

## Merit System Services

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# What Is Merit System Services?

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Merit System is the process of hiring and promoting government employees based on their ability to perform a job, rather than on their political connections. Federal legislation established the following six merit principles that apply to those state and local governments that are required to operate a Merit Personnel System as a condition of eligibility for Federal assistance or participation in an intergovernmental program.

## **Merit Principle 1 – Recruitment and Selection**

Employees are recruited, selected, and advanced on the basis of their relative ability, knowledge, and skills, including open consideration of qualified applicants for initial appointment.

## **Merit Principle 2 – Compensation**

Merit Employees are paid equitable and adequate compensation.

## **Merit Principle 3 – Training**

Employees are trained, as needed, to assure high quality principles.

## **Merit Principle 4 – Employee Retention**

Employees are retained on the basis of the adequacy of their performance, correcting inadequate performance, and separating employees whose inadequate performance cannot be corrected.

## **Merit Principle 5 – Fair Treatment**

Applicants and employees are treated fairly in all aspects of personnel administration without regard to political affiliation, race, color, national origin, sex, religious creed, age, or disability and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights as citizens. This “fair treatment” principle includes compliance with the Federal equal employment opportunity and nondiscrimination laws.

## **Merit Principle 6 – Political Rights and Prohibitions**

Employees are protected against coercion for partisan political purposes and are prohibited from using their official authority for purposes of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for office.

Pursuant to California Government Code Section 19800 – 19810, the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that counties that receive federal funds for programs within their Social Services and Child Support Services departments adhere to the federal merit principles. Merit System Services (MSS) provides Recruitment and Selection, and Classification services that meet the federal mandates by following the Local Agency Personnel Standards (LAPS).

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## Local Agency Personnel Standards

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The [LAPS](#) are the regulations that govern the proper administration of recruitment and selection processes and classification plans and structures for the administration of a Merit Personnel System for employees of the covered Social Services and Child Support Services Departments.

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## Counties Covered by Merit System Services

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Merit System Services connects people with career opportunities in Social Services and Child Support Services Departments in the following California counties:

[Alpine](#)  
[Amador](#)  
[Calaveras](#)  
[Colusa](#)  
[Del Norte](#)  
[El Dorado](#)  
[Glenn](#)  
[Humboldt](#)  
[Imperial](#)

[Inyo](#)  
[Lake](#)  
[Lassen](#)  
[Madera](#)  
[Mariposa](#)  
[Merced](#)  
[Modoc](#)  
[Mono](#)  
[Monterey](#)

[Plumas](#)  
[San Benito](#)  
[Sierra](#)  
[Sutter](#)  
[Tehama](#)  
[Tuolumne](#)  
[Trinity](#)

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## Application Information

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All completed applications will be screened against the minimum qualifications listed on the job announcement. Approved applications may be evaluated further to identify the most qualified applicants. MSS will notify you via email of your status after your application has been reviewed. Applications will typically be reviewed within two to three (2-3) days. Selected applicants will be invited to the next step of the examination process. Tentative examination dates are posted on the job announcement.

All communication from MSS regarding the status of your application, test scheduling, test results, etc. will be sent via email. Notification/status information will be emailed to you at each step in the recruitment process. **Please ensure your NEOGOV account is set-up to receive email notifications.** You can verify that your account is set-up to receive email notifications by going into your account setting and viewing the notification preference section. Failure to have "Email" selected as the preferred notification method will result in missed candidate communication from our office. It is your responsibility to ensure that your account is set up to receive email notifications from our office.

The examination process may include one or more of the following components: application evaluation, competitive rating of the application, supplemental questionnaire; written examination; job-related exercise; writing assessment; computer skills examination; or structured oral examination.

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## Tips for Completing Your Application

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The following are some tips for completing an application. This information is provided to encourage your full and accurate completion of the application as a key step in the selection process.

- Take your time and make sure the application is an accurate representation of your qualifications.
- Provide sufficient details of your duties and responsibilities. Job titles do not tell us about the breadth and depth of your experience.
- If multiple positions were held, list each position separately as an individual entry. For example, Social Worker I, II, III would be listed as three different job entries.
- Don't use acronyms or slang.

### **Before you begin the application:**

The application requires specific information about your work experience and/or educational background. It is a good idea to have information or documents that will help you complete the application. Some of this information includes:

- A current resume or previous employment application to remind you of dates of previous employment, job titles held, the name and title of your current and previous supervisor(s), and job duties performed.
- Current college transcripts showing courses completed, academic units (semester or quarter units) completed, and the actual or projected dates for degree completion.
- Applicants who completed their education outside of the United States must submit verification of degree and/or course equivalency by the application deadline. To find more information on degree verification, please see the Foreign Degree Verification section below.
- A copy of current or previous job descriptions and/or class specifications for jobs you held. Do not copy and paste directly from a job description; instead, it is suggested that you use these job description and/or class specifications as an additional tool to assist you when describing the specific duties and responsibilities that you performed.
- A copy of or access to the job announcement for the position for which you are applying. This is a helpful document to refer to, as a reminder of the final filing date, and a resource for confirming that you meet the minimum requirements for the position.

### **Please note:**

- The job announcement will not be available online after the application deadline. Please print/save a copy for your records.
- Be sure to update your profile with any new information when applying for future jobs.

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## Foreign Degree Verification

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Applicants who completed their education outside of the United State must submit verification of degree and/or course equivalency by the application deadline. Organization that provide foreign education credential evaluation services can be found at [NACES](#). MSS will accept verification of degree and/or course equivalency from any of the listed member agencies. You must attach the documentation to your application before it is submitted.

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## Special Testing Arrangements

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Special testing arrangements may be made to accommodate applicants for disability, military or religious reasons. If you require such arrangements, please contact MSS at [mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov](mailto:mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov) or 916-323-2360 upon notification that your application has been approved. Documentation from medical, military, school or church officials outlining the accommodation request must be received by our office a minimum of five business days prior to a scheduled examination.

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## Appeals Process

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You may appeal examination decisions to CalHR on the following grounds:

- For alleged irregularity, discrimination, bias, or fraud in one or more steps in an examination, or
- For alleged improper acts or circumstance resulting in erroneous interpretation and application, by the examiners, or the skills, knowledge and abilities considered to be essential for satisfactory performance in the class for which the candidate is being examined.

Therefore, your appeal will have to demonstrate how the examination or your results fall into one of these two categories.

Appeals of decisions from selection procedures must be filed in writing with CalHR within 30 calendar days of the date on which notification of the results of the selection process were mailed to the candidate. Please note that notifying or conferring with Merit System Services does not extend the time for filing an appeal with CalHR. Your rights may be lost if you fail to file with CalHR within the 30-day time limit. Your appeal should include a description of the facts that support your contention that the selection process was improper.

### **Appellants should mail or fax appeals to:**

California Department of Human Resources (CalHR)  
Attn: Merit System Appeals  
1515 S Street, North Building, Suite 543  
Sacramento, CA 95811

### **Appeals can also be emailed to:**

[mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov](mailto:mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov)

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## Written Examinations

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If a written examination is part of the exam process, MSS will send you a notification indicating the date, time, location, length of examination, and materials for you to bring to the examination. Please pay close attention to the tentative examination dates on the job announcement. When you take a written examination, you are demonstrating your knowledge, skills, and abilities as they relate to a given job classification. Written examinations are the basis of evaluation of your potential for success on the job. Aids such as dictionaries and calculators are not allowed.

Currently, MSS does not have study aids for written examinations. However, MSS has been granted permission from Los Angeles County to share written examination information available on their [website](#). While the sample tests were developed specifically for Los Angeles County, the information included is beneficial for all applicants. These guides address subject areas that are commonly assessed on written examinations.

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## Subtests of Written Examinations

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MSS Exams may include one or more of the subtests listed below.

Exam Title	Subtests
<b>Accountant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accounting Principles and Practices</li> <li>• Financial Analysis and Practices</li> <li>• Auditing Principles and Practices</li> <li>• Mathematical Ability</li> <li>• Analytical Ability</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> </ul>
<b>Account Clerk, Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office Practices and Procedures</li> <li>• Bookkeeping Practices</li> <li>• Accounting Problems</li> <li>• Working Relationships</li> <li>• Ability to Follow Directions</li> </ul>
<b>Account Clerk, Entry Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to Work Rapidly with Data/Information</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Numerical Skills</li> <li>• Understanding Written Information</li> <li>• Knowledge of Basic Accounting/Bookkeeping</li> </ul>
<b>Accounting Technician</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accounting and Auditing Principles and Practices</li> <li>• Accounting Problems</li> <li>• Analytical Ability</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Working with Others/Interpersonal Skills</li> </ul>
<b>Child Support Specialist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Written Material</li> <li>• English Usage</li> <li>• Numerical Skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal Communications and Interviewing</li> </ul>
<b>Clerical, Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Reading Comprehension</li> </ul>
<b>Clerical, Entry Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alphabetize, File and Code Information</li> <li>• Speed and Accuracy in Filing, Checking and Coding</li> <li>• Editing (Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar)</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Reading and Understanding Written Information</li> <li>• Numerical Skills</li> </ul>

Exam Title	Subtests
<b>Eligibility Specialist I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits Calculations/Data Analysis</li> <li>• Computer Usage</li> <li>• Problem Solving/Analytical</li> <li>• Reading Comprehension</li> <li>• Record Keeping</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> </ul>
<b>Employment and Training Worker I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Office – Numerical and Alphabetical</li> <li>• Analytical Ability</li> <li>• Interviewing Principles</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Interpersonal Skills/Customer Service</li> <li>• Employment and Training/Social Services</li> </ul>
<b>Integrated Case Worker I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Office Skills – Numerical and Alphabetical</li> <li>• Analytical Ability</li> <li>• Interviewing Principles</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Interpersonal Skills/Customer Service</li> <li>• Employment and Training/Social Services</li> <li>• Benefit Determinations</li> </ul>
<b>Legal Clerk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clerical Skills</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Public and Interpersonal Relations</li> <li>• Problem Solving, Analysis, Mathematical Ability</li> </ul>
<b>Office Assistant Supervisor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clerical Skills and Abilities</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Analytical Ability</li> <li>• Interpersonal Relations</li> <li>• Supervision</li> </ul>
<b>Social Service Aide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clerical Skills and Abilities</li> <li>• Reading and Interpreting Written Information</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Public and Interpersonal Relations</li> <li>• Effective Working Relations</li> </ul>
<b>Social Worker I/II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical Ability</li> <li>• Interviewing Principles</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Interpersonal Skills</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Services Analyst I/II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical Reasoning/Problem Solving</li> <li>• Math and Statistics</li> <li>• Written Communication</li> <li>• Interpersonal Skills</li> </ul>
<b>Support Services Assistant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Filing and Checking</li> <li>• Understanding Written Information</li> <li>• Interpersonal Relations</li> <li>• Written Communication/English Language Skills</li> <li>• Basic Computer Skills</li> </ul>

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## Test Taking Tips for the Written Examination

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- The test items are multiple choice. They are designed to have only one answer. More than one answer may seem correct, but only select the best of the choices offered.
- Read all of the directions carefully.
- Read each question completely before answering it.
- It is in your best interest to answer all of the questions, even if you have to guess. Your score will be based on the number of correct answers.
- If you have the option of choosing what section you want to begin with, consider which would be the best for you. Would it be better to begin with the section you find the most difficult or to begin with the easiest? For some people, answering the easy questions first is a time saver and a confidence builder.
- Periodically check to make sure your answer sheet is correct and corresponds to the question you are on.
- Periodically check the clock; do not spend too much time on any one question.
- Interpret words according to their generally accepted meanings.
- The process of elimination can help you choose the correct answer in a multiple-choice exam. Start by crossing off answers that can't be correct. Then spend your time focusing on the possible correct choices.
- When you are finished and have extra time, don't stop! Go back to review your answers where allowed, making sure you didn't make any careless mistakes, such as putting the right answer in the wrong place.

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## Transferring Written Test Scores/Retest Policy

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Applicants are not permitted to take the same version of a test within six months of the date that they last took the exam. Applicants who have taken the same version within the last six months will have their scores transferred from the last recruitment to the current recruitment(s) that require that specific version. MSS will notify all applicants whose scores are being transferred. Applicants who receive notification of being scheduled for a written examination are not eligible to have their scores transferred, and must take the exam in order to continue in the recruitment process.

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please call MSS at (916) 323-2360.

If you are scheduled for multiple exams with the same examination number on the same day, OR if you believe you have taken the examination number in the past six months, please contact MSS prior to the scheduled examination date to request your scores be transferred. If you do not contact MSS prior to the scheduled examination date, your scores will not be transferred.

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## Structured Oral Examination

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If a structured oral examination is part of the exam process, you will receive an email or phone call to solicit your interest and availability in attending the structured oral examination. If you are interested and available, MSS will send you a notification indicating the date, time, and location.

Late arrivals and other persons not approved for this specific examination will not be allowed to participate.

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## Purpose of the Structured Oral Examination

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An oral examination is not a hiring interview, even though it is conducted in an interview format. The structured oral examination is a selection tool that is used to measure job characteristics that are difficult to measure via a written test, such as oral communication and interpersonal skills. The examination is also used to evaluate a candidate's ability to perform a job.

It is important to note that the panelists are not given a copy of your application or resume; therefore, it is important that your responses to the questions be detailed and provide sufficient information about your qualifications.

Read [Preparing for the Structured Oral Exam](#) for additional information and tips for preparing for the structured oral exam.

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## Examination Results

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You may expect examination results in approximately two weeks following the date of the examination. Results of some examinations may take a longer or shorter period of time, depending on the number of candidates and the length of time it takes to process all candidates. The results will also be provided to the county and they will use this information in determining the next steps of the hiring process.

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## Bilingual Examination General Information

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The State of California Department of Social Services (CDSS), which oversees the delivery of welfare and other social services provided by counties throughout the state, has directed that only those applicants who pass the exam are eligible to hold bilingual designated positions which require the employee to serve non-English speaking clientele. The CDSS made this decision because of its desire to ensure that each client receives effective bilingual services and accurate information. The agency recognized that employees who interview non-English speaking clients must be reasonably fluent in the client's language. Without an acceptable level of fluency, an employee could convey inaccurate and/or incomplete information, or misunderstand information provided by the client. Either case could affect a client's eligibility for benefits or create delays in the receipt of benefits. In an effort to diminish risk, the CDSS directed CalHR to develop and administer an examination which measures the language skills of the employees who will serve non-English speaking clients. The bilingual examination is in addition to the competitive examination(s) that are required for the position. Currently, MSS only administers bilingual examinations for Spanish.

## Bilingual Examination Components, Administration and Results

Depending on the position that is associated with the bilingual exam, the exam may be comprised of either an Oral component only, or a Multiple Choice Written Exam and Oral component.

In most instances the Multiple Choice Written Exam will be administered to a group of applicants. Aids such as dictionaries, notes, or other resource materials are prohibited.

The Oral Performance Component is administered to one applicant at a time with a trained proctor present in the room. The applicant speaks into a tape recorder.

Applicants use a Scantron sheet for the Multiple Choice Written Exam. Answer sheets are then electronically scored based on the number of questions answered correctly.

One subject matter expert (SME) will evaluate the Oral Performance Component by listening to the applicant's oral exam tape recording. When evaluating your performance, the SME assesses the accuracy level of your renditions. Specifically, he or she identifies errors in the dimensions tested and determines whether or not an error (or omission) led to a change of meaning, or may create confusion in the listener's mind.

The dimensions tested on the bilingual examination are: basic vocabulary, language register, grammar, word distortion and or inventions, pronunciation, accuracy, comprehension of the material, pronounced hesitations or repeated unsuccessful attempts to interpret/translate and literal renditions.

Once you pass a component, you will not need to re-take that particular exam.

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## Job Previews

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These videos provide Social Worker and Eligibility Specialist with a preview to the challenges, benefits, and rewards of the jobs, as well as the emotional context in which they will work in.

### Social Worker:

Watch a short video about Social Workers:

[Social Worker Video on YouTube](#)

### Eligibility Specialist:

Watch a short video about Eligibility Specialists:

[Eligibility Specialist Video on YouTube](#)

To view the full class specification for the Social Worker or Eligibility Specialist, please click [here](#).

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## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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### Why am I not receiving emails from Merit System Services?

You may need to add MSS as a safe sender for your email account. Please add emails with the extension of @calhr.ca.gov and @cpshr.us to your safe sender email list (example: [mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov](mailto:mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov) and [mss@cpshr.us](mailto:mss@cpshr.us)). This will help ensure that you receive all notifications. Periodically check your spam folder.

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### What if I don't have a computer?

If you do not have access to a computer, you may visit a local library to use a public computer. Keep in mind that all notifications will be sent to you via email.

If you are unable to apply online due to a disability, a special accommodation may be made for applicants with disabilities. If you require such arrangements, please contact MSS at [mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov](mailto:mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov) or (916) 323-2360 or at [mss@cpshr.us](mailto:mss@cpshr.us) or (916) 471-3507.

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### What if the position I am interested in is not currently open?

MSS only accepts applications for positions that are currently open and posted on our Career Page. Applicants are encouraged to check the web page frequently for new postings. Job openings may be posted for a restricted time, applicants are encouraged to apply in a timely manner. If you are interested in a position that MSS is not currently accepting applications for, you can submit an interest card for the position.

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### How much information should I include on my application?

The information you include in your online profile and any other recruitment and selection related documentation are integral parts of your examination and will be reviewed and evaluated based on the current job requirements. Only the education, experience, and training you list will be compared to the criteria measuring the qualifications for this job, and only applicants with the most relevant education, experience, and training will be included in each phase of the selection process. Therefore, it is especially important that your responses to each component of this process be as complete and detailed as possible. Be sure to list all relevant education, experience, and/or training that should be considered for the job you are applying for are included in the appropriate sections.

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### How do I attach additional documents to my application?

The last step before submitting your application is uploading attachments. First, use "Choose attachment type" to select the type, and then use the "Upload" button to browse and select your attachment.

If you have previously uploaded attachments, you can use the “Recent Uploads” button to access these files.

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#### What happens to my application after it has been submitted?

Your application will be reviewed to determine if you meet the minimum qualifications that are listed on the job announcement. You will receive notification from MSS once your application has been screened.

Following the initial review, those applicants deemed to have met the minimum qualifications will be subject to further evaluation consisting of one or more of the following items: application evaluation, competitive rating of the application, supplemental questionnaire; written examination; job-related exercise; writing assessment; computer skills examination; or structured oral examination. The tentative examination types and dates are listed on the job announcement along with tentative examination dates.

Following completion of the evaluation process, an “Eligible List” is developed. Applicants are notified of their status, and the “Eligible List” is referred to the county department for which you applied, who may then conduct hiring interviews.

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#### Can I change my application after it has been submitted?

Once your application has been submitted, you can’t make any changes to your education or work experience. Therefore, it is important that you enter all of your relevant education (degrees earned or in progress; units completed) and work experience that demonstrates how you meet the minimum qualifications of the position.

If your name, email address or other profile information has changed you can log in to Government Jobs and update that information. Those changes will be reflected for notification purposes for any active applications.

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#### What if I’m scheduled for more than one test on the same day?

Please contact MSS at [mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov](mailto:mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov) or (916) 323-2360 or at [mss@cpshr.us](mailto:mss@cpshr.us) or (916) 471-3507, depending on the examinations you are scheduled for, your scores may be transferred to multiple examinations.

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#### My application was approved, now what?

If your application is approved, you will be notified of the next step in the examination process (written examination, structured oral examination, or placement on an eligible list) as soon as the examination dates and locations have been scheduled, or as soon as the eligible list is established.

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### [I'm on the eligible list, now what?](#)

Any future contact regarding the recruitment will be initiated by the local agency department based on their hiring rules and timeline. Be advised that the department may not contact each person on the eligible list before a selection is made. Please allow a minimum of two weeks before following up with the department on the status of the list and hiring process.

You must advise the local agency department of a change in name, address, telephone number, and/or email address. If you would like your name removed from the eligible list, or would like information on the current status of the eligible list, please contact the local agency department.

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## Contact Us

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We're easy to reach...

California Department of Human Resources (CalHR)  
Merit System Services  
1515 S Street, North Building, Suite 500  
Sacramento, CA 95811  
Email: [mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov](mailto:mssprogram@calhr.ca.gov)  
Telephone: (916) 323-2360  
Fax: (916) 327-1886

CPS HR Consulting  
Merit System Services  
2450 Del Paso Road, Suite 220  
Sacramento, CA 95834  
Email: [mss@cpshr.us](mailto:mss@cpshr.us)  
Telephone: (916) 471-3507  
Fax: (916) 648-1211

Our business hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

*The Merit System Services Program is administered by the California Department of Human Resources.*

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