



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 is one of several channels to provide multilingual services to County residents. Administered by the Office of Human Resources (OHR), this program certifies employees who can communicate in specific languages other than English to provide services to our LEP customers. Multilingual certification ensures the quality of language services provided to LEP individuals.

Employees who become multilingual certified receive a multilingual pay differential based on their certification level and are registered in the [Language Certified Employees Database](#). Multilingual 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.

Determining Need for Multilingual Certified Employees

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 services to determine where language access to these services requires support from multilingual certified employees. 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. Montgomery County currently allows for certification in American Sign Language, Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

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? Only employees who provide direct services to customers should become certified.

Required Skills

How will the multilingual employee use the language skills? Consider whether the multilingual employee will only interact with customers (calls, walk-ins, emails, etc.) or will also be translating official government documents into the target language (memos, flyers, forms, etc.) to assist the customer in gaining access to services.

Availability of Existing Language-Certified Employees

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

Associated Costs for Language-Certified Employees

Can your department fund multilingual certified employees? Consider the impact on 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.

Determining Eligibility for Multilingual Certification

Employees fluent in English and an approved target language can apply if they also meet the following criteria:

- **Basic:**
 - Works in a front-facing position that interacts with County residents on a daily basis; and
 - Provides multilingual interpretation at least weekly to County residents who have Limited English Proficiency and who would otherwise be prevented from meaningful access to County services.
- **Advanced:**
 - Provides written translation of official government documents on at least a weekly basis into the target language; and
 - The translation work cannot be serviced by the Office of Community Partnership's Translations Unit.
- **Expert:**
 - Is a member of the FOP bargaining unit and has mastery of the target language for use in interrogations, investigations, and legal proceedings.

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 multilingual skills

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.

Removing a Multilingual Pay Differential

Department directors must ensure that the County stops paying the multilingual differential to a multilingual 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 multilingual services;
- No longer wishes to provide 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 removing the certification and differential. The multilingual differential can only be removed by a memo from the employee's department director.

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 removing the multilingual certification and pay differential:

- If multilingual skills are a requirement for a designated position and the incumbent employee no longer wishes to provide multilingual services, 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 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 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.

Other County Resources for LEP Residents

In addition to the Multilingual Certification Program, MCG provides access to services to LEP residents with telephone and onsite interpretation services, as well as contracted translation services. More details can be found on the County's LEP webpage at montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resource.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).

This document provides general information about Montgomery County Government's Multilingual Certification Program. 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.