

Language Competency and Hiring Survey

In spring of 2007 Eladia Rivera, of the Boulder Public Library, posted a survey to the REFORMA-CO listserv. The questions posed were:

1. Does your library or local government use in-house or outsourced pre-hire evaluation or measure of language skills and proficiency for positions hiring second language skills, e.g. Spanish, Russian, Chinese, sign language, or other spoken languages? If so, how is this structured?
2. Does your library or local government provide any form of incentive to second language speakers? If so, is it in the form of salary or other forms of recognition? Are there varying forms of incentive tied to the level of proficiency in the desired language?
3. Does your library or local government pay for language training for library staff?

It was also asked that they leave any additional comments they might have on this topic.

Responses

Boulder Public Library/City of Boulder Boulder, CO

1. The city of Boulder does not currently have use an in-house or outsourced pre-hire evaluation or measure of language skills. City departments (Library included) may employ assessment tools depending on their needs.
2. The city of Boulder does not currently have a formal policy offering incentives for second languages. Some positions list second language fluency in the job postings as required or desired qualifications and many use second language fluency as a criteria to select candidates. Some departments use second language fluency in determining a higher starting pay rate for a new candidate. City Departments do have some flexibility in the starting salary of an employee. Should a person bring strong second language skills they might start at a higher level than someone without. This would depend on the job and the qualification requirements.
3. The library gives time off the desk, and in some cases has provided limited financial support or leave with pay for staff to pursue language training. We also provided in-house classes for staff to make the effort easier.

Comments: The issue of recruitment needs to be tackled in a different way than the traditional recruitment process. A strategy for engaging diverse members of the Boulder community in our hiring processes is needed. BPL uses volunteers for outreach program, library, city and other organizations when needed/requested. Usually have a volunteer from Mexico do the final edit on translations. If paid translation job comes by, is offered to volunteers. In past, used Russian speaking volunteers. Keep a list of volunteers, community members, and organizations with language skills other than English. In past, got grants from the library foundation for an outreach assistant for Spanish speaking people and s/he helped with translations as well. Ghada Elturk/Outreach

Brooklyn Public Library

1. We currently do not use any tools that address second languages.
-

**Broward County Library
Florida**

1. No
 2. No
 3. Yes
-

**Chesterfield County
South Carolina**

1. No, we should, but as far as I can tell the HR folks take the candidate's word for it for any language.
2. Second languages don't seem to be high on the list of priorities for county personnel, although I know that my board argued for a raise based in part on my Spanish proficiency. I, personally, would try to compensate someone but it would not be able to be through salary.
3. It would, if I could convince any of the staff to take classes!

Comments: I think that the library here is going to have to make some changes as the Latino pop continues to grow. I've started a children's collection in Spanish but I am the only person who can review it. The number of calls of Spanish speakers is growing and only I can handle them.

**Denver Public Library
Denver, CO**

1. No
 2. Level 1 verbal proficiency \$50 per pay period. Level 2 written proficiency, extra \$75 per person. Level 3 translation proficiency \$100 per person.
 3. DPL provides Spanish language training. Beyond that, staff can apply for tuition reimbursement to attend language classes
-

**Douglas County Libraries
Colorado**

1. No, employees self-evaluate their reading, writing, and speaking skills.
2. No.
3. We do offer some compensation for training but I don't know if this includes for language. The employee has to identify how the training will benefit the lib and it has to be "certified", so conversation groups probably would not suffice.

Comments: I use my Spanish speaking skills weekly, if not daily and I also use it to accomplish tasks that are outside my job descript b/c I am the only one who speaks Spanish; I feel that I should be compensated for this extra skill and responsibility but I am not.

**Fresno County Public Library
Fresno, California**

1. New employees that are filling bilingual-specific positions are given language proficiency tests by in-house staff. During the interview, a bilingual staff member asks a few questions in that language. If the candidate demonstrates proficiency and is hired, they may later be given a certification test by in-house staff. I don't know how it is structured, only that it is administered by staff that are fluent.
2. If an employee is certified as bilingual, they receive an increase in salary. I believe it is .50/hr
3. The library does not provide the training itself, but has paid for staff to take it.

Comments: I think a great incentive would be just to provide time for staff to study Spanish. We have Rosetta Stone, which is great, but no time to use it.

**Jefferson County Public Libraries
Colorado**

1. We do advertise some positions with "bilingual Spanish speakers encouraged to apply". We put apps into A, B, and C piles and one with Spanish would probably go in the A pile. We don't test the applicants but ask them to self-rate their skills. We do not have a separate job description for these positions.
2. No response
3. We sent several staff through the 10-week Berlitz Spanish class.

Comments: After taking the class, employees mostly used their Spanish skills with contractors, not patrons. General comments to consider: Jeffco decided there is not enough need for Spanish skills to have their staff improve their proficiency. Another library that sent staff to a basic level class found that they did not use it that much afterwards, but theorized that it might be because a basic level class will not give people enough sense of confidence in their fluency that they will venture to use it.

**Jefferson County Public Libraries
Colorado
Secondary Input**

1. No, we ask them to self-identify.
2. No, not at this time.
3. We sent 12 staff to a Spanish Berlitz course (20 classes). They later reported that they used their Spanish with patrons about 2% of the time (and about 25% of those incidents the Spanish speaker had an English speaker with them and 20% of the time people just asked them where the bathroom was). We decided not to offer additional pay.

Comments: We do advertise that "Spanish speakers encouraged to apply" and have been fortunate to get a lot of people with skills.

Lexington Public Library
Lexington, Kentucky

1. We do in-house evaluations of Spanish speakers only. Bilingual staff participates in the hiring interview for librarian assistants to assess their spoken fluency. For other positions (such as those that involve translating materials) there is also a written evaluation.
 2. Not that I know of.
 3. Yes.
-

Minneapolis Public Library
Minneapolis, Minnesota

1. Library – For positions other than Library Links! Outreach positions there is no evaluation of language proficiency.
2. No, not at present although this has been recommended in a report that was written recently and...it is likely we will merge with the County system within the next year. They do offer \$40 monthly for staff who use their non-English language skills.
3. Not in the normal course of things. Again this was a recommendation in our recent report. Individuals' have taken "budget leave" unpaid leave for weeks course.

Comments: We do a lot of talking about the need for language skills.

Multnomah County Library
Multnomah County, Oregon

1. Use in-house evaluators for Spanish, IRCO for Vietnamese, other people from the community (high schools and churches) to evaluate Chinese and Russian. Written test part of application, spoken during interview.
 2. There is a differential pay for designated bilingual positions (same differential is applied to any position that needs to be bilingual).
 3. We are offering Spanish classes to our staff but they have to take them on their own time and be pre-approved.
-

Pikes Peak Library District
Colorado Springs, Colorado

1. No, but we could. We send employees to an external organization that tests them.
 2. "Foreign Language Stipend" of \$25 per month, for those who pass a test given by an external org. (Appears to have only one level of competency.)
 3. We have a tuition-assistance program for employees, but most who use it do so for MLS courses. We have also provided "basic Spanish" classes to employees.
-

Rochester Public Library
Rochester, Minnesota

Comments: Rochester has nothing in place at survey time (Spring 2007) for their library relative to these questions.

San Antonio Public Library
San Antonio, Texas

1. Yes, the test is administered by the City of SF HR department. Not know if in house or outsourced. Spoken and administered by a native speaker.
 2. Yes, bilingual differential. No varying levels of incentive tied to the level of proficiency in the desired language.
 3. Not sure.
-

Seattle Public Library
Seattle, Washington

1. We have not used a pre-hire evaluation for the senior librarian position - currently the only position that we have that requires language skills.
 2. The salary scale for this position (senior librarian) is higher (\$59,467 - \$72,155) than for the librarian (\$52,520 - \$63,710). We have 3 such positions and we are currently evaluating if the current practice meets our need to serve our ESL patrons and to incent staff to use their language skills.
 3. We do not specifically pay for language skills training; however, staff may apply their annual development fund allotment (\$600.00) to such training upon approval of their manager.
-

West Chicago Public Library District
West Chicago, Illinois

1. No. Potential hires state their 2nd language skills on resumes and/or applications, but there is no evaluation of those skills either before or after hire.
2. No
3. Occasionally. A few years ago there was a 10-week (one 2-hour class per week) intro to Spanish class given.

Comments: The population we serve is 49% Hispanic, many of whom have limited English proficiency.

West Palm Beach
Florida

1. No, except for the Hispanic Outreach Librarian. I was made to converse with a Spanish speaker on staff (the administrative assistant), and she reported on my fluency.
 2. No.
 3. It hasn't come up.
-

Westminster Public Library
Westminster, Colorado

1. Didn't answer.
 2. We pay up to \$1000/year depending on level of fluency in Spanish, Hmong, Laotian (\$500 for functional level— conversationally fluent), \$750 for effectively speaking, \$1000 not defined
 3. Fill out an application and appear before bilingual certification board.
-