



Bilingual Pay Stipend – Standard Operating Procedures

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1. Purpose

To provide procedural guidance on determining an employee’s eligibility to receive a Bilingual Stipend.

2. Specific Procedures

Departments with a genuine business need for non-English language skills may identify the necessary language(s) needed to meet the specific needs of their customers and request Bilingual Stipends for employees. Prior to receiving a Bilingual Stipend and incorporating a non-English language regularly in their job, employees are required to undergo a language proficiency assessment to confirm acceptable proficiency levels. The Human Resources Department coordinates and manages the language proficiency assessment process. All expenses relating to the assessment will be charged to the employing department. The following processes must be followed according to these procedures:

- i. Department Director in consultation with an employee will confirm a business need for bilingual skills and necessary funding for a Bilingual Pay Stipend.
- ii. Employee submits request via the Human Resources Information System (HRIS) after they consult with the Department Director.
- iii. Employee will read and acknowledge (electronically sign) the Bilingual Pay Stipend Agreement.
- iv. Department Director submits the Approval step in the HRIS. Please see the Job Aid.
- v. Once the agreement is acknowledged and the Department Director approves the request, Human Resources will work with the Language Assessment agency and the employee to schedule the language assessment(s).
 - a. Language assessment expenses are the responsibility of the department and a sufficient budget must be identified by the Department Director prior to the request.
 - 1.v.a.1 Conversational assessments (Listening & Speaking Test (IVR)) are \$55 each and written/reading assessments (Translation Test (Online)) are \$66 each.
 - b. Employees will be assessed for the appropriate language and category as discussed with their Department Director. The type of assessments assigned to the employee may be dependent on the employee’s position and department.
 - c. Employees must complete the assessment within two weeks of receiving their assigned assessments.

- vi. The following outlines the minimum requirements for language assessments. It is important to note that different language assessment companies employ distinct scoring systems. Currently, the County utilizes ALTA, a language assessment company that employs a scale ranging from 1 to 12, correlated to the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale.
 - a. Category A – Conversational: ALTA Level 9 / ILR 3
 - b. Category B – Reading & Writing: ALTA Level 9 / ILR 3
 - c. Category C – Both Conversational and Reading & Writing: ALTA Level 9 / ILR 3
 - d. Human Resources will notify the employee, immediate supervisor, and department director if the minimum requirements for the assessment were met. Employees can request a copy of their assessment results from Human Resources.
 - e. If an employee falls below the minimum requirement in an assessment, they can ask to retake the assessment once within the 12 months following the initial test, with approval from the Department Director.
 - f. Any employee who does not meet the minimum requirement for the proficiency assessment will not be allowed to use any language other than English when interacting with members of the public as part of their job duties.
 - g. Human Resources will maintain a record of assessment dates, scores, and employees receiving the Bilingual Stipend in the HRIS. It is the employee and their supervisor's responsibility to monitor re-test dates.
- vii. Human Resources will enter the Stipend request into the HRIS system, and it will go through all appropriate approvals.
 - a. This process can take multiple weeks. The Bilingual Stipend will begin on the date of a successful assessment and retroactive pay will be applied.
- viii. The results of the language proficiency assessments are valid for five years. After that time the employee must take a new assessment.
 - a. At the discretion of the Department Director, in collaboration with Human Resources, an employee may be required to have their language skills re-assessed before the end of the five-year period if there are performance issues with their ability to perform bilingual tasks.
 - b. Employees that worked for Buncombe County in the past 5 years and have a successful assessment on file can use their previous score. Assessment scores expire after five years.

3. References

- 3.1. Supplemental Pay Policy

4. Definitions

- i. **Language proficiency assessment** – A test or series of tests that assess a person's written, verbal, and comprehensive language proficiency skills.
- ii. **Genuine Business Need** – An identified gap in current talent, systems, tools and/or processes that inhibits the ability to fulfill obligations in providing effective and efficient government.



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- iii. **Bi-lingual staff** – A staff person employed by Buncombe County who has demonstrated proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and/or understanding at least one other language in addition to English as authorized by his or her department and approved by HR.
- iv. **Interpretation** – The act of listening to communication in one language (source language) along with orally or visually converting it to another language (target language) while retaining the same meaning.
- v. **Language Services** – Oral and written language services needed to ensure that individuals with NELP may communicate effectively with staff, and to provide those individuals with meaningful access to, and an equal opportunity to fully participate in, the services, activities, or other programs administered by the County.
- vi. **Non-English Language Preference (NELP)** – Used to refer to individuals who prefer a non-English language with respect to a particular type of service, benefit, or encounter.