

# STARTALK Career Pathways

## Connecting Heritage Learners to Federal Careers

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ILR Plenary: May 19, 2023

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Center for Applied Linguistics

# Agenda

- Introduction
- Student Perspectives
- Resources
- Conclusion

# Introduction

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# Organization and Funding



- Promote language learning and cultural understanding by serving as a trusted source for research, resources, and policy analysis



- Increase number of students, highly effective teachers, and materials and curricula for critical languages in the U.S.
- **Enhance workforce development in the federal government to meet national security needs through the study of critical languages**

# Project Goals

- Illuminate and strengthen pathways to U.S. federal government careers for language learners in high school and college
  - Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian
  - Strengths and experiences of heritage language learners
- Provide free resources that highlight career opportunities and ways to build on students' language and cultural assets.
  - Podcasts, videos, and interactive web content
  - Guidance for language programs

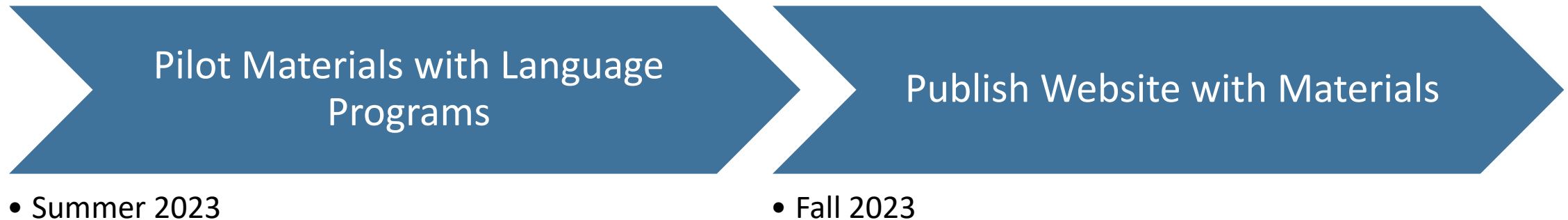


# Project Timeline

## Completed milestones



## Upcoming work



# Student Advisory Panels

- Purpose: Hear from students about their knowledge of and questions related to federal government careers
  - Review and give feedback on materials in progress
- Participants: 10 high school and college heritage language speakers (2 for each focal language)



CENTER  
FOR APPLIED  
LINGUISTICS

PROMOTING ACCESS, EQUITY *and* MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING *for* LINGUISTICALLY *and* CULTURALLY  
DIVERSE PEOPLE AROUND *the* WORLD.

# Student Perspectives

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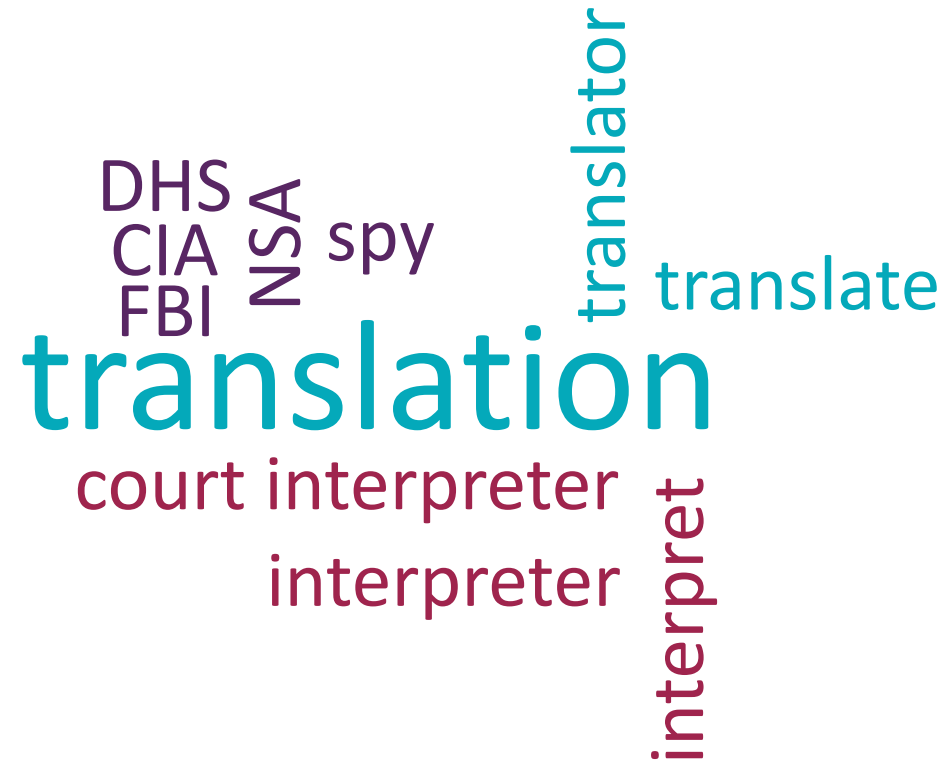
## Knowledge, Interests, and Needs



# Student Perspectives: Knowledge Overview

- Students have limited knowledge of careers that use their language skills
- Students have strong knowledge about their heritage languages
- They recognize the relationship between language and culture
- They have helpful advice about language learning
- Heritage language students perceive themselves as having a different type of knowledge or different strengths from second language learners

# Knowledge: Federal Jobs that Use Language Skills



A word cloud centered around the word "translation". The word "translation" is the largest and most prominent, written in a teal color. Surrounding it are several other words in different colors and orientations. Above "translation" are "DHS", "CIA", "FBI", "NSA", and "spy" in a dark purple color. To the right of "translation" are "translator" (written vertically) and "translate" in a teal color. Below "translation" are "court interpreter", "interpreter", and "interpret" (written vertically) in a dark red color.

translation

DHS  
CIA  
FBI  
NSA  
spy

translator  
translate

court interpreter  
interpreter  
interpret

# Knowledge: Language Learning

Students were knowledgeable about language learning opportunities and had useful advice for other students

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Join clubs/groups to learn about language and culture with other heritage speakers

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Take classes before entering university to save time and allow you to take higher-level classes in the heritage language

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*Subscribe to newsletters, listservs, and/or social media channels with information about learning opportunities*

# Knowledge: Heritage vs. Second Language

Students perceive themselves as having a different type of knowledge  
or different strengths from second language learners

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There is a big difference between what I know in terms of  
vocabulary and what those who grew up in a target language  
speaking country know.

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*I have a lot of Chinese friends who speak it, but they don't know 90% of the  
characters that they know how to say*

# Student Perspectives: Interests Overview

- Students are interested in using their skills to help their communities
- They would be interested in information that is personal and shows current federal employees' backgrounds
- They currently seek out a variety of sources to find information about jobs

# Interest: Helping Communities

Having this argument for what benefits can come from pursuing this government career...if there's a reason to tie it back to community connections and having a solid argument for the benefits for partaking in such programs

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There is a stigma of being a spy

*There is a perception that you are snitching or selling out in a sense*

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Knowing the personal and community benefits would be really helpful



# Interest: Personal Information

Students would like information that is more personal and provides insight into employees' backgrounds and career paths

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My questions focus on the process of someone working the federal government – do you have to major in the language, are there specific colleges, do you have to live in the country for a certain amount of time, where do you apply, where do you make connections, etc.

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Interviewees would serve as role models for us learning our heritage languages

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*I'd like to see something more interactive or better networking opportunities like meeting hiring managers through meet and greets*

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I'd like to hear stories from professionals who have real-world experience with different careers

# Student Perspectives: Needs Overview

- Heritage language learners need information about what skills are needed and what jobs are available
- Students would like insight into hiring processes
- They would appreciate information about the benefits of federal careers



# Needs: Information about Skills

Students want to know if their skills are suitable for government jobs

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Do you need to be at an advanced level of our heritage language to be considered for a government job?

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*Even though I can understand a conversational level I don't think I would be proficient enough in the nuances of different vocabulary words. I know the common topics, but I wouldn't be able to talk about something complex or technical*

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I'm curious how much writing these jobs would entail

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If the government made it clear what language varieties are accepted, more heritage speakers would be incentivized to apply

# Needs: Insight about Hiring Processes

Students feel that hiring processes are opaque, so they would like information that could illuminate these pathways

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Getting hired in general or getting any job is hard in general and we have the advantage of speaking a critical language, but it feels like you are sending applications off into space.

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*I'd like to see sample cover letters and LinkedIn profiles*

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I think one of the questions I would have for them is what exactly they are looking for from us and what are some of the specifics we should focus on for an interview

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Seeing how to network with heritage language skills would be good

# Takeaways for Resource Development

- Feature a variety of jobs beyond defense and national intelligence
- Include basic information about where to find jobs and how to apply
- Provide insight into hiring processes
- Ask in interviews about personal factors like job satisfaction
- Reflect different dialects and language varieties that students might speak

# Resources

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# Overview

- Language Pathways Series

- 12 podcast episodes
- 10 resource lists
- 5 language learning guides
- Language Pathways graphic and checklist
- Goal setting sheet
- Interactive guide

- Career Opportunities Series

- 8 video interviews
- Survey of interview guests
- Interactive guide

- Dissemination resources

- Digital badge
- Interactive guide for language programs

# Podcast Series

- 10 main episodes of 18-23 minutes
- 29 guests, 2-5 each episode
  - Speakers of 5 focal languages
  - 15 federal workers
  - Heritage language educators
  - Language testing specialists
  - Career counselors



# Podcast Episodes

1. Skills and Abilities of Heritage Learners
2. Developing Heritage Learner Skills for Government Careers
3. Benefits of Government Careers
4. Using Different Language Varieties and Dialects in Government Jobs
5. The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale
6. Language Learning, Volunteer, and Work Opportunities to Prepare for a Government Career
7. Testing and Demonstrating Proficiency in a Heritage Language
8. Networking and Searching for Government Jobs
9. Government Jobs that Use Language Skills
10. Recruiting and Hiring Processes for Government Jobs

# Episode: Using Different Language Varieties and Dialects in Government Jobs

**Host:** And I'm wondering, are there specific varieties or dialects that would be particularly valuable to the federal government?

**Guest 1:** No variety really is preferable to another variety. A variety is important where you can use it. If someone is going to Cairo, we're going to teach them the Egyptian dialect. If someone is going to Sudan, Sudanese, and so on and so forth. So, there is no one dialect or variety that's preferable to know than the other. Now our teachers here, we assign teachers to teach the dialect that they know and that they can teach and speak. That's an advantage for the students because we teach them the authentic dialect that's spoken by someone who speaks it. So, our teachers are qualified native speakers of that dialect or variety that we teach.

**Guest 2:** There is a high need, I know that for Azari or Kurdish and also for other dialects, and we do need people who speak those dialects. So, if there are people that they are interested, I would highly recommend for them to go and pursue these things. I know that there are some like Luri Bakhtiari, we don't have anyone. I don't know if there are many people speaking that. We have Mazandarani from the north, Rashti and Gilaki dialects. We have other like, you know, Sistan and Balochistan, those Balochi dialects, I don't know if we have people, but I know that their needs are there. For like, they are at the government that they are looking for people who speak those dialects. So those students who have parents that have been speaking these languages, please don't hide it. You are needed, they want you there. And find that dream job that you want.





# Episode: Networking and Searching for Government Jobs

**Host:** Alex, is there anything you'd like to share about how students can find networking opportunities and what you find helpful about networking?

**Guest:** One of the best ways to network is to do informational interviews. Informational interviews are a really key tool in learning about different organizations and about different roles in organizations. You reach out to somebody who works in an organization of interest or has worked there, and you talk to them. You talk to them about their role and about what they did. And you let them know a bit about yourself, about what skills you have and what might be a position that might—may be a good fit for you in that organization. You let them tell you about other people and other positions you might want to research. And I always recommend that when you leave and when you're closing your informational interview, you ask, “Who else should I speak with? Knowing what you know about me now, knowing about my interests, who do you recommend that I talk with? And may I use your name?” So, this is how you can start growing your network from just one person.

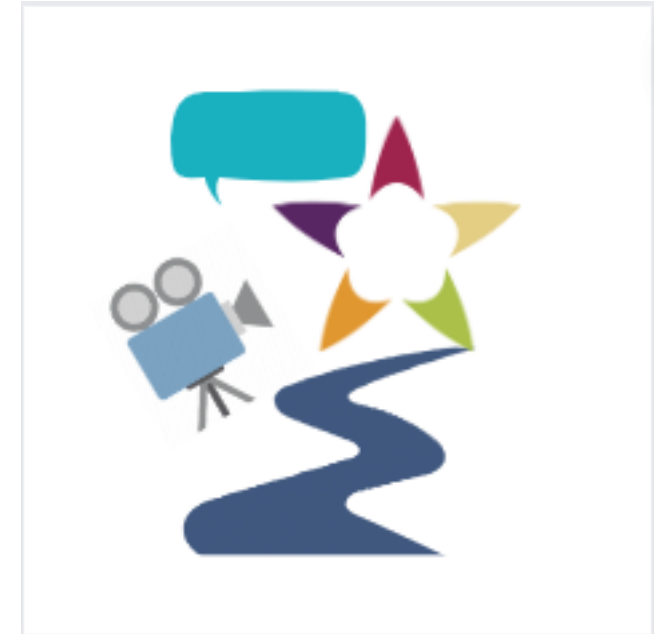


# Additional Career Pathways Resources

- Language learning guide
- Pathways graphic
- Interactive guide

# Video Series

- 8 video interviews of 5-7 minutes
  - L1, L2, and heritage speakers of 4 focal languages
  - Diverse roles within Departments of State, Commerce, Health and Human Services, and Defense



# Video Interview Questions

- How did you learn your language? *(for heritage and second language learners)*
- What made you choose to work for the federal government?
- How did you find your specific position?
- How did you prepare to be a good candidate for this job?
- How do you use your language skills in your job?
- What does your job look like day to day?
- How do you use your language with other speakers in your workplace?
- What unique skills do heritage language speakers bring to the workplace?
- How has working for the federal government helped your professional growth?
- How has working for the federal government helped your personal growth?
- How do you think you can help the community of speakers of your language through your job?
- What advice do you have for heritage language learners who are interested in a federal government job?

# Videos: Ariel and Matilda

- Ariel (Writer/editor, NIH) started learning Chinese in a STARTALK program
- Matilda (Public health advisor, CDC) is an EHLS graduate from Sudan

[Videos](#)

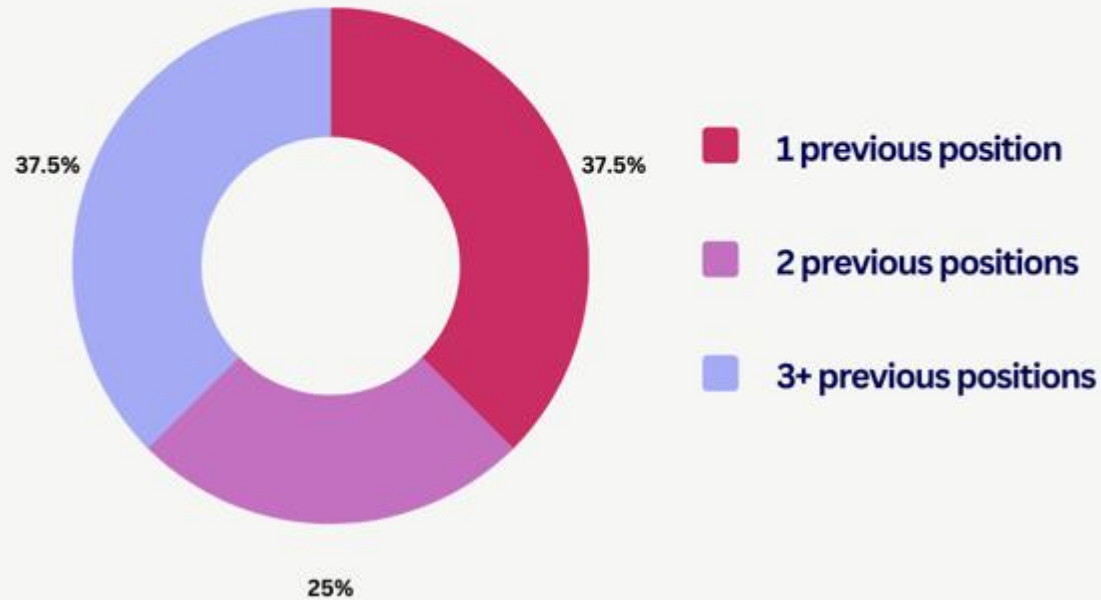
# Video Guest Survey

- Visualizations of responses across 8 guests
  - Backgrounds and preparation for federal jobs
  - Language skills
  - Benefits of federal jobs

# Video Guest Survey: Background and Preparation

## Question 4

### Positions before Federal Government



## Question 5

### Previous Sectors

#### Business



#### Education



#### Military



#### Self-employed



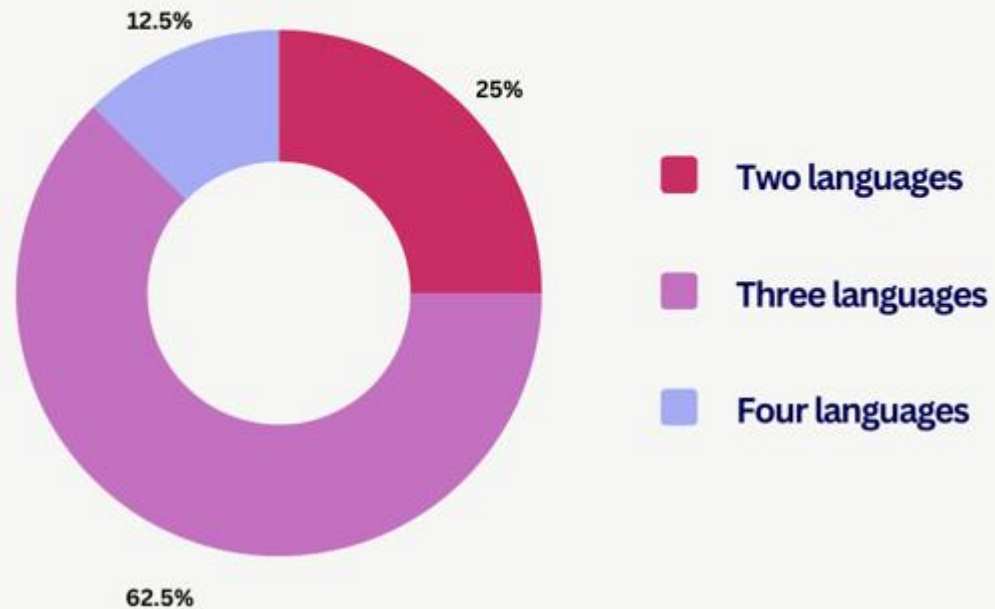
#### Non-profit or NGO



# Video Guest Survey: Language Skills

Question 9

## Number of Languages



Question 10

## Context of Learning Critical Language

At home/through family



Elementary school



Middle school



High school



College



STARTALK program



Non-STARTALK summer language program



Study abroad





# Video Guest Survey: Job Benefits

Question 13

## Satisfaction Working in the Federal Government

Participant 1



Participant 2



Participant 3



Participant 4



Participant 5



Participant 6



Participant 7



Participant 8



Question 13

## Benefits as a Critical Language Speaker

Improved cultural understanding



Helping speakers of the language in the United States or abroad



Opportunities for travel/special assignments



Improved language skills



Increased pay



Career advancement



Leadership opportunities



Networking opportunities in other professions




# Conclusion

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# Takeaways for Government Employees

- Many students don't know what job opportunities exist
- Some have clear career interests, but are unsure how to incorporate their language skills
- Students may lack confidence in their skills relative to what they think employers want
- You can be a source of support for students!
  - Informational interviews
  - Career fairs
  - Formal and informal mentoring
  - Share information about government work in your communities and language networks

# Next Steps



Pilot Materials with Language Programs

- Summer 2023

Publish Website with Materials

- Fall 2023

Piloting with 3 STARTALK summer programs

- Review videos and podcasts and associated supports
- Give feedback on format and presentation of materials

After revisions, all project materials will be posted on a free website hosted by CAL!

# Thank You!

- Thank you to the National Security Agency, STARTALK Program Office, and the ILR community!
- Any questions?



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