



Guidance for Departments: Multilingual Certification Program

Montgomery County, Maryland is a culturally diverse community, and Montgomery County Government (MCG) provides services to more than 1 million residents. With such a diverse population, MCG must ensure that its services are accessible and available to everyone, including individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). It is a priority of the County to build a linguistically accessible and culturally competent government to ensure meaningful access to government services for all communities throughout the County.

LEP individuals are customers who are prevented from meaningful access to services because of their inability to read, write or understand the English language. For additional information about LEP, read MCG's Limited English Proficiency Policy Statement at montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resources/files/lep_policy_statement.pdf.

About the Multilingual Certification Program

MCG's Multilingual Certification Program was developed to expand its pool of available language translation resources by certifying employees who can communicate in specific languages other than English to provide services to our LEP customers. Multilingual certification ensures the quality and timeliness of language services provided to both LEP residents and visitors.

Employees who become language-certified receive a multilingual pay differential based on their certification level and are registered in the [Language Certified Employees Database](#). Language-certified employees may be contacted by other departments to provide language assistance and are expected to make reasonable efforts to provide requested services with approval from their supervisor. Employees at the Advanced level certification may be called upon by the Office of Human Resources to serve as language Raters for language certification exams.

Determining a Need for Multilingual Employees to Serve LEP Customers

Our goal is to consistently provide high-quality services to all residents in our county and remove language barriers to public services for people with limited English proficiency (LEP). MCG departments and offices should carefully assess their workforce to determine whether or not language-certified employee services are meeting the needs of our LEP customers.

In addition, as new vacancies occur where the position entails frequent contact with LEP customers, you should assess whether or not there is a need for the position to have a language certification. Identifying these positions in advance and reassessing your current workforce is essential. It is important to understand the staff current usage of the language skill, individuals being served, and gaps in service delivery so that we can ensure that the County is providing timely and accessible services to LEP customers and that we are maximizing our service delivery potential. Consider the following factors when determining a need for multilingual employees/positions to serve LEP customers:

Language Demographics

Do you know your customer base? Consider the LEP demographics of your service area and track customers by their primary languages.

Frequency of Contact with LEP Customers

How often are employees in direct contact with LEP customers in your department? Consider initial LEP customer contact, including requests for information and walk-ins. Infrequent or intermittent contact with LEP customers can be referred to other language access resources at montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resource.html.

Utilization of Multilingual Employees

What will be the role of the multilingual employee? Consider if the position requires providing services directly to customers or if the employee would function as a third-party interpreter and/or translator for other staff members who are assisting a customer.

Required Skills

How will the multilingual employee use the language skills? Consider if the multilingual employee will use written language skills, oral language skills, or both.

Availability of Existing Language-Certified Employees

Does your department currently have enough language-certified employees to meet the existing need? Consider whether you are currently leveraging their language skills efficiently and effectively in order to serve your customers.

Associated Costs for Language-Certified Employees

Can your department fund language-certified employees? Consider the impact to your department's budget. Departments and offices are responsible for funding their employees' multilingual pay differential for all hours worked, including any overtime hours worked.

Review and Continuation of Operational Need

A department director should review the approval of a multilingual pay differential if:

- A certified multilingual employee is promoted, demoted, or transferred to a different position; or
- The performance evaluation of a certified multilingual employee indicates that the employee did not use, or seldom used, the multilingual skills during the rating period.

A department director should periodically review the multilingual pay differentials approved for employees within a department, division, or work unit after:

- A program change or reorganization occurred that affected the County's need for multilingual skills;
- A change in client characteristics that indicates that the identified language skill may no longer be needed; or
- The performance evaluations of employees who are certified in a particular language indicate that the employees **did not use, or seldom used**, the multilingual skills during the rating period.

Performance Evaluation of Employees Receiving Multilingual Pay

The supervisor of an employee who receives multilingual pay must:

- Include the use of multilingual skills as a performance expectation should be included in the employee's performance plan; and
- Rate the employee's performance in using the multilingual skills.

Removing a Multilingual Pay Differential

Department directors must ensure that the County stops paying the multilingual differential to a language-certified employee who:

- Transfers to, or assumes, a position for which the multilingual skills are not approved;
- Was certified to provide multilingual services that are no longer needed;
- Is no longer needed by a department to provide a specific language skill;
- Is no longer able to provide the multilingual services;
- No longer wishes to provide the multilingual services;
- Refuses or fails to provide requested multilingual services in a satisfactory manner; or
- Fails to renew the multilingual certification as required.

The Department director must notify the language-certified employee, OHR and OMB of a decision to stop paying a multilingual pay differential and the reasons for stopping the differential. The multilingual differential can only be removed by a memo from the employee's department director, which can be sent via the department's HR Liaison or Senior Executive Administrative Assistant (SEAA).

To discontinue a multilingual pay differential, follow the format and include the content of the [Sample Memo to Discontinue Multilingual Pay Differentials](#) and then place it in your department's memo document. Then, send it to the appropriate parties listed in the memo, including all parties that are CCed at the end of the memo.

Other important points to note about ending the multilingual pay differential:

- If multilingual skills are a requirement for a designated position and the incumbent employee no longer wishes to provide the multilingual skills, the department director must determine if the employee's request can be accommodated by means such as transferring the employee or relying on the multilingual skills of other employees. If the director determines that the request cannot be accommodated, the department director may deny the employee's request.
- If an employee refuses or fails to provide requested multilingual services in a satisfactory manner, this should be reflected in the employee's performance evaluation and may be grounds for disciplinary action including removing the employee from the designated position.

Important Points Regarding the Language Certified Employees Database**A department director must advise the OHR Director promptly when:**

- A certified employee leaves County employment or the designated position;
- A certified employee will be unavailable for interpreter assignments for an extended period of time for any reason.

An employee whose name is on the Language Certified Employees Database must:

- Make a reasonable effort to provide interpreter services at the request of other departments; and
- Obtain the approval of the employee's supervisor before accepting assignments from other departments.

A department manager who requests the services of an employee on the list from another department must:

- Give reasonable notice to the certified employee of the need for interpreter services;
- Not subject the employee to hazardous conditions or place the employee in potentially dangerous situations; and
- If required, provide the employee with transportation to the location where the interpreter services are needed or reimburse the employee for travel and other appropriate expenses.

If a department uses an employee on the Language Certified Employees Database from another department to provide interpreter services for four or more hours in a pay period, the department director of the using department must reimburse the employing department at the employee's hourly salary rate for the hours the employee spent providing interpreter services for the using department.

Additional County Interpretation and Translation Resources

In addition to the Multilingual Certification Program, MCG provides interpretation and translation services to remove barriers LEP residents and visitors may encounter when seeking services. Detailed information on language access resources can be found on the County's LEP webpage at montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resource.html.

Montgomery County Language Bank: The Language Bank is managed by the Office of Community Partnerships. Volunteers serve as interpreters and translators, assisting department staff as they serve customers. Department staff may contact Language Bank volunteers directly to request interpretation or translation services. For more information, visit montgomerycountymd.gov/partnerships/language.html.

Telephone Interpretation Services (866-998-0352): Departments can obtain real-time telephone interpretation services 24 hours a day, in over 100 languages, using Voiance, a language interpreting vendor.

Onsite Interpreter Services and Translation Services (301-424-7737, ext. 113): Departments can obtain onsite, face-to-face interpreter services and document translation services provided by Schreiber Translations and Translations International. Each department must establish an account through a purchase order.

For more information on County language interpretation and translation resources listed in this section, please visit the Limited English Proficiency Contracted Language Resources webpage at montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/res_contractors.html.

Questions and Resources

For questions, please email ohr.languagetesting@montgomerycountymd.gov. For resources, please visit the Multilingual Certification Program webpage at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/multilingual or montgomerycountymd.gov/HR (Workforce > Multilingual Program). There you will find details about these topics:

- Who can apply
- How individuals apply and become certified
- Multilingual certification levels
- Multilingual pay differentials
- System User Guide and link
- Rater instructions

This document provides general information about Montgomery County Government's Multilingual Certification Program. The document also provides information about additional translation and interpretation services available to departments. If there is an inconsistency between the content of this document and any other documents, the applicable document will prevail (e.g., the law, regulation, procedure, or collective bargaining agreement). Please consult appropriate references, such as the Montgomery County Personnel Regulations and collective bargaining agreements for additional information.

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