Multilingual Certification Program

Overview and Guidance for Departments

Montgomery County, Maryland is a culturally diverse community and the government provides services to more than 1 million residents. With such a diverse population, the government must ensure that its services are accessible and available to everyone, including individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP).

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 Montgomery County's Limited English Proficiency Policy Statement at **montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resources/files/lep_policy_statement.pdf**.

About the Multilingual Certification Program

Montgomery County'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. For additional County LEP Resources, visit **montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resource.html**.

Multilingual certification ensures the quality and timeliness of language services provided to both LEP residents and visitors. Employees who obtain their multilingual certification receive a multilingual pay differential based on their certification level.

Levels of Multilingual Certification

- *Basic* – requires oral communication skills in a second language.
- *Advanced* – requires oral and written communication skills in a second language.
- *Expert* (only for members of the Fraternal Order of Police) – requires mastery of both basic and advanced skills necessary for comprehensive use in interrogations, investigations and legal proceedings.

Multilingual certified employees are registered in the Language Certified Employee Database available at **montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/res_internal.html**. Certified employees may be contacted by other departments to provide language assistance and are expected to make reasonable effort 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.

Approved Languages

Employees can be certified in any of the approved languages:

1. American Sign Language
2. Amharic
3. Chinese
4. French
5. Korean
6. Spanish
7. Vietnamese

NOTE: Exceptions to the approved languages may occur based on collective bargaining agreements.

Certification Process

Once a department has determined a need for multilingual employees to serve LEP group, interested and/or selected employees must obtain approval from their supervisor or manager and their department or office director to take the exam(s) for multilingual certification. Departments and offices are responsible for funding their employees' multilingual pay differential.

The Multilingual Program uses certified County employees to administer Basic and Advanced level exams. Certified employees are key to the success of the program's operation. The program coordinator works with supervisors to obtain approval for certified employees to conduct exams during business hours. Montgomery County uses a vendor to administer the Expert level exam (available only to members of the Fraternal Order of Police) and certain languages outside of the seven approved languages. The cost of the using the vendor is paid for by the department requesting the exam.

For more information on the certification process, visit **montgomerycountymd.gov/HR** (*Workforce* > *Multilingual Certification*).

Determining a Need for Multilingual Employees to Serve LEP Customers

As a best practice, Montgomery County Government departments and offices should assess their positions and identify those with frequent contact with LEP customers. Identifying these positions in advance helps departments provide timely service to LEP customers. Consider the following factors when determining a need for multilingual employees to serve LEP customers.

Language Demographics
Do you know your customer base? Consider the limited English proficient (LEP) demographics of your service delivery area and identify/track customers by primary language.

Contact with Limited English Proficient (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 found on the County's Limited English Proficiency webpage, **montgomerycountymd.gov/lep/resource.html**.

Utilization of Multilingual Employees
What will be the role of the multilingual employee? Consider their position and if it requires providing services directly to customers or if they would function as a third-party interpreter and/or translator for other staff members.

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

Availability of Certified Multilingual Employees
Does your department currently have enough multilingual certified employees to meet the existing need? Consider the current complement of multilingual certified employees and if they can be leveraged in a more effective and efficient way to serve your customers.

Associated Costs for Certified Multilingual Employees
Can your department fund multilingual certified employees? Consider the impact to your department's budget for multilingual pay differential. The multilingual pay differential is paid for all hours worked.

Multilingual Pay
Certified employees receive a differential for all hours worked.

MCGEO Employees and Non-Represented Employees
- Basic: $1.00 per hour
- Advanced: $1.50 per hour

International Association of Fire Fighters Employees
- Basic: $1.00 per hour

Fraternal Order of Police Employees
- Basic: $1.00 per hour
- Advanced: $2.00 per hour
- Expert: $3.00 per hour

Additional County Interpretation and Translation Resources

In addition to the Multilingual Certification Program, Montgomery County 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 Limited English Proficiency webpage, **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. Each department uses a department-specific vendor account billing code and access code. Contact your department liaison for the existing account number and PIN, or contact 800-481-3289 to obtain a new account.

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

If you have questions regarding the Multilingual Certification Program, contact **ohr.languagetesting@montgomerycountymd.gov**.

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.