

**ENGLISH FOR HERITAGE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

REPORT ON FEASIBILITY STUDY AND PROPOSAL FOR PILOT PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted to

NATIONAL SECURITY EDUCATION PROGRAM



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Executive Summary

In order to carry out its mission effectively, the U.S. defense and intelligence community needs personnel who are proficient speakers of a number of critical languages. One source of such personnel is communities of heritage language speakers in the United States that include U.S. citizens who are highly proficient in their native languages but lack the English language proficiency to carry out work-related duties effectively.

To address this situation, in 2004 the U.S. Congress amended subsection (a)(1) of section 802 of the David L. Boren National Security Education Act of 1991 (50 U.S.C. 1902) to include the provision of scholarships for heritage speakers of languages that are critical to U.S. security interests. The scholarships will enable heritage speakers to study English at U.S. universities. Scholarships will be awarded only to U.S. citizens who agree to fulfill the federal service requirement specified for all scholarship recipients under the Boren Act.

Feasibility Study

In February 2005 the National Security Education Program (NSEP) asked the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to study the feasibility of an English for Heritage Language Speakers (EHLS) program that would implement the legislative requirements of the amendment cited above. CAL collected information from federal agencies and consulted with heritage experts, ESL experts, and ESL assessment experts.

Federal agency respondents indicated that (in rank order) Arabic, Persian, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Pashto, Urdu, and Korean were the most critical languages. They listed translation, interpretation, conversation, presentations, and reading as the primary work-related purposes for which nonnative speakers of English currently on staff use English, and noted that writing is the skill in which those staffers most need training. Work-related tasks require a minimum proficiency level of 3 on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale.¹

Heritage language consultants in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian agreed that the program would need to recruit heritage speakers who were educated through college in the heritage language to ensure professional-level heritage language proficiency. They concurred that the EHLS program would be an attractive opportunity for professional development for heritage speakers who are U.S. citizens. Locating the EHLS program in cities with substantial heritage populations would facilitate recruitment.

The ESL experts made recommendations on program structure, instructional approach(es), curriculum, and support to help participants achieve the target proficiency goals. Instruction

¹ The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) coordinates language instruction among U.S. government agencies. Its language proficiency scale describes what a person is able to do with language on a scale from 0 (“no proficiency”) to 5 (“functionally native proficiency”). Listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation are rated on separate scales. Level 2 is considered “general working proficiency,” and Level 3 is considered “general professional proficiency.”

should focus on vocabulary development, sociolinguistic considerations, and fossilized language errors, and should develop metalinguistic knowledge and language learning strategies. Small cohorts of participants from the same language background would allow instruction to address individual needs and specific cross-language issues. The experts also suggested that the program consist of 720 hours (24 weeks) of intensive classroom instruction, tutorials, and support activities, and that the curriculum be built around workplace activities and materials and include a strong technology component. A corps of mentors who are current federal agency employees could provide one-on-one mentoring for program participants. Finally, the experts recommended that CAL select partner universities with established intensive English programs and experience in the development and provision of courses in English for professional purposes.

The ESL assessment experts noted that government agencies rate language proficiency on the ILR scale, so assessment at program entry and program exit must be aligned with this scale. Language proficiency in both English and the heritage language must be assessed at entry. For heritage language testing, the experts suggested either the Defense Language Proficiency Test (from the Defense Language Institute) or the assessments used by the universities participating in the National Flagship Language Initiative. For English language testing, they noted that commercially available tests are not aligned with the ILR scale and do not have appropriate content. They therefore suggested the Defense Language Institute's English Language Proficiency Test, which is appropriate with respect to level and content and is aligned with the ILR scale. For assessment of progress during the program, the experts suggested diagnostic testing at the outset to identify strengths and needs and develop individual learning plans, and formative assessment to track progress and adjust the plans as needed. The experts suggested that the EHLS partner institutions of higher education would likely have diagnostic and formative assessment instruments and procedures in place that could be adapted for use in the EHLS program.

EHLS PROGRAM FEASIBILITY

On the basis of its research, CAL has determined that a first-year pilot of the EHLS program will be feasible under the following conditions:

- ❖ The program must develop a public presence that will enable it to recruit successfully within the target heritage communities.
- ❖ The program must take place at institutions of higher education that have established intensive English programs, experience in the development and provision of programs and courses in English for professional purposes, and connections with heritage communities in the area around them.
- ❖ The program must obtain access to assessment instruments that measure participants' language proficiency in relation to the ILR scale.

Pilot Program Proposal

CAL proposes to initiate the EHLS program with two institutions of higher education in the first pilot year. They will be selected on the basis of experience and connections with heritage language communities. For the first pilot year, one partner institution will enroll a cohort of heritage speakers of Arabic, and the other will enroll a cohort of heritage speakers of either Russian or Mandarin Chinese. The program will provide 720 hours (24 weeks) of instruction over a maximum of eight months and will combine classroom language instruction with tutorials, Web-based learning, and extracurricular activities. With assistance from NSEP, CAL will obtain work materials and tasks from federal agencies; CAL and NSEP will advise the partner institutions as they incorporate these materials into a curriculum that simulates a professional context in terms of materials, activities, and expectations while also addressing individual needs and developing metalinguistic awareness and language learning strategies. CAL and NSEP will work together to establish a mentoring program that pairs program participants with current federal personnel.

CAL, NSEP, and the institutions of higher education will develop a public presence (including a Web site) for the EHLS program that presents participation as a professional development opportunity. NSEP will help participants find positions to fulfill their service requirement.

The admission process will involve preliminary screening and English and heritage language assessment. During the program, assessment will include initial diagnostic testing and ongoing formative assessment. Assessment will enable CAL and its partners to evaluate the program while it is in progress. At exit, participants' English proficiency will be assessed using the same instruments used at entry, and instructors will generate a narrative description of each participant's skill levels. The formative and exit assessments will demonstrate the effectiveness of the first year pilot and identify aspects that require adjustment or improvement.