.pdf>.

Figure 2.
Percentage of projects with a direct or indirect link to the history of English-speaking Quebec awarded funding through the Quebec commemorative strategy, 2022-2025



Sources for both figures:
Quebec, *Dévoilement de la première Stratégie québécoise de commémoration*; Quebec, *Projets retenus pour 2023–2024*; Quebec, *Projets retenus pour 2024–2025*.

An analysis of the funded projects shows that those centring primarily on the history of English-speaking Quebec tend to highlight members of the English-speaking upper classes. Another notable observation is that the institutions applying to commemorate individuals or events related to English-speaking Quebec are not exclusively ones associated with Anglophone communities; some are heritage and community organizations operating primarily in French. Here are a few examples of the funded initiatives:

- Les Amis des Jardins de Métis in Grand-Métis, an organization that operates bilingually (English and French), received \$50,000 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Elsie Reford, a pioneering horticulturist and philanthropist who transformed her estate into the renowned Reford Gardens (Jardins de Métis). Elsie Reford's first language was English, and she also spoke French and German.
- The Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, which operates bilingually in Quebec City, received \$50,000 to celebrate its 200th anniversary. Founded in 1824, it is a key institution in preserving Quebec's Anglophone heritage.
- The Musée de société des Deux-Rives (MUSO), which offers workshops in both English and French, received \$40,000 to mark the 150th anniversary of the Montreal Cotton Company (MoCo). MoCo played a pivotal role in the industrial and social history of the Montérégie region. Company management was Anglophone, and workers were both English- and French-speaking.²³
- Festifolies en Armandie, the website of which is in French only, received \$10,400 to commemorate the Black community of Philipsburg-Saint-Armand in the Eastern Townships. Research suggests that at least 15 English-speaking Black individuals lived there, possibly as free people, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.²⁴

²³ MUSO – Musée de société des Deux-Rives, “Anglophone World,” accessed April 22, 2025, https://lemuso.com/mvc/la_montreal_cotton_un_monde_anglophone-the_montreal_cotton_an_anglophone_world-eng.html.

²⁴ Sabrina Jonas, “New Exhibit in Saint-Armand, Que., Challenges History of Local Black Community,” CBC News, November 11, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/saint-amand-panels-quebec-black-history-1.7021973>.

Overall, the awarded projects²⁵ – whether focused on Francophone, Anglophone, or Indigenous populations – are diverse, spotlighting local histories from smaller communities across the province.²⁶ This funding approach promotes a more complex version of Quebec’s history rather than a singular historical narrative focused on Francophone majority perspectives.

Répertoire du patrimoine culturel du Québec

The Répertoire, which the MCC manages, is a French-language database that documents Quebec’s heritage. It includes information on historical events, individuals, places, and commemorative markers.²⁷ As of March 2025, it contained 141,272 entries.

It is difficult to quantify how many records in the Répertoire relate to English-speaking Quebec. The search tools provide no obvious way to identify such records. For instance, its advanced search page does not have relevant filters such as language spoken, linguistic group affiliation, or place of birth—which, given Quebec’s history of mass immigration, would be useful for locating English speakers. In comparison, a similar Canada-wide tool, the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, allows for sorting by region of birth.²⁸

There are also cataloguing inconsistencies. A thematic filter for “heritage of cultural communities” (*patrimoine des communautés culturelles*) yields just one result: Montreal’s Chinatown. Yet keyword searches for terms like “synagogue” or “Orthodox” return many more.

In short, it would be useful if the search tools allowed for more effective and consistent searching by themes related to language and culture.

²⁵ The MCC reviews funding proposals and may prioritize what it considers underrepresented themes or regions to promote equity, suggesting that inclusion and representation play a role in the selection process. See Quebec, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, “Conditions d’octroi de l’aide financière : Appel de projets pour le soutien aux initiatives de commémoration – Volet 1,” accessed April 16, 2025: 6, <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/culture-communications/Aides-financieres/Commémoration/Conditions-octroi-commémoration-volet-1.pdf>.

²⁶ See Catherine Lalonde, “Commémorations sur commande,” *Le Devoir*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.ledevoir.com/culture/808840/memoire-commemorations-commande>.

²⁷ The framework makes a distinction between “commemoration” and “heritage,” although the two are closely linked, since commemorative markers often become part of cultural heritage. According to the framework, commemoration serves as a reminder of the past, while heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible elements inherited from the past, valued by society, and preserved for future generations. Quebec, *Cadre de référence*, 8.

²⁸ University of Toronto and Université Laval, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography / Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*, accessed April 22, 2025, <https://www.biographi.ca/en/search.php>.

Community participation is a valuable asset in building an inclusive Repertoire. While official contributors, such as the MCC and municipalities, are often credited, individual or community authors remain unidentified. Nevertheless, communities have played a role in shaping the Repertoire, by providing textual descriptions. In 2010, staff at the Morrin Centre added biographies of notable Anglophone figures from Quebec City to the database.²⁹ Similarly, historical societies in towns with historically significant English-speaking populations, such as Sutton, Bury, and Aylmer, also provided input.³⁰ The MCC's openness to this involvement is encouraging and should be further promoted to ensure that communities can tell their own stories.

Recognizing Grassroots Heritage Preservation Efforts of English-Speaking Quebec

Quebec's English-speaking communities are dedicated to preserving their heritage.³¹ This is reflected in a network of grassroots organizations working to safeguard local historical and cultural legacies³²—often with limited institutional support. Many of these groups are connected through the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN), which amplifies their efforts.³³ Together, they work to preserve the “historical capital”³⁴ of English-speaking Quebec and to protect community vitality.³⁵ Government commemoration policies must be informed by and support this work if they are to achieve their stated goal: inclusive historical narratives.

²⁹ For more about the project and to read the entries, see Morrin Centre, “Prisoners, Students and Thinkers,” accessed April 16, 2025, <https://www.morrin.org/en/lhsq-publications/prisoners-students-and-thinkers/>.

³⁰ Fédération Histoire Québec, “Inventaire du Patrimoine commémoratif,” accessed April 16, 2025, https://histoirequebec.qc.ca/inventaire-du-patrimoine-commemoratif-presentation-du-projet/?srltid=AfmBOopdn7B3IU7vjYshlU0kY22lmshl7N4t6plyajmvXH_WNF4OVxgN.

³¹ Lorraine O'Donnell and Patrick Donovan, “Resources on English-Speaking Quebec: A Field Map,” *Minorités Linguistiques et Société / Linguistic Minorities and Society*, no. 20 (2023): 9-12, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/minling/2023-n20-minling07553/1110172ar.pdf>.

³² For a good overview of some of these organizations and their work, see Matthew Farfan and Rod MacLeod, eds., *Meet the Network: Profiles of Heritage Groups Across Quebec* (Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, 2022).

³³ To learn more about QAHN, visit their website at: <https://qahn.org/>.

³⁴ Lorraine O'Donnell, “La Diversité, la pauvreté et le capital historique et social des communautés d'expression anglaise du Québec,” in *Les collectivités locales au cœur de l'intégration des immigrants*, ed. Lucille Guilbert, Estelle Bernier, and Michèle Vatz Laaroussi (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2013), 164, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9782763717715-013>.

³⁵ See Alain Roy, “From Vitality to Vitality of Memory: Conceptual Foundations of the Role of Memory and Heritage in the Vitality of Official Language Minority Communities,” concept paper, January 2021, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2021/bac-lac/SB4-64-2021-eng.pdf.

Conclusion

If commemoration is the “*mise en récit d’une société*”³⁶—the story a society tells about itself—then it matters what heritage and history the Quebec government chooses to highlight through its institutions, initiatives, and practices, and how inclusive it is of the province’s linguistic and cultural diversity.³⁷ The *Je me souviens* strategy signals a commitment to inclusivity: recognizing evolving historical narratives, working with Indigenous communities, and acknowledging the contributions of diverse groups to Quebec’s history.

Yet Quebec’s commitment appears insufficient. The strategy avoids naming which groups are considered underrepresented in commemorative efforts, and its advisory committee appears to lack direct representation from certain communities, such as the English-speaking minority. **While an analysis of funded projects suggests that Anglophones are not being left out, commemorative efforts are uneven, tending to spotlight individuals from higher social classes rather than grassroots community experiences.**³⁸

Moving forward, the government could improve representation by:

- **ensuring minority group participation on advisory bodies;**
- **actively promoting funding programs to underrepresented groups;**
- **expanding community contributions to databases like the Répertoire, with improved terminology and search options.**

Doing so would lead to a more nuanced, inclusive understanding of Quebec’s past—one that truly reflects its complex, plural heritage.

³⁶ Jean Rey-Regazzi, “Commémoration et patrimoine commémoratif - se souvenir, ensemble,” *Histoire Québec* 29, no. 4 (2024): 4, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/hq/2024-v29-n4-hq09378/105110ac/>.

³⁷ A recent QUESCEN policy brief on the Musée national de l’histoire du Québec echoes similar concerns and calls for a nuanced and realistic representation of English-speaking communities within the museum’s mission, governance, and exhibits, given their historical and demographic weight. See Patrick Donovan and Lorraine O’Donnell, *Mémoire sur le projet de loi sur l’intégration nationale*. Présenté à la Commission des relations avec les citoyens concernant le projet de loi 84, Loi sur l’intégration nationale (QUESCEN, 2025), https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/QUESCEN_Memoire_sur_le_projet_de_loi84_sur_integrationnationale_FINAL.pdf.

³⁸ For an alternative approach that seeks to develop a sociopolitical history of ordinary English-speaking Quebecers, see Lorraine O’Donnell, *People’s History of English-Speaking Quebec: A Community-Based History Project for the Vitality of an Official Language Minority*, QUESCEN Working Paper no. 6, June 2022, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Working_Paper_6_ODonnell.pdf.

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