

USA Federal Language Framework US

Language Policy



Good Practice Executive Summary

The United States of America is taking a strategic approach to the development of its language & culture capacity through the creation of a pipeline throughout the education-employment spectrum to produce linguistically capable and culturally aware citizens. Hence although the focus of the Lilama project is on language policy for employment, this approach has the advantage of being sustainable in the long run whilst responding in gradual steps to immediate business need. Many of the recommendations of its newly-formed Framework and Policy may seem familiar to a European audience, however for a nation such as the United States it is an innovative and effective solution to a broad need.

The approach taken in the United States is that to achieve large enough cadres of individuals with the level of proficiency required to conduct effective communications in another language requires instruction of that language across the education-employment range. It requires universal or near-universal learning of a language other than English from the primary levels of education, so as to develop very widespread language and cultural fluency, with very advanced language ability and learning of less commonly taught languages being developed primarily at college levels of education. The availability in the medium-to-long term of a pool of foreign language speakers emerging from the mainstream education system will relieve the need for business to engage in ongoing extended language training for key target markets. Efforts are therefore made to ensure that the languages taught include those needed by prospective employers, both government and private.

A second feature of the strategy is that a primary funding source of efforts to introduce languages needed by commerce and government and to teach them to very advanced levels is the Department of Defence, including the NSA. The languages targetted are therefore also those required for national security interests. This has been balanced against the instruction of traditional languages, and there is therefore a healthy combination of the two. Frequent mention is therefore made of 'critical' languages, i.e. those which are critical to the nation's national interests. The strategy encourages building on the skills of the heritage communities, which are defined as those resident communities consisting of immigrants from non-English-speaking nations and their children. This is a feature of society which is particularly strong in the USA.

Proficiency is measured through the government's ILR (and the academic ACTFL) scales, which have been matched in this file to the CEFR scale.

The Framework and Policy have a background in a robust series of consultation exercises at government, business and education levels. These include the Metro Language series, the Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities in 2005, the 2006 Education for Global Leadership statement by the Committee for Economic Development (CED), the work of the federal Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) and, the guidance by the National Foreign Language Center and support of several federal departments including Defense, State & Commerce. Other highly influential monographs in the process of raising American awareness of the need for greatly improved foreign language capability are included in note 1 at the end of the dossier file. The NLPR is a non-governmental group of private citizens, which includes some people, like Drs. Brecht and Slater and Ambassador Lemmon, who are concerned with language policy in their official positions. However, the NLPR does not (yet) have any influence on policy.

The Framework and Policy have been designed & financed at federal level, however implementation occurs predominantly at State and local levels, with some states more proactive in establishing programmes. Pilot activity has been conducted in certain states, such as the heritage work in Maryland and the roadmaps in Ohio, Oregon, Utah and Texas. At federal level the salient feature of the roundtables is that they bring together decision-makers at strategic and operational level across the range of stakeholder agencies to ensure that the Framework and Policy recommendations are coordinated and implemented. There has been a great deal of effort in planning and collaboration among those interested in language education, and Dr. Slater's Flagship programs require close coordination among participating institutions. But true national coordination is the missing element.

There is a focus on both business and security, and recognition that in addition to the multinational and SME communities as key employers, the government itself is a major source of employment, including the employment of those with the language & intercultural skills. As the Lilama project is focussed on languages for employment, we recommend that this source of employment is included in the mix.

The content of this dossier file is based on a series of meetings in & around Washington DC from 14-17 July 2009 and on published information provided at those meetings. The organisations visited include the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC), the Department of Defense National Security Education Program (NSEP), the Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), the International Center for Language Studies, and LLE Communications.

The publications consulted include the 2006 CED 'Education for Global Leadership', the 2005 Department of Defense 'Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities', the NSEP Annual Review, the 2009 NFLC Heritage Report, the 2009 NFLC Language Framework, the minutes of the

Metro Language Series, and the Department of Defense / CASL 2008 'End State of Language Capability'.

This dossier file includes references to a wide range of initiatives, which have only been summarised briefly to provide a concise overview of activity. Most of these refer to implementation at education level as opposed to pure corporate language training, however the logic for adopting this route is highlighted in paragraph 1 above. This is in contrast to many European programmes which, albeit focussed on the training of employed managers and other members of the workforce, either take longer periods of time to reach fruition or are not sustainable over the long term. The US approach is to tackle both of these issues to ensure a permanent pipeline of language speakers in the world of employment, both business and government.

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

The dossier file needs to confirm how the policy addresses lifelong learning relating to contextualised employment needs. Some policies may limit the breadth of the training foresees on one language or sector, and therefore all limitations need to be clearly defined, with justification for their inclusion outlined.

The strategy promotes the following objectives:

- √ promotes lifelong learning and learner mobility
- √ seeks to improve the quality and efficiency of provisions and outcomes
- √ ensures the provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work

The priorities driving the Framework are national security, diplomacy and trade. Although a drive to increase America's linguistic capability began before the events of 9/11, this was seen as a wake-up call to develop policy and implement resulting actions. The 2005 'Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities' by the Department of Defense (based on recommendations arising from a conference of key stakeholders from government and non-governmental sectors in June 2004) identified the need for capability at multiple levels, from elementary education to employment.

The conference that produced the Call was brought by David Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel by appointment of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as part of that department's extensive re-thinking of the need for language and cultural ability in the U.S. military, which culminated in a plan called the "Defence Language Transformation Roadmap." These principles have also been supported by General David Petraeus in his radical re-analysis of effective counter-insurgency operations that focuses on the need for cultural and linguistic understanding in even the smallest military units.

The 2006 'Education for Global Leadership' statement by the Committee for Economic Development reinforced these recommendations. The Committee consists of over 200 business leaders and educators. The CED statement had 3 recommendations: (1) teach international content across the curriculum & expand students' knowledge of other countries and cultures (2) expand the training pipeline at every level of education, especially 'critical' languages (3) urge the business, government & media communities to inform the public of the importance of foreign language acquisition.

A number of organisations are targetted for implementation of the framework, including the National Foreign Language Center, the Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the Departments of Defense, Education, State and Commerce. Supportive input of the implementation rests with the Language Flagship Group and its National Language Policy Roundtable (NLPR), which brings the business alliance support, and the Interagency Languages Roundtable (ILR) which provides, amongst other items of support, standard setting input. The ILR consists of mid-level implementers, which report back to decision-makers at the NLPR.

Given the wide scope of the framework, initiatives need to be coordinated and continuity ensured, rather than a piecemeal approach through the various Departments. The policy is long-term, although it also allows for short- and medium-term initiatives. No specific economic sectors are targetted, although as government is a major employer in the USA, those individuals acquiring high levels of language competence in critical languages are of particular interest for the key stakeholder government departments, such as Defense, Homeland Security, State and Commerce. Furthermore, in 2000, the study *Translating and interpreting in the federal government* identified more than 80 US government agencies that required individuals with significant proficiency in 104 languages.

The impact of the strategy is measured by breadth of basic language competence across the population (percentage of learners who study a language for several years), skills outputs (numbers of learners at identified levels of proficiency) and routes into employment. It aims particularly to produce high-calibre specialists in specific fields - medical technology, international sales, engineering etc - who also possess high levels (C1, C2) of language capability.

2. Includes incentives to enhance and sustain language learner motivation and employment benefits

The implementation of the framework encourages the incentivisation to engage with language training at all levels of education and training. This ensures both a short-term response to business need and a longer-term solution through language acquisition at early ages.

Some initiatives have been delivered which target younger learners. These include the STARTALK programme aimed at summer school intensive study of critical languages by students across the education spectrum and support for the capacity building of teachers of these languages, in addition to providing incentives and awards for language learning in the teaching work force. Target languages include Chinese, Arabic, Korean, Farsi, Hindi, Urdu, Turkish & Swahili. It is a \$10 million programme funded by National

Intelligence. Currently \$90,000 are allocated to each of the 116 (in 2009) programmes, although amounts can be higher run at beginner and intermediate level. Chinese, Arabic, Farsi and Urdu have proved to be the most popular languages.

The U.S.-China E-Language Learning System was a recent partnership between the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the United States Department of Education to build an innovative internet English and Chinese language learning program, entitled "Chengo" (Chinese and English on the Go). This joint project was intended to test the feasibility of using Internet-based second-language learning in American and Chinese schools for students from ages 12-18. The program has used 35 episodes that are 50 minutes in length to give a lesson in pronunciation and writing around themes related to Chinese culture, with the overarching theme of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. After mastering the lessons, students play games to practice their new skills. The program was targeted to prepare American students for the Chinese SAT II and Advanced Placement exams and was connected to English curriculum standards in China. The current version of this initiative is undergoing a revamp.

The economic importance of trade with Asia is highlighted in the CED statement (p5) where trade with Asia - approaching \$800 billion - is set to surpass that of trade with Europe. Equally, the home market is facing greater competition from foreign-owned companies, many of which manufacture product within the USA. Global mergers and acquisitions have created the need for a multilingual and multicultural workforce, which is one of the key messages to the business community from the CED.

Other key messages from the CED include the need for SMEs to communicate with contacts in the emerging economies in their own language, as managers must often communicate directly with customers. They do not possess the same corporate infrastructure as larger multinationals, who can often establish ground teams in the target market and employ locally. For these multinationals, sales from foreign subsidiaries are accounting for an increasing proportion of overall revenue.

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

The Framework reflects federal policy to be implemented at local level by the individual State Departments of Education, potentially with support from the Departments of Commerce or Development. The Framework targets the strengthening of 15 national Language Resource Centers which, amongst other offerings, provide a consultancy and advisory service to state businesses. It will also develop a database of individuals with certified language proficiency, a bank of language & culture resources and an interpreting service.

It encourages the development of State Roadmaps, intended to engage with the local business community in determining specific need. Given the size of the United States, it is the responsibility of each State to gauge local commercial requirements which can be mapped against their dominant economic sectors and ethnic mix of heritage speakers. Thus far roadmaps have been developed for Ohio, Oregon, Texas and Utah. Arizona have developed a separate version of the roadmap concept. At federal level a Business Alliance is currently being established to ensure ongoing representation from the business community, in parallel to the work of the NLPR. A series of 4 Metro Language meetings with businesses was held throughout 2008 in Seattle, New York, Washington DC and San Francisco to further elicit the language needs of the business community. This included business people from research and product development; marketing and branding; international business development and sales; domestic workforce management; and human resources.

Section 4 of the 'Standard Guide for Use-Oriented Foreign Language Instruction' designation F1562 (2005) stipulates the procedures required to conduct needs analysis of the local workforce. This is a combination of language skills needed, communication tasks to be accomplished, conditions under which the language is to be used, current level of proficiency, level of proficiency and timeframe for achievement, and appropriate training objectives.

A series of standards have been developed, including the standard guides for use-oriented language instruction, quality assurance in translation, intercultural skills and language interpretation services. For employers with larger numbers of staff who require assessment, one option is the LLE automated speaking and listening assessment. See section 6 for further details. The most important ILR documents are the proficiency guidelines, the Translation and Interpretation performance guidelines and the proficiency self-assessment questionnaires, all online at www.govtilr.org.

The 2009 Heritage Report (see section 4) correlated the available skills in the Maryland State heritage community with the key export destinations. The main languages of these destinations were English (35%), Arabic (17%), Spanish (11%), followed (in order) by Dutch, Chinese, German, Japanese, French, Portuguese & Korean.

Additional data on potential business needs was gathered at a Metropolitan D.C. Language Flagship workshop on October 14, 2008. Sponsored by The Language Flagship as part of a series of workshops throughout the USA, the workshop brought together representatives from area businesses that have language needs. Current required languages include Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Dari, Chinese, French, Arabic and its dialects, English, Spanish, Portuguese, African languages, Afrikaans/Dutch, and Russian.

A five-year projection placed emphasis on the need for the same languages with the addition of Eastern European languages such as Polish, Romanian,

Hungarian, and Bulgarian. These languages are applied during business development and contract negotiation, communication, public relations, marketing, and publication, as well as translations, training, recruitment, and other projects.

The workshop also covered the opportunity costs connected to a lack of language capability. These include time lost in productivity, potential loss of clients, materials being wasted and projects going unfinished due to misunderstandings, loss of deals due to misunderstandings, and loss of or damage to business relationships. Many organizations conveyed their experiences related to language capabilities simply stating, “If we don’t have the language capabilities, we don’t even get the requests for proposals.” The challenge overwhelmingly expressed was the retention of critical talent on behalf of employers.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

The Framework encourage the upskilling of America’s ‘heritage communities’. The United States is fortunate to have heritage communities of speakers of other languages. Many of these have some knowledge of their parents’ mother tongue(s) but do not always use it or are not proficient in its use.

Some heritage speakers can understand their first language when it is spoken but cannot respond in it. Some can speak it fluently but have no reading or writing skills. The strategy recognise that these are not well-served by traditional beginner language training courses. It also recognises the use of dialects and mixed feelings about their language based on negative societal reactions.

Heritage groups are also encouraged at Higher Education level to combine a knowledge of their language with a specialist field (such as biotechnology in Chinese or engineering in French). The level of language proficiency (measured on the ILR & ACTFL scales) is balanced with a tutor & mentor assessment of the ability to perform their specialist role in the target country. This is a model which is gradually being rolled out across the USA through the Language Flagships programme.

The programme is designed to produce a bank of specialists in specific fields with knowledge of a second language at a high level of proficiency. Local research into the needs & language development of the heritage communities was presented in Jan 2009 to the Governor of Maryland in the ‘Report of the Task Force of the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland’ submitted by the NFLC. This is a pilot which can serve as a model for the wider USA.

The largest numbers of heritage speakers had a Spanish, French, Chinese & Korean language background, although 24 languages with speakers of more than 3,000 were also reported. One of the key findings was the heritage speakers tended to have high levels of educational attainment. Maryland ranks 3rd in the USA in terms of proportion of heritage speakers with a degree-level qualification.

The business community was widely consulted on the need for specific language skills. Views were also sought from business support organisations such as the World Trade Center Institute, the Regional Manufacturing Institute and the Baltimore Chamber of Commerce. The various informal programs already in place include daily language lessons hosted by native- language-speaking employees and the engagement of bi- or multi-lingual employees on an “as needed” basis.

To gain additional insight into Maryland’s potential business needs, the Task Force catalogued the languages associated with the State’s top export destinations. The data suggests a strong correlation between many of Maryland’s heritage languages and the countries engaged in trade with the State (see section 3 for further details).

The main recommendations of the report for the Maryland State are (1) create a website for the State’s heritage language programmes (2) support and promote the awarding of high school credit by exam for students who attend non-public heritage language schools in Maryland (3) offer additional preK – grade 12 world language programs in Maryland public schools where students have the opportunity to learn English while continuing to enhance their heritage language proficiency (4) continue to expand teacher certification options for heritage language speakers (5) enhance library collections of children’s literature in heritage languages (6) provide affordable, accessible advanced English language classes for adult heritage language speakers (7) increase access to heritage language programs for all Marylanders by exploring and sharing information on facilities for use by heritage language training programs (8) compile and make available a list of employment opportunities in Maryland for heritage language speakers (9) develop a *Language Roadmap* (strategic plan) for Maryland.

5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

The main tool for implementing direct exposure to international markets for immersion training is the Flagship programme. This aims to produce postgraduate-level professionals in specific fields with language skills acquired through training in the USA and in a country of the target language. The Flagship programme receives funds of \$35-£40 million per year.

Periods of time spent overseas are a key component of the Flagship programme delivered by Ohio State University. As the programme is funded as part of the National Security Education Programme the target countries are those which align to America's national security & trade interests. The programme is a Federal programme and is therefore also delivered in other US states.

The receiving institutions are based in Nanjing & Qingdao (China), Cairo (Egypt), Damascus (Syria), Jaipur (India), Seoul (S. Korea), and St Petersburg (Russia). The sending institutions are based across the USA: in Maryland, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Indiana, Oregon, Arizona, Texas, Utah, Pennsylvania, Vermont & California and Hawai'i. The US institutions specialise in one or two languages.

For their induction prior to course start, learners first undertake a rigorous 9-week intensive training programme in a country of the target language designed to get them to level B1. This is followed by one year of study in the USA and one year in the target country.

Whilst overseas learners work in host organisations and are expected to use their language knowledge in a wide variety of contexts. They are expected to conduct research, write reports and engage in social discourse in the office. They also attend courses in their specialist field in the target language.

Funding for the programme comes from these sources: 33% Federal Department of Defence, 33% student fees, 20% programme support and 17% from the university network.

The current model is moving from a university-student centred model to a K-12 model to ensure a pipeline of learners into employment. This is also more cost-effective.

6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

The Framework uses the ILR standards to gauge levels of proficiency. To achieve level C2 for the world of employment, a scale of proficiency is targeted, starting at the earliest levels of learning. The ILR scales are widely recognised across the USA.

Most research into correlations with CEFR has been conducted with the ILR scales. However, it also recognises the relevance of the American Council for on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines. However, valid and reliable instruments are not yet available in all languages at all levels, hence this is currently being addressed. In some instances, credit is given for the ability to use the language rather than a strict proficiency

gauge. An oral proficiency interview system of assessment has also been developed.

CEFR	ILR
	5
C2	4
C1	3/4
B2	2/3
B1	2
A2	1
A1	1

A guide to the number of recommended learner hours is provided in the 'Standard Guide for Use-Oriented Foreign Language Instruction' designation F1562 re-approved in 2005.

To acquire a level 1 ILR approx 150hrs of traditional Western European languages, 250hrs of such languages as Russian, Persian, Hungarian, or Hindi, or 350hrs of study of Arabic, Chinese, Japanese or Korean language is required for native English speakers. To reach level 2 ILR it would be 400hrs/600hrs/1100hrs. to achieve a level 3 would require 650/1100/2200hrs.

A '+' plus sign symbol is used by the ILR to indicate where proficiency exceeds a basic skill level but does not fully meet the criteria for the next base level. ILR standards are available at the ILR website at www.govtilr.org. The ACTFL standards used in schools and universities are detailed in the publication 'Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century'. Within the STARTALK programme Lingua Folio (an adaptation of the Council of Europe) is used for online proficiency self-assessment.

7. Can be readily & usefully implemented

There is overwhelming support from a wide range of stakeholders representing government, business and education to ensure that the strategy is implemented effectively. Given the large number of players, the strategy needs careful oversight and coordination, and this is currently partially managed by the National Foreign Language Center, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and several influential professional organizations.

The Department of Education has developed LangSource, a grant-created database of language & culture resource focussed predominantly on Chinese, Arabic, German, Japanese, Hindi, Spanish, Korean, Urdu, Hausa, Tamil, Yoruba and Quechua. Another source of such materials, also supported by the Department of Education, is the Language Materials Project database, which may also be accessed online. As part of this there is a clear mapping table in the appendixes.

Substantial funds have gone into ensuring implementation, the majority of which have been committed by the defense and security services through the National Security Language Initiative. Although the current (July 2009) economic climate is having an impact on state budgets, there remains the committed Federal budgets to support programmes such as Flagship. The costs of such programmes are, however, deemed to be high, therefore economies of scales are sought by increasing the number of graduating students on such programmes.

Clear actions for implementation of the strategy have been defined. These have been agreed with the key stakeholders in the strategy and disseminated across a wide range of governmental organisations.

David Owen
21 July 2009

Notes:

- 1) (1) Strength through wisdom: A critique of U.S. capability. Report of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies. (1979)
- (2) Senator Paul Simon, *The tongue-tied American: Confronting the foreign language crisis*. New York: Continuum. (1980).
- (3) Brecht, Richard., & William Rivers, *Language and national security in the 21st century: The role of title VI/F-H in supporting national language capacity*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. (2000).
- (4) *International education and foreign languages: Keys to securing America's future*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. (2007)

8. Transferability

8.1. Evidence of transfer

The file should identify whether the policy or training has already been transferred to other places or sectors. It can include the following information:

Although there is no evidence of direct transfer of the policy in all its breadth, there are mirror actions occurring in other countries. For instance, in the UK the Business Language Champions programme and the Routes into Language programme aim to generate the pipeline of education into employment in much the same way as in the USA.

The language priorities for these 2 programmes are focussed on trade and not national security, although there is some cross-over with, for instance, Chinese & Spanish.

The use of Round Tables to both determine policy and develop actions is widely used in the UK. For instance, in the East of England the RLN East Advisory Board performs such as function, as does the follow-on engagement with stakeholders across the agency spectrum. Those involved tend to be in departments related to trade, education and employment, whilst national security representation is limited to the police and prison sectors at regional level.

There was no case of 'we were first' rather both systems (USA & UK) developed at the same time. However, preliminary discussions between the NFLC and CiLT were held, however these do not seem to have continued.

Key issues arising out of current discussions for transfer revolve around the role played by the national security agenda and what influence this should have. This is a discussion that has already commenced with the European Commission DG Education and Culture.

8.2. Innovation

Is the policy or training innovative and therefore has not yet been transferred? We may score a policy or training programme low due to lack of evidence of existing transfer but recognise that it is new and therefore be 'early days' for transfer. Where it is deemed by the Observer as innovative, it should be recognised as worth of transfer, and this needs to be reflected in its evaluation.

The policy is innovative in that it combines 3 widely differing agendas, namely national security, trade and education. Although there are often direct correlations between the first two, these tend to be limited to interests of larger corporations and not SMEs. Furthermore, common ground has been sought in identifying priority ('critical') languages.

Transfer can be a straightforward process it piloted with the regional security interests (police & prisons), and this is already happening in the East of England where security services and SMEs share common training. However it does rely on seeking a common agenda such as Romanian and Polish business culture training and Chinese language training.

The major barrier to transfer would be the engagement of the wider national security institutions such as the Ministry of Defence, MI5 and MI6. This has not been attempted, however there exists a military language training centre to the west of London which would be the first line of approach. British intelligence officers are required to have within their teams language skills at a high level (author having first-hand experience of testing in Kurdish).

8.3. Dependence on political context

The file needs to identify whether transferability depends on specific assumptions relating to political context. Some policies may make assumptions regarding the political drivers behind them, particularly in relation to European policy.

Although the main political driver behind the framework is national security, the presence of other diplomatic, trade & education interests generates a balance which can be replicated elsewhere. The primary source of funding is the Department of Defense, with contributions from elsewhere. In some European regions, such as the East of England, funding is more difficult to channel as it needs to reflect national priorities (such as the unemployed or low skilled, where the majority of ESF funds are allocated).

There is no reason why the European Union cannot adopt a similar approach based on its existing policies in relation to global security and interaction with the growth markets such as China, Mexico and Russia.

As the beneficiaries of the training are in full-time education, this can be readily copied across to other countries.

8.4. Flexibility

How flexible is the policy to allow for transferability? The scoring for this criterion will be based on elements of intelligence gathered from criteria 1-3 & 5. Observers will need to indicate which elements of the policy or programme may not be conducive for possible transfer.

See above comments.

8.5. Multi-region transfer

Does the policy or programme allow for multi-regional transfer? It encourages mobility, as programme managers become involved in exchange and observation.

The policy can be transferred to any region with sufficient funding (even for a pilot project) and stakeholder interest. It can also be transferred to a multi-regional network, which is arguably the most effective approach. There are few limits to the transfer to target groups in other regions, are these are people in full-time education.