

Language Program Guide: Connecting Heritage Learners to Federal Careers

This guide is designed to support you in using the STARTALK Career Pathways resources with your students. All project materials are brought to you by the Center for Applied Linguistics with funding from the National Security Agency.

Purpose

The goal of the STARTALK Career Pathways project is to illuminate and strengthen pathways to U.S. federal government careers for language learners in high school and college.

This project is part of the STARTALK initiative to increase learning of critical languages in order to build workforce capacity in the federal government to meet national security needs. The Center for Applied Linguistics developed podcasts, videos, interactive online guides, and supporting materials to provide language programs and students, particularly heritage language learners, with resources that highlight opportunities and pathways to bring their in-demand language skills to the federal government and obtain a fulfilling career. Although our materials specifically highlight Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian and the strengths and experiences of heritage learners, the information provided can help any language learner interested in federal career opportunities, including middle school students starting to think about their future plans.

Resources

The STARTALK Career Pathways resources are grouped into the Language Pathways Series, which helps students understand practical skills and steps to achieve their language goals and get hired by the federal government, and the Career Opportunities Series, which demonstrates the diverse careers available in the federal government that use language skills. Finally, students can get credit to show their work with these series. Click on each box to learn more about these resources.

The Language Pathways Series consists of:

- 12 episodes of the Language Pathways podcast, including an introduction, 10 episodes on key topics to help language learners prepare for a federal government job, and a conclusion;
- 10 resource lists for the main podcast episodes, which link organizations mentioned by our guests and other online resources we recommend related to the episode topic;
- 5 language learning guides that list specific scholarship and language programs and links to learning materials for Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian;
- a pathways graphic illustrating actions to take from high school, the military, college, and starting a search for a federal job;
- a checklist detailing steps in each pathway to a federal career;

- a sheet to set and monitor progress towards goals; and
- the Language Pathways Guide, which helps students use and explore these resources through questions for discussion, detailed steps to take on different paths to a federal career, and an interactive quiz, “What language scholarship is right for me?”

The Career Opportunities Series consists of:

- 8 video interviews with federal government employees;
- Results of a survey of all video guests on their backgrounds, career preparation, language skills used on the job, and benefits of working for the federal government; and
- The Career Opportunities Guide, which helps students use and explore these resources through questions for discussion, information on how federal work looks in real life, and an interactive quiz, “What federal job is right for me?”

Students who work through the STARTALK Career Pathways resources can request a digital badge to show what they have learned. We encourage you to include plans for earning and sharing this credential as you use these resources with your students.

[Guidance for target language use](#)

While we interview people who use Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian in their work, the STARTALK Career Pathways podcast, videos, and supporting materials are provided in English. This makes our resources accessible to learners of varied languages in the United States, and also matches the language that students will need to use to search and apply for jobs in the federal government.

Discussion and reflection on career goals and pathways may be an appropriate use of English in your language classroom, but there are many ways to communicate about and work with the STARTALK Career Pathways resources in the target language. The Ideas for Instruction section of this guide includes suggestions for target language activities. You can also translate or add target language text to any of our transcripts and downloadable files. These materials are designed for your use, and there are no restrictions on how you may wish to modify them for classroom instruction.

Episode groupings

The project website and our interactive guides provide details on each of our podcast episodes and videos. As an alternative to listening to and viewing the full series in order, you may wish to group podcasts and videos for your students to interpret. See each category below to select episodes and videos of interest based on different characteristics. Note that all of the videos address the broad topics of our podcast so any video can be paired well with a podcast episode.

Language

Arabic: Episodes 4, 6, 8, 9; Matilda video

Chinese: Episodes 1, 2, 3, 6, 9; Ariel, Shane, and Wen videos

Korean: Episodes 3, 8; Hyejin and Jennie videos

Persian: Episodes 1, 4, 9

Russian: Episode 6; Alex and Sofia videos

Federal agency

Department of Commerce: Shane video

Department of Defense: Episodes 4, 8, 9; Wen, Hyejin, Jennie, and Alex videos

Department of Health and Human Services: Episode 8; Matilda and Ariel videos

Department of Homeland Security: Episodes 3, 6, 8

Department of Justice: Episodes 3, 9

Department of State: Episodes 4, 5, 6; Sofia video

Department of the Treasury: Episode 6

Federal job

Accountant: Jennie video

Foreign service: Episode 6

IT services: Wen video

Language analyst: Episodes 3, 9; Alex video

Language instructor: Episodes 4, 5; Sofia video

Language services contractor: Episode 8; Hyejin video

Military service: Episode 9

Mission support: Episode 6

Patent examiner: Shane video

Public health: Episode 8; Matilda and Ariel videos

Podcast topic

Heritage learner skills: Episodes 1, 2, 3

Daily work in federal jobs: Episodes 3, 4, 9

Measuring language proficiency: Episodes 5, 7

Preparing and searching for government jobs: Episodes 4, 6, 8, 10

Questions for discussion and reflection

Our interactive Language Pathways Guide provides three questions for student discussion or individual reflection for each podcast episode and the Career Opportunities Guide shares three questions to consider for the full video series. These questions are designed to encourage students to think about what they learned from each episode and video guest and how this can be applied to pursuing their own language learning and career goals.

1. Skills and Abilities of Heritage Learners

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. What do you think is your biggest strength as a language learner?
3. How have you used your cultural knowledge to help in communication?

2. Developing Heritage Learner Skills for Government Careers

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. What language skills do you want to grow?
3. What resources have you found useful to work on reading and writing?

3. Benefits of Government Careers

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. What benefits of a government job interest you the most?
3. What concerns do you have about how you can support your community while working for the federal government?

4. Using Different Language Varieties and Dialects in Government Jobs

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. What different language varieties or dialects are you familiar with?
3. How have you used a language variety or different level of formality in your language to help with communication?

5. The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. Why do you think it is important to talk about proficiency on a defined scale like the ILR?
3. How do you think your levels of proficiency vary across speaking, reading, listening, and writing?

6. Language Learning, Volunteer, and Work Opportunities to Prepare for a Government Career

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. What government scholarships and internships do you know about? Where can you go to learn more?
3. What do you think are the most effective ways to prepare for a government career?

7. Testing and Demonstrating Proficiency in a Heritage Language

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. How do you assess your own language skills?
3. What is your experience with proficiency testing? What did you learn from your test results?

8. Networking and Searching for Government Jobs

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. Who are some people you can contact to network for government jobs?
3. What keywords would be helpful to use when searching for government jobs?

9. Government Jobs that Use Language Skills

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. How do you want to use your language skills to help people in the United States or abroad?
3. What are different types of jobs and agencies where you could use your language skills?

10. Recruiting and Hiring Processes for Government Jobs

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this episode?
2. How can your school's guidance office or career center help you prepare and search for jobs?
3. What is your experience with practice or real job interviews? What did you learn from them?

All videos

1. What was the most interesting thing you heard in this video interview?
2. Do you think your language skills and interests would be a good fit for this job or federal agency? Why or why not?
3. Which personal, professional, or community benefits discussed in this interview align with your career goals?

Class activities

The following activities are suggested for using the STARTALK Career Pathways resources in your classroom.

Episode review and discussion

In this activity, students will interact with the video survey results, podcast episodes and videos, questions for discussion and reflection, and episode resource lists.

First, activate prior knowledge and prepare for the activity by viewing and discussing the video survey results. Next, listen to and view selected podcast episodes and videos and discuss the questions for each episode and video. Finally, explore the resource list for each episode.

This activity can be differentiated by completing tasks as a class, in small groups, or in pairs; grouping different podcast episodes and videos based on topics and characteristics of interest or allowing students to choose episodes and videos to access; or including a presentational communication task to summarize the episode content or share information learned from the resource list orally or in writing. To encourage communication in the target language, consider translating the discussion questions and requiring discussion in the target language.

Career path planning

In this activity, students will interact with the Language Pathways and Career Opportunities guides, the Language Pathways Checklist, and the Goal Setting Sheet.

First, activate prior knowledge and prepare for the activity by discussing careers that use language skills. Next, work through Part 4: Resources to Build to a Federal Career in the Language Pathways Guide including the interactive quiz on language scholarships and complete the interactive quiz on federal jobs in the Career Opportunities Guide. Finally, answer the questions in the Establishing Your Goals section of the Goal Setting Sheet.

Because this activity is related to personal plans and goals, it should be completed individually. It can be differentiated by asking students to complete or add a set number of goals in the Taking Steps Toward Your Goals section of the Goal Setting Sheet; including an interpersonal communication task to share why they selected their goal job in pairs or small groups; or adding a task to conduct additional research about a goal job and present information orally or in writing.

Proficiency self-assessment

In this activity, students will interact with the Language Pathways Podcast Episodes 5 and 7, the ILR self-assessments linked in the Episode 5 resource list, and other self-assessment materials and rubrics that you use in your classroom.

First, activate prior knowledge and prepare for the activity by discussing proficiency scales and assessments students are familiar with and the benefits of self-assessing language skills. Next, listen to the selected podcast episodes. Finally, complete the self-assessments of speaking, reading, and/or listening on the ILR website.

This activity can be differentiated by adding a peer assessment activity for a paired student or to assess the level of the class as a whole; having students self-assess using can-do statements specific to your class; asking students to write their own target or accomplished can-do statements for relevant ILR levels; or including an interpersonal communication task to describe and demonstrate language learning and skills in a job interview role play.

Extension activities

The following extension activities can provide students with additional opportunities to build on the STARTALK Career Pathways resources outside of the classroom.

Interview project

Following the model of the STARTALK Career Pathways podcasts and videos, students can conduct an interview with a person who uses the target language in their job. Students can use the target language in all communicative modes and demonstrate intercultural competence.

First, research and review professional interviews conducted in the target language, then write a list of interview questions. Select a family, school, or community member and request and then conduct an interview. Finally, share results from the interview in an oral or written presentation.

Language learning guide deep dive

For students of Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian, the STARTALK Career Pathways language learning guides can serve as a jumping off point for self-study and additional language practice. First, review the relevant language learning guide and explore the links for developing skills. Select the top three to five links of interest and write a plan and schedule to use them for self-study. Finally, share information about the links selected, reasons, and lessons learned in an oral or written presentation.

For students of other languages, use the language learning guides as a model to create a guide for the target language. First, research scholarships, language learning opportunities, and online resources for this language provided by universities, government, and other reputable institutions. Then design a guide with links and descriptions of these resources for other students to use.

Federal agency report

After learning about federal agencies and example jobs in the Career Opportunities Guide, students can do a report on a federal agency of their choice. Students can use the target language to access information from online resources and make cultural comparisons.

First, select a U.S. government agency of interest and then research that agency and its equivalent in a country that uses the target language. Write a report on the work of the two agencies including comparisons of similarities and differences. Finally, share results from the report in an oral presentation and discuss if the agency sounds like a good place to work.