

A User's Guide: Multilingual Compensation in Montgomery County

Important Information

This booklet provides general information for employees, supervisors, and managers about special compensation for required use of another language in addition to English.

The information in this booklet is not intended to change or otherwise modify any law, regulation, procedure, or collective bargaining agreement that may govern the subject matter covered in this booklet. If there is an inconsistency between the content of this booklet and one of the above documents, the law, regulation, procedure, or collective bargaining agreement will prevail. Please also bear in mind that laws, regulations, procedures, and collective bargaining agreements may be amended at any time.

Please consult appropriate references, such as the *Personnel Regulations* and collective bargaining agreements for additional information.

General Information

Q. What is multilingual compensation?

A. Multilingual compensation is special pay for County employees who provide services to customers or clients in a second language (other than English) as part of their employment. The County established this form of compensation to improve service delivery to community members with limited English-language ability.

Q. If I speak or write a second language, will I receive additional pay?

A. Multilingual pay is related to the requirements of a *position* or to a *need in your department for an employee who can communicate in a specific language*, regardless of the position that the employee fills. For you to be eligible for multilingual pay:

- your position must be identified by your department as one that requires the use of another language to provide services; or
- your department must have a need for an employee (in any position) who can communicate in a specific second language and you have those skills.

If you or your position is designated as requiring the ability to communicate orally and/or in writing in a second language, you will have the opportunity to be tested to demonstrate your second language proficiency. If you pass the test and are *certified* by the Office of Human Resources (OHR), you will then be eligible to receive multilingual pay.

Q. Does it matter what second language I speak?

A. In order to be eligible for language compensation, you must speak a language that is spoken by 3 percent or more of the population within Montgomery County. Some of the second languages used by County employees are Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Chinese, Sign, and Korean. The department requesting the certification of an employee must determine that there is a business necessity for that language.

Q. What is the amount of the multilingual pay?

A. The specific hourly differentials depend on the required level of proficiency in the second language (basic or advanced) and are negotiated through the collective bargaining process. Consult your bargaining unit's Agreement with the County for more information. Employees not represented by a union are paid the same hourly rate for multilingual compensation as employees represented by the Municipal and County Government Employee's Organization, UFCW/Local 1994.

Note that multilingual pay is provided only for hours actually worked.

Department Identification of Second Language Need

Q. What must a department do to identify the language requirements of a position or the general need in the department for specific second language skills?

- A.** The department must:
- determine the languages other than English that are needed to serve customers effectively, depending on the population served;
 - identify the specific positions that must be filled by employees who can communicate either orally, and/or in writing, in the identified language or languages; and,
 - decide, for each position, at which proficiency level the employee will be required to use the additional language skills – *basic* or *advanced*.

Basic proficiency requires *oral* communication skills in a second language to perform the work assignments of the positions. *Advanced* proficiency requires *oral and written* communication skills in a second language as part of the work assignments.

Application for Certification

Q. If my department has designated my position as needing proficiency in a

second language, how do I begin the second-language certification process?

A. Your department director must complete a language certification form requesting the certification examination for you. The form will identify the second language needed by the department, the level of proficiency needed, and the name of the employee whose language skills need to be certified. The form should be submitted to OHR, EOB, 7th floor.

Q. May I submit a request to be tested for multiple languages?

A. Yes, if your department identifies the language need, you can be tested for as many languages as you know. However, you will only receive multilingual pay for providing County services in *one* language in addition to English.

Employees certified in multiple languages may be listed in the certified language list more than once.

Q. Where can I find a language certification form?

A. Forms are available on-line in OHR's Resource Library. This is the link: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/ohr/ResourceLibrary/RLMain1.cfm?m=1&c=34>

Note that there are different language certification forms depending on which bargaining agreement is applicable to you.

Q. What happens once OHR receives the language certification form?

A. Within seven days of receiving the form, you will receive a phone call or an e-mail to schedule you for a language test. The test is designed to assess oral, written, or both types of skills in a second language other than English.

Language Testing

Q. Who administers the language test?

A. OHR staff administers job related examination, conducts the examination, serves as rater, or obtains a certified rater, and notifies you of examination results.

Q. What are the levels for the Multilingual Certification?

A. There are two levels, the Basic and the Advanced levels. The Basic level or Oral examination evaluates skills for oral communication in a non-english language, and for two-way interpretation of oral statements between English and a non-english language.

The Advanced level or written examination evaluates skills required for oral communication and interpretation in a non-english language, and for two-way translation of written information between English and a non-english language.

Q. What is the process that OHR uses for language certification?

A. There are two processes for completing the Multilingual certification at both the Basic and the Advanced levels.

One process is a test for languages that are most commonly spoken in the County. The Basic and Advanced proficiency levels are rated by County staff who are certified at the Advanced level.

The second process is a Credential review for languages that are not commonly used and where internal expertise is not available. This testing procedure is based on review of the individual's education, training, and experience in the non-English language.

Basic Skills Test

Q. What kind of test of *basic* skills should I expect?

A. If you have been identified to provide *basic* language skills as part of your employment, you will be given a brief job-related performance examination by a certified language rater. You will be required to converse in the appropriate second language as well as read, comprehend, and interpret from the English language to the second language and vice versa without the use of a bilingual dictionary.

To pass that examination, you will need to achieve a satisfactory level. This means that you appear to possess an adequate degree of verb ability in the English/Second languages. The conversation demonstrates knowledge of the Second language/English languages, and that overall, delivery is understandable. You need to pass on *each* of the three components of the test:

1. conversation in both languages;
2. reading/comprehending/interpreting from English to the second language; and,
3. reading/comprehending/interpreting from the second language to English.

Advanced Skills Test

Q. What kind of test of *advanced skills* should I expect?

A. If you have been identified to provide *advanced skills* as part of your employment, you will be given a written examination in addition to an oral communication skills test. You will be required to translate in writing from the English language to the second language and vice versa. A bilingual dictionary may be used.

To pass the written exam, you will need to achieve a satisfactory level on each of the two components of the written test:

1. reading/comprehending/translating in writing from English to the second language; and,
2. reading/comprehending/translating in writing from the second language to English.

The skills required for written communication include proper sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and accents.

Q. How do I know if I passed or failed the *basic* or *advanced language* examinations?

A. OHR will e-mail or phone you with the results within five days. A formal notification memo will also be sent from the OHR Director to your department director with the examination results.

Passing the Test

Q. What happens when I pass the *basic* or *advanced exam*?

A. Your department has instructions from OHR to completing timesheets and processing any retroactive requests for compensation. Therefore, you will be contacted by an internal departmental representative who works closely with OHR to ensure prompt processing of your paperwork once the formal memo of your successful examination is received.

If your certification and eligibility for multilingual pay is to be made retroactive, the effective date of the pay retroactivity is the beginning of the first pay period following your department director's signature on the language certification form.

Q. If I transfer or I am promoted into another position where my second language skills are not needed, do I keep getting the compensation?

A. No. Multilingual pay is tied to the position you occupy in your department. The *ability* to communicate orally or in writing in a second language is not the controlling factor for compensation. Compensation is only available if you are identified by your department as *required* to provide County services in a second language.

Not successfully passing the test

Q. What happens if I fail the *basic exam*?

A. If you are designated to provide *basic* skills and you fail the examination, you may request to be re-tested within six months from the date of the initial test. If you have not passed the re-test within six months of the initial test, you will need to submit a new language certification form to re-apply. The language differential will be made retroactive to the beginning of the pay period following the date the department director authorizes the new form.

Q. What happens if I fail the *advanced* exam?

A. If you are designated to provide *advanced* skills and you pass the oral portion of the exam, but fail the written portion of the exam, you can either:

- be paid at the *basic* level until you are re-tested and pass at the *advanced* level **or**
- remain at the *basic* level.

If six months has passed and you have not re-tested, if you decide to try for the advanced level, you must submit a new language certification form.

Q. What will the make-up exam be like?

A. If you request a make-up exam, you will have different exam materials and a different certified rater. The make-up exam must be taken and passed within six months of the failed exam for the retroactive pay date on the original multilingual certification form to be honored.

Q. What happens if I fail the make-up exam?

A. If you fail the make-up exam, you must wait six months before re-submitting a new language certification form and start the process again. This time period will provide you with ample opportunity to take language classes to better prepare you for the examination.

Interpreter/Translator Services

Q. Once I have passed my test, am I placed on a County-wide Interpreter/Translator list?

A. Yes. OHR maintains a County wide Certified Language Interpreter/Translator list that is available in the OHR Resource Library. The list is made available to provide resources to departments needing occasional second-language assistance to serve a customer.

Visit the OHR Resource Library, and select the link to the Certified Language Employees' List.

Q. If I get a call to interpret/translate from someone outside of my department, am I expected to assist?

A. Yes, you must make a reasonable effort to provide interpreter/translator services at the request of other departments. However, you must obtain approval of your supervisor before accepting an assignment from another department. Hours in excess of four per pay period must be charged back to requesting department.

Q. Will my supervisor evaluate my performance in providing services in a second language?

A. Yes, your supervisor must include the use of multilingual skills as a performance expectation in your performance plan.

Additional Information

If you need additional information, contact the Staffing and Organizational Development Team in OHR at 240-777-5000.

Note: This information may be made available in an alternate format, if required. Please contact OHR's Training and Organizational Development Team at 240-777-5000.