

The background image is a photograph of the Wisconsin State Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin. The building is a neoclassical structure with a large, ornate dome that is illuminated from within, giving it a golden glow. The sky is a warm, orange and yellow color, suggesting either sunrise or sunset. The foreground is filled with the dark silhouettes of trees.

2025 NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 5

2025

OFFICE FOR EQUITY
AND INCLUSION

DANE COUNTY, MADISON, WISCONSIN



EQUITY FOR ALL



Equity and inclusion is rooted in Title VI and VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The 1964 Civil Rights Act provides protection for everyone. Due to a history of documented discrimination throughout the country in employment, education, and public accommodations, Dane County is dedicated to addressing disparities. In our work, it's important to remember that equity is for everyone.

The summer season and beyond is always a good time to reflect and celebrate worthy accomplishments. As I consider the challenges of 2025, I must express gratitude for the hard work and dedication of the staff members of the Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI).

The accomplishments that we share are only made possible with a focused and caring team. Dane County is fortunate to have an OEI Department that places a high regard for customer service and well-being. In Dane County, equity and inclusion supports high school aged Boys and Girls Club Interns to adults over the age of 40 in need of employee rights assistance. We provide consultation for employees seeking reasonable accommodations and ergonomic equipment. OEI annually provides needed grant opportunities to community partners.

We face many challenges in our work. We address employee and County customer complaints. We listen to customers that are sometimes dissatisfied with County services and offer a helping hand or corrective action when appropriate. We uphold the values of equity and inclusion when others suggest that our cause will always be an uphill climb. With the work of Dane County's Equal Opportunity Commission serving the public interest and the assistance of the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion provides services for all of Dane County.

We will continue to work toward the greatest possibilities and opportunities with a committed team and supportive community members. As the fibers of Civil Rights and Equity are being tested this year, I congratulate the Office for Equity and Inclusion for not wavering in effort or empathy for the people we serve.

Wesley Sparkman

Director, The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion



Q & A LETTER FROM THE DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT

RODRIGO VALDIVIA
DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT SPECIALIST



Hello all,

As the Diversity Recruitment Specialist for Dane County, my role is uniquely positioned in two departments: I am 50% in the Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI) and 50% in the Employee Relations (ER) Division. In Employee Relations, I handle the majority of Dane County's bilingual recruitments. As such, I am the point-of-contact for bilingual testing, administering our use of ALTA Language Services to test both candidates and employees. In this article, I intend to answer some of the more common questions and requests I have received from Dane County managers and employees regarding bilingual testing.

First, the most common question I am hearing is: Is there a policy that states when an employee can take the bilingual test? Do they have to wait for a bilingual position to become available in order to take the test? Second, it tends to be followed up with: If they take and pass the test, will they receive the \$2 an hour bilingual pay premium?

As it pertains to the first question, there is currently no formal policy for when an employee can take the bilingual test, nor do they have to wait for a bilingual position to become available in order to take it. If you are a manager or an employee and you would like to get tested, please connect with me and I can set you up for the exams your classification requires.

For the second question, passing the bilingual assessments alone does not automatically qualify you for the bilingual pay. Whether or not a position is designated as bilingual is based on community need, and not necessarily on the person being bilingual. Currently, there is a five hour per week threshold that employees should be performing their job assignment in the other language in order for that position to qualify for bilingual designation. More specifically, the [Bilingual Designation Policy](#) in the Administrative Practices Manual states, "A bilingual designation may be appropriate when a position must perform their job assignment in the other language for a minimum of five (5) hours per week."

The [Employee Benefit Handbook](#), under Bilingual Classification Pay, adds: "When a position is identified as benefitting from a language skill based on community need, Managers/supervisors can request to designate those existing positions as bilingual, and or create new positions through the County budget process with a bilingual designation. Additionally, an employee not in a designated bilingual position who is performing their essential job duties in two or more languages can make a request to their manager/supervisor to submit a request to Employee Relations to designate their position as bilingual." Ultimately, the decision to designate a position as bilingual is a managerial one and not subject to the grievance process.

The [Bilingual Designation Policy](#) APM also states that if a manager wishes to designate a position as bilingual, they are to submit a Request for Bilingual designation Change Memo to Employee Relations (this is just a memo on department letterhead, not an official form), along with a Position Description showing the work that will be performed in the other language. Likewise, a department may request the removal of the bilingual designation for a position by following this same protocol. (One possible reason for this would be if a position with a bilingual designation has gone unfilled for several months despite multiple recruitment efforts.) Employee Relations will review the bilingual designation request and make a determination. They are likely to request supporting information for how the positions meets the bilingual designation threshold.



(CONTINUED)

An additional point: The majority of our bilingual positions require passing ALTA's Listening and Speaking assessments for both English and the non-English language. The Listening and Speaking assessments only test in the target language, meaning they don't test English to Spanish, or Spanish to English, for instance—they only test English or Spanish alone. (This is the same for ALTA's Writing tests.) Hopefully one day, we may remove the English testing requirement and only test the non-English language, as the interview and Achievement History Questionnaire serve as additional English language proficiency assessments.

Hiring managers may request additional tests for a recruitment, such as reading, writing, translation, and/or interpretation; though I caution about adding these indiscriminately since the number of candidates may dwindle as the recruitment goes on. There are already naturally smaller applicant pools for bilingual recruitments. It may be better to test the applicants using the Listening and Speaking assessments, and then to incorporate a bilingual question or writing sample for the candidates during the interview, being sure to include a diverse, bilingual and bicultural interview panel to assess the candidates' language proficiency and cultural sensitivity. (It is important to note, however, that all the candidates placed on the eligibility list have already been tested and have met the minimum requirements. Candidates cannot be screened out at that point.) In regards to the interview panelists (and graders), only Dane County managers (M-class) or individuals external to the County can serve on it. Employee group represented individuals (even if they are non-dues paying members) may not. This may be good reason to build a list of external subject matter experts to tap should you need them to assist you in the grading or interviewing of applicants.

In closing, over the last few years Dane County has seen remarkable growth and improvements in our ability to deliver services to our community members with a preferred language other than English or who have limited English proficiency. We have seen marked increases in bilingual-designated positions and support staff with the hiring of our Spanish and Hmong Language Access Coordinators in Human Services, our Language Access and Reporting Specialist in the Office for Equity and Inclusion, a pair of Medical Interpreters in both Public Health and Human Services, and a Court Interpreter in our Clerk of Courts department. We have also seen an increase of 28 bilingual designated positions since the fall of 2023, from 106 positions to 134 positions. But Dane County is home to almost 600,000 individuals and our bilingual community continues to grow. 134 bilingual employees is not enough to support such a richly diverse population. Even with this increase, there are still a number of departments that are lacking bilingual representation that could surely benefit from additional language support and bilingual designated positions.

As it stands, I see adjusting the five hour per week threshold as the biggest lever to allowing more individuals to use, and be compensated for, their bilingual skills on the job. I would love to see that policy adjusted to allow for more individuals to use their full skillset wherever safely and reasonably possible. So, let's work on designating more positions as bilingual. If you are a manager, don't be afraid to have your employees tested and to advocate for their position's bilingual designation. I suggest recording every instance of when another language is used to assist the public (please see the OEI Language Access Services Tracking spreadsheet). Even if it doesn't meet the threshold, this data could help us make the case for adjusting that threshold in the future.

In sum, at OEI, we believe in Equity and Inclusion for Everyone and Every Community. This is just a part of the work. Please reach out and let us know how we can support you. There is still work to be done. I look forward to doing that work alongside you. It is a team effort.

Thank you,
In your corner,

Rodrigo Valdivia, Diversity Recruitment Specialist



OEI SUMMER INTERN

My name is Yesenia Zaldivar Garcia, I'm this year's intern for the Dane County Office for Equity and Inclusion. I currently attend Madison West High School, and will be a Senior this upcoming fall. As of now, my interests lie in law and medicine, though I am leaning more toward law, specifically becoming a lawyer. While I'm still exploring which area of law I want to pursue, I know that my ultimate goal is to make a meaningful difference in my community by connecting with and supporting others.



As the daughter of immigrants, who came to this country with nothing but hope, I've been shaped by their sacrifices and dreams. Their pursuit of a better future for our family has inspired me in countless ways. I want to seek higher education, pursue a career where I can give back, and help others the way incredible lawyers once helped my family. I hope to show young people that anything is possible if you put in the work and hold onto hope—and that our parents' sacrifices are not in vain.

This summer I was given the incredible opportunity to intern through the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. I discovered this internship through the AVID/TOPS program, which has long supported students like me through tutoring, college visits, mentoring, internships, and career exploration. I've been a part of AVID/TOPS for five years now, and I'm extremely grateful for the doors it has opened. Initially, my top internship choice was a law firm, but I wasn't selected due to its high demand. At the time, I saw it as a setback, but now I know it was a blessing in disguise. Interning at OEI has been just as rewarding—if not more so than I could have imagined.

At OEI, I've learned from an amazing team, assisting them with tasks both big and small, everyone has been welcoming and generous with their knowledge, teaching me through their work and personal experiences. I've gained insight into the behind-the-scenes operations of county government and equity-based initiatives that directly impact our community. Every day brings something new, and I feel fortunate to be in a space where I'm constantly learning—not only about law but also about leadership, community engagement, and equity. This experience has strengthened my passion for law and public service, and I'm excited to carry these lessons forward and share them with others.

Through this internship, I've gained valuable exposure to the work being done across Dane County and have connected with professionals—including lawyers and judges—who have shared advice, career paths, and encouragement. These conversations have helped me grow both personally and professionally.

With that being said, to anyone reading this: if opportunities like this come your way, take them. Put yourself out there. Real-world experience—whether in law, public service, or any other field of your interest—will teach you lessons you can't learn in a classroom. It may feel intimidating at first, but once you take that leap, you'll be grateful for the doors it opens and the rooms you never expected to enter at such a young age.



DANE COUNTY OEI COVID-19

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

BY THEOLA CARTER, MANAGER OF POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

It has been a little more than half a decade since the whole world came to an abrupt stop and pivoted due to a world health crisis. Prior to that, the last major catastrophic global health threat was over 100 years (1918-1920) on the heels of the end of World War I – the H1N1 Spanish flu virus. More than half million individuals lost their lives in the United States. Now, fast forward to March 2020, when Dane County employees were immediately sent home and told to wait for further notice. There was so much confusion about what was happening. Little did many of us know; but America, like the rest of the world, was under siege due to the COVID 19 virus. Everyone was told to wash hands, washed items purchased and stay 6 feet apart from one another. Grocery store shelves became emptied; bathroom tissue, Lysol spray, Lysol wipes, masks and hand sanitizer were at a premium. Schools, churches and businesses like restaurants and beauty salons were ordered to shut down. Hospitals were nearly at capacity. On the daily, you heard about the numbers who were sick or even perished from the virus. The roads and highways were as barren as a western ghost town after the gold rush without the tumble weed. And my gosh, you could find a decent spot to park in-- the Dane County parking ramp! The price of a gallon of gas was less than a \$1.00. I recall paying \$.59 a gallon for gas! You could actually drive from east to the west side of Madison and vice versa within twenty minutes!



Everyone was masking up and people were so hilarious and creative with their apocalyptic outfits. Unfortunately, however, there were over 300,000 confirmed deaths from COVID in the USA. What was thought in most people's minds would last maybe a few weeks and then back to normal quickly faded and became ambiguity. Our bad though. It was a huge miscalculation on how long shelter-in-places and going out only as needed would really last. We did recall the grave errors of the flu pandemic though and were thinking about potential scenarios if the same cycle repeated itself with the COVID 19 virus.

But, I would be negligent if I did not mention the role public servants, in particularly, Dane County public servants throughout this ordeal. Dane County rose to the height of the occasion. The County Sheriffs, Dane County Human Services, Dane County Airport, Dane County Waste and Renewable, and Dane County Public Works did not have the luxury of working from home. They had to go into the office on a daily basis and some departments had to run 24 hours a day. The County Executive, Joe Parisi, took immediate action to protect the residents of Dane County and keep employees safe. The world was fighting an enemy too tiny for the naked eye to see. Dane County's Emergency Management Department, led by Charlie Tubbs, and Public Health, led by Janelle Heinrich, were on public display. As a part of the emergency management response team, the Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI) participated in meetings. Representatives for emergency management meetings were Wesley Sparkman (Director) and Theola Carter (Program and Policy Manager). The people were looking to Dane County leadership for answers, protocols and procedures.

DANE COUNTY OEI COVID-19

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

BY THEOLA CARTER, MANAGER OF POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CONTINUED)



During the COVID outbreak, OEI provided real-time information, outreach services, and served as a vital resource to the various communities of color in Dane County. Looking back, one has to conduct an after-action analysis to consider what was done well and where improvements can be made? It does not have to be a pandemic, it can be any man-made or natural disaster such as a tornado, flooding, fire, blizzard or even extremely rare events such as a massive sinkhole, mudslide or earthquake.

So, what did we do right?

Continuity of Operation Plan

Well, prior to the outbreak, OEI had already written up their Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Staff identify key functions that would need to continue in the event that a catastrophe occurred unaware that it would need to be put to use within months of its' completion.

Why was OEI ahead in doing this? Well, the Manager of Policy and Program Improvement ,me, had worked for the State of Wisconsin for over 25 years. During my time at the State, I had left the Department for Workforce Development (DWD) for a position as the Bureau Director of Housing for State Department of Administration. As I made the transition from one position to the other, there was a fire in DWD. This caused the Department to immediately rehouse staff in different places throughout the State. The State was not truly ready but had to come up with a plan so that critical functions could continue. When it comes to the lives of others and them depending on you, It does not matter if there is a disaster, there are certain works that must continue despite what happens in the world around us. As a result, all state agencies were required to develop a COOP. Leaving the State and returning as an employee for Dane County, I thought it would be in the office's best interest to have a written plan in event of an emergency. The staff talked about various scenarios and reviewed fire and tornado drills. To date, this document is used and is reviewed at least every two years.

Internal OEI Operations

The office set up a calling tree and contact protocols if things continued to escalate. The COOP and other information was placed in our shared drive for all staff to be able to access. We began rotating when people would be in the office for safety measurements. We notified one another when we were in the office. We checked on those who were in the office to ensure all was going well. The County acquired Zoom and we set up managers and department meetings via Zoom. People were looking to Dane County leadership for answers, protocols and procedures. This allowed us to connect, provide information, give updates on things we were working on, discuss any challenges and troubleshoot issues. We began inventorying supplies in the office to see what was needed. We ensured that everyone received a laptop so that they could link to work from homes. When vaccines became available, we provided information to the public about what was available, as provided to us by public health, and where to go for further information.

DANE COUNTY OEI COVID-19

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

BY THEOLA CARTER, MANAGER OF POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CONTINUED)

Emergency Management Outreach to Communities of Color

OEI participated in every in-person and virtual meeting. The information was forwarded to various community groups, leaders and individuals. Over the course of the emergency (2020-2023), a total of 85 email update messages were sent out to the community. There were in excess of 170 recipients on the list and it was distributed to persons in other states and reached persons in Europe and Africa by the time the pandemic emergency was declared over on May 3, 2023 by the World Health Organization and the United States on May 11, 2023. The 170 plus recipients sent the messages far and wide. Individuals contacted OEI asking to be added to the email list to receive information directly. Information included, what to do, where to go, who to contact, how to apply for different grants, the number of COVID cases in the area, information on the vaccine, accessing website information and any other relevant information. How far information reached and how many lives were touch by it, we will never know. OEI's goal was to get the information out to the communities, and we did just that.

All County Staff - Equity and Inclusion Training

OEI sponsored a showing of *The Niceties* by Eleanor Burgess in collaboration with Forward Theater, City of Madison, and the United Way. The play was inspired by an incident that occurred on Yale University's campus. Zoe, a Black student, attends a liberal arts college. She goes to meet with her white professor, Janine, in her office to discuss her paper about slavery's effect on the American Revolution. What should have been an ordinary meeting of professor and student speaking on ways to improve the paper, turns tense and becomes a heated dispute about their difference of opinions between their worldviews about race, history, prejudice and power which resonates campus-wide with profound implications. OEI prepared a study guide and held several virtual discussions for staff.

Boys and Girls Club Summer and COVID Interns Programs

Students were impacted by the pandemic as well, so OEI continued the Boys and Girls Club Summer Internship Program, and the Office administered a \$10,000 Student COVID 8 Week Intern Program. Four teens were hired to serve as social media ambassadors to communicate with youth in the community. Teens developed and implemented an online needs assessment and questionnaire for youth of color, in order to determine their level of knowledge regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Students collaborated with Madison/Dane County Public Health to develop an educational campaign, with the goal of informing youth and young adults in Dane County about the facts surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, they also took the time to respond to online comments and questions from youth and young adults in a positive and open manner.

DANE COUNTY OEI COVID-19

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

BY THEOLA CARTER, MANAGER OF POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CONTINUED)

Partners in Equity Food Program

The Partner in Equity Food Project Grant was created to encourage the innovative development of projects that advanced equity and access in local food systems across Dane County through educational and outreach services. In 2020, OEI allocated \$25,000 grants to eleven (11) organizations in Dane County for this purpose. In 2021 there was \$19,500 in awards granted to nine (9) agencies to advance equity and access to local food systems amid the pandemic. In 2022, \$20,000 was awarded to ten (10) organizations based on their proposals to address issues related to healthy food access, access to land for growing food, or issues related to food waste and recovery. In addition, another \$20,000 was awarded in 2023 to twelve (12) local agencies that created innovative food programs that strove to achieve greater equity in our community and help address food insecurity. During the COVID pandemic years, OEI administered a total of \$84,500 to forty-two (42) local agencies in communities throughout Dane County to combat hunger and address food insecurities.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We learned that we can work from home and still get it right by providing excellent customer service. We learned that we can rise to the challenge and color outside of the prescribed lines to help our neighbors. But most importantly, as OEI staff, we got the work done and did not miss a beat when it came to helping Dane County residents because the people are at the heart of everything that we do.

We learned that public and private sectors can come together for a public good. We learned that in the face of danger, people will come together, put themselves in harm's way for the sake of others and in most instances, put race to the side. We also learned that people, unfortunately, can behave more badly, and attempt to profit off the discomfort of others.

We learned the importance of connectiveness. We established a text check-in to ensure one another was okay, not just physically but mentally as well. We did this by simply greeting each other and telling one another what we were going to be doing that day. We did email check-ins throughout the day to ensure that everyone had all they needed to perform their work. We inquired about one another's family because if a member of one's immediate family was ailing then we'd try to assist in any way we could to help the coworker. We shared any information received relating to the pandemic with one another and others. We shared funny events and any other thing that would occur with one another because laughter, in the midst of all that was happening around us, was a sanctuary of relief. Some of us even found relief in sharing food recipes.

In a blink of an eye something that has not been given much thought, can cause catastrophic results. The Covid 19 Pandemic resulted in illness, death, isolation, limited essentials such as food, paper products, masks, the loss of businesses, government leadership issues, educational issues, and the list goes on. That said...tomorrow is truly never promised, I like to make the most out of the time and opportunities that I have!"
- Carrie Braxton, Manager of Equal Employment Opportunity

DANE COUNTY OEI COVID-19

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

BY THEOLA CARTER, MANAGER OF POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CONTINUED)

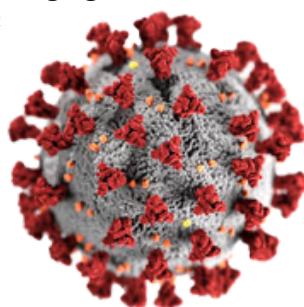
We learned too, that no matter what information was provided, some people would always be in the contrary. Some will not be satisfied no matter what measures are taken. They will always criticize, be skeptical, they will do the opposite of what is in their best interest and convince others to do the same. But despite that, public servants still put countless hours in serving and protecting the public. We set up places for the homeless to shelter. There were times when it was not an issue of the pandemic but also severe weather we were confronting. We worked to get people food, water and assist small businesses with funding to keep business in operation. Yeah, Dane County public sector employees did that!

The pandemic truly made us think about what preparedness truly meant. Does being prepared as possible for one type of event mean being prepared for a different type of event? Is simply having things like tissue, Lysol, mask ...etc. enough to be considered prepared? We put thought into what had to be done immediately, what can be done later and what thing had to be ongoing.

[I learned]“How to be at peace with myself alone.” Rhiannon Buehler, Language Access Specialist

The next time you hear someone say, “County employees, state employees, city employees don’t work, are lazy, or get paid for doing nothing” you remember to remind them that we work, we just don’t brag about the things we are doing or our accomplishments; we signed on the dotted line indicating that we will do the job. Remind them of the work that public sector employees did during the pandemic and do on a daily basis that impact their lives. Talk about the number of people that were assisted during a time of crisis and how public employees work for the public good, and sometimes that may have meant putting their lives in harm’s way for the sake of the community. Tell them about how roads are maintained, trash is collected, police and fire departments rush to assist when there are incidents, that you still get water in your homes, the sewer is maintained, many filed for unemployment during the crisis and you still can if one loses employment or worker’s compensation if one is hurt on the job and traffic lights still work. Tell them, how there are some departments that operate 24-7-365-12-60-60 and do not have the luxury of working from home. These are just a few things that are taken as a given without truly considering the people who make it work seamlessly. Simply state to the person(s), “they work extremely hard and just because you don’t see them or need that particular service at that moment, does not mean that nothing is happening.” It’s like a stage production of Hamilton, that actors perform wowing the audience with their dancing, acting and singing.

The performers on stage are the ones that get all the accolades, but the real magic happens behind the scenes with the countless rehearsals with the director, set designer and builders, the orchestra, stage managers, prop and costume designers, sound and lighting crew. At curtain call, you are acknowledging their masterful work as well.





RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE ORDINANCE

BY REYNA VASQUEZ

Did you know that the Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI) sends out a religious observance list? The list was compiled by the County Board annually and was forwarded to the Office for Equity and Inclusion to administer in 2016. Here is the link to the Ordinance passed by the Board: [memo](#). The religious holiday list helps to govern when public meetings are held so that there is maximum participation by the community, “In order to encourage civic participation, meetings of County Board and committees shall not be scheduled on holidays or on the day of any statewide or countywide election. If necessary for consideration of time sensitive matters, committees may meet on the day of an election at the direction of both the committee chair and county board chair. The County Board chair shall consider holidays and elections when developing the annual schedule of County Board meetings.” [Ordinance Chapter 7.22 (7)(a)].

Every year, OEI reaches out to religious organizations to confirm the religious dates. Subsequently, a memo is sent out to Dane County employees to plan meetings for the upcoming year. The County Board plans their meetings around the observances and other County recognized holidays. It is recommended that boards, commissions, and committees in the executive branch try to avoid scheduling meetings on the stated religious holidays as the county aims to be conscious and not put anyone in a compromising position of choosing between work and religious obligations. For 2026, the observations are outlined in the chart below.



RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE ORDINANCE

2026 RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Try to avoid work-restricted holidays

Ash Wednesday – Wednesday, February 18th	Eid-al-Adha – Thursday, May 28th Work-restricted holiday. Meetings should be avoided
Purim – Begins at sunset on Monday, March 2nd to nightfall on Tuesday, March 3rd.	Rosh Hashanah – Begins at sunset on Friday, September 11th, to nightfall Sunday, September 13th. Work-restricted holiday. Meetings should be avoided September 11th – 13th
Eid-al-Fitr – Friday, March 20th Work-restricted holiday. Meetings should be avoided	Yom Kippur – Begins at sunset on Sunday, September 20th, to nightfall Monday, September 21st. Work-restricted holiday. Meetings should be avoided September 20th – 21st
Passover – Wednesday, April 1st, to nightfall on Thursday, April 9th. Begins at sunset on the 1st. Work-restricted holiday. Meetings should be avoided April 1st & 2nd	Sukkot – Begins at sunset on Friday, September 25th, to nightfall Friday, October 2nd.
Maundy Thursday – Thursday, April 2nd	Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah – Begins at sunset on Friday, October 2nd, to nightfall Sunday, October 4th.
Good Friday – Friday, April 3rd	Diwali – Sunday, November 8th
Shavuot – Begins at sunset on Thursday, May 21st, to nightfall Saturday, May 23rd.	Hanukkah – Begins at sunset Friday, December 4th, to nightfall Saturday, December 12th.

Note: These are dates when the County may be open for business.

TARGETED BUSINESS PROGRAM

STRENGTHENING BUSINESS CONNECTIONS | AUGUST 2025

BY JOE OBY, CONTRACT COMPLIANCE SPECIALIST

The Dane County Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI) is committed to ensuring county contracting and procurement opportunities are accessible to the small, local businesses that form the backbone of our community. OEI's Targeted Business Enterprise (TBE) Program works to expand access, remove barriers, and promote inclusive participation in public contracting.

The program recognizes the challenges small businesses face in competing for government contracts. By actively engaging with these businesses, OEI helps strengthen the county's supplier base while fostering local job creation, innovation, and economic resilience. This commitment goes beyond policy—it's about building real, lasting opportunities for small businesses to learn, connect, and succeed.

RECENT ENGAGEMENTS

Construction Contractor Networking | February 2025 (Recap)

OEI partnered with the City of Madison Department of Civil Rights and the Wisconsin Supplier Diversity Program to host a virtual networking session. This event brought together general contractors, subcontractors, and agency representatives to discuss upcoming opportunities, share best practices, and build partnerships that enhance competitiveness.

Small Business Enterprise Networking: Finding the Right Resources | June 2025 (Recap)

Featuring keynote speaker Michelle Somes-Booher, Director of the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center, this event highlighted essential capacity-building resources. Participants connected with organizations such as the Wisconsin Procurement Institute, Summit Credit Union, and the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation to learn about training, financing, and business growth strategies.

Procurement 101 & Beyond: Local Government Contracting for Small Businesses | September 2025 (Recap)

Continuing its support for small businesses, OEI co-hosted this virtual training focused on identifying government contracts, understanding procurement procedures, and maintaining strong agency relationships. Amanda Roman, CEO of Domina Consulting, Inc., shared practical strategies for preparing competitive bids and managing awards. Panelists from the Wisconsin Supplier Diversity Program, Milwaukee County, City of Madison, Dane County, and Wisconsin Procurement Institute offered guidance and answered participant questions, strengthening collaboration and greater access to public-sector opportunities.

IMPACT AND LOOKING AHEAD

These initiatives have strengthened connections between local businesses and public agencies while broadening awareness of contracting opportunities. As a result, these small businesses are now better equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to enhance competitiveness and pursue growth.

Participants report greater confidence in navigating procurement systems, crafting stronger bids, and building professional partnerships. Through the TBE Program, OEI remains dedicated to empowering local firms, advancing economic inclusion, and sustaining a vibrant economy.

In partnership with community organizations and public agencies, OEI continues to foster deeper engagement and long-term economic resilience across Dane County. For updates on upcoming events and resources, visit our website at [Office for Equity and Inclusion](#) or contact the Targeted Business Program directly at (608) 266-4192.



MANAGER OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

CARRIE BRAXTON

Hello, Welcome to fall and the remainder of 2025! I am the Manager of Equal Employment Opportunity in the Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI); I have been in this role for seven years, in OEI for nine years, and I have to happily state that I have been with Dane County for 28 years. Sometimes I ask myself, where has the time gone? During that time, the experiences within the County, my department, past positions, and my current role have elevated my knowledge, skills, and connections continuously. I eagerly await whatever opportunities come next but putting County government first and foremost, is imperative!

I will now cover a few areas that I would like to highlight for you. I am hoping that you find the information interesting.

PARTNERING WITH DANE ARTS REFLECTION

As I walk around the OEI office at times, I notice the eye-catching artwork that we received through last years' partnership with Dane Arts, as well as other donated and reframed art work. It is a great reminder of collaboration within the County and how art can uplift the work space. It also continues to showcase the artwork of artists whose work may not be as well-known or viewed in various spaces. I am looking forward to continued collaborations with Dane Arts and other departments.

DANE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL FUN FAIR

On Sunday, July 13, 2025, I on behalf of OEI, participated in the Environmental Fun Fair held at the Lussier Family Heritage Center. It was advertised in English, Spanish, Hmong, and for the visually impaired. Rhiannon Buehler - Language Access and Reporting Specialist of OEI, worked diligently with Susan Sanford - Strategic Engagement Coordinator of Land and Water Resources Department and Angelika Neitzel - Early Literacy Librarian of Monona Public Library, to ensure OEI's participation. There were diverse books displayed on the OEI table, which served as great visuals and made for thought-provoking conversations about literacy, plus they could even be checked out. Additionally, the atmosphere was lively with nature, science, art, and mostly outdoor-centered activities that all ages especially youth, could partake and enjoy.

In addition to meeting the various attendees, I was able to visit with other Dane County staff who were representing their departments: such as Dane Arts and Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC). As the Manager of Equal Employment Opportunity, along with providing brochures, OEI water bottles, toys, and stickers, I discussed Dane County government which included employment-themed talks, but I also discussed literacy, specifically how important it is to know how to read so that one may be able to apply for employment and for other areas of one's life. Overall, the event went well and there appeared to be great interest not only in the environmental fun fair but also with Dane County government, which is a win-win to me!



MANAGER OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

CARRIE BRAKTON (CONTINUED)

INTERVIEW PANELS

Serving on interview panels is part of my duties. I find it rewarding while serving that I get to work with different departments, meet potential hires, and partake in an area where I may have input with choosing an applicant that can hopefully benefit one of Dane County's departments. This applicant may then receive gainful employment that may benefit their life in some way. Additionally, if an applicant is hired, then I will more than likely see them a bit later when I facilitate part of New Employee Orientation, which occurs generally every three weeks and my topics are Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment.

I was recently told by a newer hire that myself and another colleague, "Made them feel very welcomed and they felt they'd made the right choice in transitioning to Dane County". I really appreciated hearing that and it goes to show that a little bit of kindness can go a long way. That is the impact that I would like to continue to strive for!

Dane County Hiring 2019 through 2023

I am sharing an overview of Dane County hiring from the last three years 2022 through 2024. There has been a steady increase of staff hired over the past several years. That said over the past two years, there have been some retirements for various reasons as well.

Dane County Employees Total

2024 - Employees 2710, increase of 66 from 2023
2023 - Employees 2644, increase of 163 from 2022
2022 - Employees 2481, increase of 41 from 2021



Minority Staff

2024 - Employees 648, increase of 24 from 2023
2023 - Employees 624, increase of 69 from 2022
2022 - Employees 555, increase of 22 from 2021

Minority Managers Total

2024 - Minority managers 55, increase of 9 from 2023
2023 - Minority managers 46, increase of 7 from 2022
2022 - Minority managers 39, increase of 0 from 2021



Departments with the highest numbers of minority staff

Office for Equity and Inclusion - 62.5% minority staff
Juvenile Court Program - 50.0% minority staff
Badger Prairie (Human Services dept.) - 51.2% minority staff
Public Health - 30.1% minority staff
Administration - 37.0% minority staff



OVERVIEW & UPDATES ON LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE DATA COLLECTION

RHIANNON E. BUEHLER DE VALDIVIA

Thank you to departments who submitted their language assistance data! This information is very helpful and instrumental in helping the county serve its multilingual communities and operate more effectively, efficiently, and safely. This work is about eliminating barriers and making it as easy as possible for folks to access your department's programs, services, and activities.

Who submitted?

- Board of Supervisors
- Clerk of Courts
- Corporation Counsel
- Emergency Management
- Human Services
- Land and Water Resources
- Office for Equity and Inclusion
- Office of Energy and Climate Change
- Planning and Development
- Pretrial Services
- Public Health
- Sheriff's Office
- UW Extension
- Waste and Renewables

Didn't submit and don't know how to get your data? Let's get ready for the next data submission date: **December 15th, 2025**. Your data comes from a combination of places including the following:

1. Bilingual staff's use of language skills
2. Staff interpreter and translators
3. The language assistance vendors your department/office/functional area works with
 - a. Request a report of the data from the vendor or contractor or access your own account. Large, national/international vendors will have an online dashboard for customers to access.
 - i. For example, with [LanguageLine Solutions](#), you can ask our account manager for usage reports or you can sign-up and create an account and have access to live usage reports at [MyLanguageLine](https://my.languageline.com/portal/go/home/), <https://my.languageline.com/portal/go/home/>
4. Your own logs and tracking tools, including the Dane County Language Access Services Tracking Form
5. Emails and calendars – look back and see where you used language assistance

COUNTY BILINGUAL DESIGNATION TREND

TOTAL Dane County Employees* with a Bilingual Designation

ORG	DEPT	Functional Work Area Name	9/20 2023	10/28 2024	8/7 2025	11/12 2025
055	0700	The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity & Inclusion	1	1	1	1
060	0765	Clerk-Administration	2	2	2	1
168	1965	Child Support Agency	13	14	13	12
180	2040	Register of Deeds	1	1	1	1
288	2580	General Court Support	0	0	1	1
351	3065	Crime Response	1	1	1	1
351	3030	Criminal & Traffic – Adult	3	3	3	3
351	3075	Deferred Prosecution Program	1	2	2	2
351	3060	Victim Witness	3	4	4	4
385	3540	Public Safety Communications	0	0	3	3
396	3765	Emergency Medical Services	0	0	0	1
5115	6042	Aging & Disability Resource Center	4	4	2	3
515	6099	Behavioral Health-CCS	2	2	2	2
515	6096	Behavioral Health-Urgent Care	2	2	2	2
515	6054	Child Protective Services	5	5	5	4

COUNTY BILINGUAL DESIGNATION TREND

TOTAL Dane County Employees* with a Bilingual Designation (Continued)

ORG	DEPT	Functional Work Area Name	9/20 2023	10/28 2024	8/7 2025	11/12 2025
515	6050	CYF Administration	1	1	1	1
515	6044	Disability Services	2	3	3	3
515	6060	EAWS Administration	2	3	2	2
515	6062	Eligibility	34	40	40	39
515	6080	Housing Access & Affordability	1	1	1	1
515	6039	HS Administration	1	1	2	2
515	6070	P&EI Administration	1	1	1	1
515	6072	P&EI Community Programs	11	14	13	13
515	6053	Youth Justice	3	3	3	3
520	6130	Board of Health-Administration	11	18	24	25
612	6915	Library	1	1	1	1
684	7665	Zoo	0	0	0	1
720	7890	Extension	0	1	1	1
			106	128	134	134

*These employees are paid bilingual pay or are designated as bilingual in their title.

COUNTY BILINGUAL DESIGNATION TREND

Due to the number of total Dane County staff, about 2,700 full-time employees and 300 part-time employees, and the community need, ideally, we want a greater number of employees designated as bilingual, especially in departments that have high contact with the public and community members. It is good that there has been a steady increase (although stagnant for the last three months); it will be better when every department has at least one employee with a bilingual designation. We want our staff to meet community need and to be able to provide direct language support and communication as much as possible.

It's very good to see that Public Safety Communications, our 9-1-1 Center, has their first three positions designated as bilingual; General Court Support, the Clerk of Courts, also designated their first position bilingual! Congratulations! Emergency Management also designated their much needed first position as bilingual and so did the Zoo! Unfortunately, designations were lost with the County Clerk's Office, Child Support Agency and Dane County Department of Human Services' (DCDHS) Child Protective Services and Eligibility.

~More to come~

Stay tuned for specifics on the amount and type of language assistance provided and Dane County's top languages in an upcoming newsletter, as well as a language access guide for employees.

Didn't submit data, not sure where to begin?

One of the first things I suggest doing is setting up an account with LanguageLine Solutions, Inc. The county has an Omnia contract with them for lower government rates. To begin, complete and email a new account form to Megan Rogan (Rogan.Megan@danecounty.gov) in Purchasing, copying me, and she will help facilitate the account set-up.

This gives you quick coverage for the majority of languages that you may come in contact with during your course of work and should primarily be used for unscheduled communicative interactions.

You can ask Kelly Mistry (kmistry@languageline.com) our LanguageLine Solutions' account manager, for usage reports or you can sign-up and create a MyLanguageLine account and have access to live usage reports at [MyLanguageLine](#). It takes 24 hours to validate an account. For live data, go to the analytics' tab, which refreshes every 30 seconds.

When downloading the LanguageLine InSight app on devices, please instruct staff to label their device in the following manner: First Name Last Name and then acronym for their Department Name and Division and the type of device. For example: "Rhiannon Buehler OEI Laptop"; we're a small department without divisions. There is a 35-character maximum for device names. For a shared device, begin with the Department Name or acronym, then Division, if applicable, then storage location or device "home" (for example: Pod 3, Vehicle ##). It's important to know where the InSight App usage is coming from and this is most easily done by having the device labeled well.

COUNTY BILINGUAL DESIGNATION TREND

I also suggest ordering some of LanguageLine Solutions' complimentary support materials. It's helpful for everyone to have a quick reference guide postcard and badge and the label stickers can go on everything. I'd order a couple extras in case they get lost, for new staff, and for work vehicles. The language ID guide is also useful and so is the desktop display, and it's all free.

For the most part, I only suggest using telephonic and video remote interpretation (VRI) for unscheduled interactions, as it costs about the same amount as an in-person interpreter, and in-person language assistance is almost always going to be a more accurate and effective form of communication.

Ideally, this is the preferred order for the methods of providing language assistance:

1. Direct in-language communication (in-person preferred or virtual, via telephone as needed)
*Direct means Spanish to Spanish, Arabic to Arabic, etc. without going in and out of English or another language. Multilingual staff are a great solution to being able to provide this form of language assistance.
2. Indirect qualified in-person (oral, visual, etc.) interpretation (provided by staff, contractors, freelancers)
*Indirect means at least 3 people are involved in the interaction, with the interpreter acting as the language conduit.
3. Indirect video remote interpretation (oral, visual, VRI)
4. Indirect telephonic or over-the-phone interpretation (oral, OPI)
5. Indirect written translation
6. A combination of all of the above ways

A very brief explanation:

*Internal staff know the lingo and are able to communicate directly, thus omitting more chances for error and not doubling or tripling the amount of time needed to communicate. Visual cues and body language are a huge part of communication; when you don't have the visuals, aspects of communication get lost. Adding technology also increases the possibility for disruptions due to not being close enough to a microphone, device malfunctions, inaccuracies, and many other reasons.

Ellen Derge, our Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, and I are happy to meet with you to discuss any questions you may have about language access and effective communication! Please see Rodrigo's article to learn more about employee bilingual testing and the bilingual designation process.

INTERESTED IN LANGUAGE ACCESS? JOIN THE DANE COUNTY LANGUAGE ACCESS WORK GROUP!

The Dane County Language Access Work Group (DC LAWG) currently consists of representation from Public Health, Human Services, Sheriff's Office (Field and Security Services), the OEI, Procurement, Planning and Development, Office of the Dane County Board of Supervisors, Information Management, Corporation Counsel – Child Support Agency, Public Safety Communications, Administration – Facilities Management, Highway and Transportation, Land & Water Resources, Office of Energy and Climate Change, the District Attorney's Office – Deferred Prosecution Program and Victim Witness Services, Emergency Management, Clerk of Courts, Waste and Renewables, Office of Justice Reform, Pretrial Services, Extension, Arts and Cultural Affairs, and the Zoo!

DC LAWG is usually scheduled to meet the fourth Wednesday of the month at 9:00 a.m., with some changes due to holidays or special meetings. Preferably this meeting is in-person with a hybrid option available. Members can participate as they are able; it's a no pressure group.

We will usually begin meeting in OEI conference room 356 with in-person small groups eventually moving to meeting room 354.

This is a great group for your department, office, or work area's language access point of contact to exchange ideas, learn from others, and stay in the loop! Please reach out if you would like me to add you to the calendar invitation!



APRIL 2025 DC LAWG RETREAT PHOTOS HOSTED BY LAND & WATER RESOURCES



IN-PERSON TRAINING UPDATE

Over the past year, I facilitated in-person training on providing meaningful language access to around 700 Dane County employees. The trainings ranged in length from one hour to four hours and included:

- Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) leadership group in August 2024 (around 25 people)
- OEI in October 2024 (6 people)
- Dane County Managers and Supervisors in November 2024 (around 120 people)
- Highway and Transportation in January and April 2025 (around 140 people)
- Administration's Facilities' Division in February 2025 (5 people)
- Sheriff's Office sworn officers in February, March, and April (around 400 staff)
- Emergency Management in October 2025 (10 people). *Ellen and I both facilitated this workshop.

Ellen and I will be training the Sheriff's Office civilian professionals in December 2025. We hope to train, in collaboration with you, another 700 staff next year.



With abundance and peace, and gratitude,

Rhiannon

Rhiannon E. Buehler de Valdivia | Language Access & Reporting Specialist
The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion
210 MLK Jr. Boulevard, Room 356, Madison, WI 53703
Phone: (608) 283-1656 **Fax:** (608) 266-2138 **Email:** Buehler.Rhiannon@danecounty.gov



THE APRIL 24, 2026, WCAG DEADLINE FOR PUBLIC ENTITIES

By Ellen Derge

The date of **April 24, 2026**, marks a significant milestone in digital accessibility, specifically for state and local government in the United States. On this date, a final rule under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), published by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), requires that public entities make their web content and mobile applications accessible to people with disabilities, in compliance with specific Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards.

The New Rule at a Glance

The DOJ's new regulation establishes WCAG 2.1 Level AA as the technical standard for accessibility. This rule is designed to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to the services, programs, and activities provided by state and local government entities.

<https://www.ada.gov/resources/web-rule-first-steps/>

Who is Affected and by When?

The compliance deadlines are tiered based on population size. Dane County will be expected to be compliant by April 24, 2026.

This rule extends beyond traditional websites to cover a wide range of digital assets, including social media posts, PDFs, word documents, online forms, and mobile apps. Content created by third parties may also be covered if it is a necessary part of the public entity's services.

Preparing for the Deadline

Non-compliance can result in lawsuits and significant financial penalties. With the 2026 deadline approaching, Dane County Departments are encouraged to:

- **Audit** their existing web content and any mobile apps to identify accessibility barriers.
- **Remediate** inaccessible content and implement strategies for ongoing accessibility management.
- **Train** staff on creating accessible digital content.

The U.S. Department of Justice provides resources and guidance on the new rule on their ADA.gov website.

If you or your department are interested in more information or training opportunities please reach out to:

Ellen Derge (she/her)
ADA Coordinator
derge.ellen@danecounty.gov
Phone: (608) 267-1520



DANE COUNTY

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NOTIFICATION SIGN-UP

Dane County Emergency Management provides several services to citizens, businesses, and local governments. These services include coordinating emergency responses; assisting citizens, cities, towns, schools, and businesses to create emergency plans; developing community hazard mitigation plans; operating the countywide tornado siren and other emergency alerts, and organizing Emergency Medical Services. It is important that you are prepared as much as possible and know what to do in the event of an emergency. A key factor in knowing what, where and when is Dane County Emergency Notification.

The Dane County Emergency Telephone Notification is the official emergency notification system used by Dane County first response agencies to communicate with community members during emergencies. Sign up now to receive free alerts via text message, email, and/or voice message.

Add your addresses (home, work, school) to receive geo-targeted alerts

Indicate what types of alerts you want to receive, including weather, evacuation orders, armed person/active shooter, hazardous materials incidents, gas leaks, missing persons, and more.

Indicate how you want to be notified: text, email, and/or voice message.

To sign up and receive emergency notifications go to

[https://www.smart911.com/smart911/registration/registrationLanding.action?
cdnExternalPath=](https://www.smart911.com/smart911/registration/registrationLanding.action?cdnExternalPath=)



**Sign up to
receive alerts**

Emergency alerts and notifications via
Phone call, text message, email and social media





OEI NEWSLETTER
VOL. 5

P | DESIGNED BY
PUENTE CREATIVE STUDIOS