THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP
Creating Global Professionals

Proficiency Initiative Consolidated Q&As

February 19, 2014 Webinar

Please Note: The following is an edited version of a transcript of The Language Flagship's (TLF) technical assistance webinar (February 19, 2014) held to address questions related to The Language Flagship Proficiency Initiative Solicitation Guidelines released in January, 2014. The questions and answers below have been edited for clarity and brevity and have been reordered by topic. They are based on an unscripted dialogue and may contain small errors in grammar and flow.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q: What kind of outcome would Flagship like to see from awardees in this new grant program? How do you plan to use the results?

A: One of Flagship's goals is to disseminate Flagship practices more broadly and we hope one of the ways we can do this is through this initiative. With regard to outcomes, we would like to see grant recipients institutionalize language proficiency assessment and assessment practices which will help in the continuous improvement of their language pedagogy and curriculum. This is one of the tenets of Flagship, and we hope it is something we can share as a best practice more broadly with the field.

Q: We would like to include languages not currently listed in the RFP. Is this possible?

A: As stated in the RFP, funds will be awarded to cover the costs of testing in six languages only - Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Spanish or Russian. Applicants who wish to include other languages must indicate in their proposals how they will support the cost for testing in those other languages.

Depending on the strength of your campus or interests, we would like to see proposals that include other languages, but costs for those languages would need to be covered by your institution. A combination of working in one or some of the six languages and another language or two at your institution's cost could strengthen your proposal.

Q: Can we include graduate students or programs in our proposals?

A: This initiative is focused on undergraduate programs and we cannot fund testing or other activities for graduate students or programs.

Q: What is the difference between Flagship programs and this proficiency initiative?

A: The Language Flagship program is a comprehensive program meant to develop and support practices on campuses that help students from all majors, often with no prior familiarity with the target language, attain ILR 3 level proficiency. Our domestic programs use innovative instructional techniques, including a range of interventions, to help students reach ILR 2 level prior to the Capstone overseas program. Through these grants we help support tutoring, additional instructional needs, and a variety of interventions that allow programs to get students up to the advanced proficiency levels consistently. We provide some limited student support for domestic or overseas summer and yearlong Capstone study. We also sponsor overseas Capstone programs that include intensive language instruction, direct enrollment at partner universities abroad, and internships. Our goals is for students to reach ILR 3 level proficiency across all modalities.

We are not re-creating the Flagship program with the Proficiency Initiative; instead, we would like to disseminate the assessment practice established within Flagship and encourage both non-Flagship and Flagship institutions to integrate this practice in all languages, across languages, and across consortia. Through this initiative, we are focusing on this one crucial piece of the Flagship system to disseminate the practice and work more broadly on these shared goals of improving language learning and teaching.

Q: Are colleges or universities considered eligible if they have well-developed language programs but do not offer a major in the language?

A: They are certainly eligible. There is no requirement that majors be offered in any one language. But there must be evidence that applicants have healthy language programs that include more advanced levels of language instruction.

Q: Does the grant favor programs that are only now starting up proficiency practices, as opposed to programs that have well-established proficiency processes?

A: Generally, institutions that have already thought about proficiency testing and have some practices in place can be expanded, improved and built upon – this could be viewed as more of a strength than a weakness.

Q: Is IIE available to discuss specifics or advise institutions as they prepare their proposals?

A: Please email us first and we can arrange to have a conversation. We cannot tell you specifically what to include or not to include in your proposals, or what reviewers might or might not prefer. However, if you have a complex question or if something is not clear in the RFP, please contact us.

Q: What types of activities can be funded under the grant?

A: Grant funds may be used to cover expenses such as:

- Delivery, administration, and scoring of existing proficiency tests and testing procedures.
- Faculty development through participation in workshops or other training focused on teaching for proficiency. We realize there is limited funding available through this grant and that most of the funding may be used on actual testing costs. However, we do hope that applicants will consider providing some opportunities for faculty development to teach towards proficiency. This is an important aspect of this initiative, as well.
- Limited curriculum development (or curricular adjustments) to ensure instructional materials are proficiency-oriented. We would support use of some limited funding for curriculum development to retool existing curricula to align with proficiency goals. With regards to proposals and budgets, we would not expect to see this type of cost included in year 1. The first year, we would expect, would focus on proficiency testing and collecting some baseline information to be able to make curricular adjustments. Of course, that might be different depending on your situation, and would need to be explained and fully justified in the proposal.

Grant funds MAY NOT be used for expenses such as:

- Training and certification of OPI testers. We also encourage you not to rely on your faculty to test their own students. However, as noted above, faculty development on teaching for proficiency is fine, so a certain amount of training on the OPI could be appropriate.
- Hiring of additional language faculty and/or tutors. We are looking for strong, existing language programs that would integrate testing. We are not looking to build programs.
- Production of new tests, additional test forms, item development or other assessment tools.
- Validating or norming tests
- Scholarships to students, including support for overseas study

Q: Regarding the funding limits/levels cited in the RFP

A: The range of possible grant funding cited in the RFP is $200,000 - $400,000 per year. Actual award amounts will be determined based on the scope of the proposed projects, including the number of languages included in the project, the number of partners/collaborator, etc. We anticipate that the greatest factors in determining actual award amounts will be the scope and scale of the projects themselves.   There is no guarantee that we will be able to fund at levels above those indicated in the out years, so please consider the scope of your project carefully. These factors will also be taken into consideration when determining final award levels.

The funding period is anticipated to be for three years; however, IIE's existing cooperative agreement with NSEP allows us to include only two years at this time. Like the second year, the third year of support will also be contingent on project performance, the review and approval of a plan and budget for that year, as well as the availability of funds. Please prepare your proposals and budgets to the best of your ability to reflect the anticipated scopes of your projects for each of the two years covered under this solicitation.

Q: What level of project cost sharing and long-term sustainment is expected? (P. 7, Item 2d)

A: The RFP does not specify the level of cost sharing or expected long-term sustainment, but cost-share and sustainment beyond three years is encouraged, as this helps demonstrate longer-term institutional commitment toward this effort.

The usual types of institutional support, including reduced indirect rates, cost-sharing of salaries, plans to develop sustainable assessment, would all be factors in the review of these proposals. We are not looking to set up a program that is simply an experiment for three years where NSEP pays for testing. Instead, we are looking for a developmental project where we provide up to three years of support for a university to institute and get a head start on conducting proficiency assessments, figuring out how they can do it efficiently, and figuring out how they can set up student or institutional costs to maintain and continue an assessment plan. We believe that a reason to continue it will be the positive source of results demonstration for your institution.

Q: Does the funding range include indirect costs?

A: The total amount is inclusive of indirect or F&A. So, these costs must be calculated into the overall amount requested.

Q: Can funding be used as an incentive for test takers?

A: No. We would not suggest that you pay students to take these tests.

Q: We have internal assessment instruments which test to the intermediate and advanced levels. Can we use grant funding to further validate these instruments?

A: No, we are not looking to invest in further test validation or assessment development. We are looking to support the implementation of language program proficiency assessment regimes on campuses.

Q: Can curriculum revision be included in the RFP, since the goal of assessment would be to reengineer how languages are taught?

A: We would be open to looking at some funding for curricular revision, but it would need to relate to the proficiency initiative. It should be tied to the assessment data and feedback.

PARTNERSHIPS

Q: The RFP also calls for collaboration with other institutions. Must the collaboration be with a Language Flagship program?

A: Collaboration with Language Flagship institutions is possible but not required. Applicants should collaborate with whatever institution(s) is/are appropriate for the proposed project. Please note that Language Flagship programs are not eligible to receive funding under this initiative, however, institutions with Language Flagship programs may apply for languages not already covered by TLF.

Q: In partnering with another university, is there a particular procedure to follow with regard to submitting the proposal and budget? That is, would both schools contribute toward one overall proposal but each submit its own budget?

A: In cases where multiple institutions will form a partnership, the lead institution is expected to submit one single proposal narrative that encompasses the full scope of the overall project. The lead institution will also submit the overall budget and budget narrative for the project, which must include separate individual budgets and budget narratives for costs requested by/for each partner institution. These costs would also be shown summarized in the overall budget under the heading "Contractual." Please see the budget template included in the RFP and found in an Excel version at http://www.thelanguageflagship.org/content/funding.

Q: Can a consortium come in for only one language?

A: Yes, a consortium or other collective of institutions may apply to conduct proficiency assessments in one single language.

Q: Can one institution submit multiple proposals, if each is for a different language-specific consortium that includes several IHEs?

A: Yes, one institution may submit multiple proposals, if each is for different language-specific consortia that include several IHEs. Institutions may also be part of more than one consortia arrangement.

Q: In a consortia, could proficiency testing results be reported in the aggregate or by coded institutional identities?

A: Our advice would be not report results in the aggregate. We are looking for ways to improve on each campus, so even if one campus starts at level X and one starts at level Y, we would want to see the effect of assessing language proficiency on each campus. We are focused on transparency. If institutions are willing to participate in the initiative, they should be willing to show results, certainly with regards to program reporting back to IIE and NSEP.

Q: How many PIs are possible on a proposal?

A: There needs to be a lead institution, from which the PI(s) come(s). We would recommend that you minimize the number of PIs on the proposal, but we do not have a set rule about this. Proposals with more than one PI should clearly explain why this is necessary. The structure of the project itself should be clearly outlined in the proposal so that the PI's responsibilities are clear.

Q: Can one institution be the lead on multiple proposals?

A: Yes. One institution can be part of multiple proposals.

Q: Will proposals including multiple languages be favored over a proposal including only one language?

A: The competitive preference will be either for a proposal with multiple institutions working on a single language or multiple languages, or one institution working on multiple languages. The scope of one language at one institution would be considered more limited.

ASSESSMENT TYPES AND ARRANGEMENTS

Q: Does this initiative require applicants to use a Flagship-developed proficiency exam to assess students' language proficiency? If not, should applicants develop their own tests?

A: Flagship-developed proficiency assessments may be used, but it is each applicant's responsibility to identify and propose assessments to be used under the initiative. Applicants may propose to use existing assessments on the ILR or ACTFL scale, Flagship tests, or other tests but must justify in the proposal why the proposed test(s) was/were selected. Applicants may not use grant funds to develop their own tests.

Q: As we understand the RFP, any tests that are now in use by Flagship programs in Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese and Russian, can be used. May we assume that they will be made available to us and, if so, at what cost?

A: Flagship-developed tests may be used but it is each applicant's responsibility to contact test providers and negotiate test availability, costs, etc.

Q: Spanish is one of the languages, yet there are no Flagship programs in this language. Will any standard tests be available (for example, DLI tests)? What are the constraints on which tests can be used?

A: Applicants will need to research publicly available assessments in all languages, including Spanish, and select the assessment that is best for their use. The Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) will not be made available to applicants through this initiative. The use of the DLPT is largely restricted to

members of the military and the government; this would not be readily available to students throughout higher education.

Q: Is there a preference for certain test(s)? Do applicants have to use a particular set of tests to be successful?

A: No, there are no preferred tests. It is up to the applicant to justify to reviewers that the assessments they have selected are 1) reliable, 2) valid, and 3) accurately reflect or can be used to interpret the ILR or ACTFL rubrics.

While there are no preferred tests, we would like to have some consistency across the tests so that we could potentially compare results. ILR and ACTFL are two widely accepted scales that span both the government sphere and higher education sphere and will provide this consistency. Because of this, we want tests scaled to those scoring rubrics. The reviewers will look at the testing regime, testing plan, and the actual assessments and they will make their judgments based on those.

Q: We want to confirm that the only skills being measured through this grant are: speaking, listening, reading.

A: This is correct. The three modalities that need to be measured are speaking, reading and listening.

Q: Is it possible to test only in listening, reading, and writing rather than speaking?

A: Speaking is one of the three required modalities. Applicants should incorporate speaking as a modality in their proposals. Although some writing rubrics exist, we have chosen speaking, reading and listening because we are most confident in the existing tests for the languages selected under this Initiative.

Q: If our institution has invested in certifying our instructors as OPI testers, would it be alright to have these certified testers test their own students *after* the grant period?

A: We would like to see a plan for institutionalization of testing practices after the grant period. If institutions are planning to use their own testers on campus after the funding period, it certainly would be helpful to address the questions of rater bias, particularly for students that testers know, either from a class or outside curricular activities where they are familiar with the student's language use. This question should be addressed, or perhaps alternate arrangements could be considered and discussed in the proposal.

Q: Can the Common European Framework of Reference data be used in addition to the ACTFL and ILR data to measure gains in overseas programs during study abroad?

A: This would be fine as long as the proposal actually proposes a testing regime that goes across modalities with the ACTFL or ILR scale. We do not see a problem with using additional testing scales,

such as the Common European Framework of Reference, to add to the data or for overseas programs as opposed to domestic.

Q: How do we go about obtaining information about Flagship assessments, including cost information?

A: Applicants should directly contact the test providers, and applicants will need to outline the cost of testing in their proposals.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Q: What would be a sufficiently high N for the project (even a range would be helpful)?

A: Applicants must propose a project that is in line with their resources and with research standards. It is up to the applicant to propose a sufficiently high N based on the scope of the applicant's proposed project.   We want to ensure that testing is being conducted broadly across students and majors who are taking the language on campus. We are not looking for a project that only tests language majors.

Q: Can you use data on overseas programs?

A: If your language program regularly integrates an overseas component and there is a testing point which you consider important, then you can certainly collect that data. You may want to test everyone who goes abroad for your own purposes, but that is not necessary under this initiative. Just make sure to justify clearly in the proposal the way you plan to use the assessments.

Q: Must applicants test students from beginning to the advanced level or would it be acceptable to assess the higher level students of different content-based courses?

A: The RFP does not specify how you should implement this across all levels, or what decisions you would make about strategic testing points. It is up to applicants to propose a testing regime that is both doable and cost effective and that would give a good view of the entire language program and the proficiency marks that students going through the language program would be expected to achieve. One of the pieces of institutionalization we would like to see is an alignment of courses to proficiency goals. If students are not meeting these goals, then institutions should look at what is being taught and how it is being taught. We would like a broad range, but it is up to the applicants to decide what is appropriate or useful for each level and what type of battery regime is required at what intervals.

Q: Can in-house OPI testing by ACTFL-certified testers on your own campus be proposed as a means of assessing students' speaking proficiency? If not, can two institutions submitting a joint application propose for each co-applicant to have their ACTFL-certified OPI testers interview students by the other institution (e.g., via Skype)?

A: Applicants are encouraged to use OPI testers that are not affiliated with their campus. Two institutions submitting a joint application can propose using each campus' certified OPI testers to interview students from the other institution. Arrangements such as this that are included in a proposal will be evaluated by reviewers.

FLAGSHIP PROGRAM INFORMATION

Q: What kinds of established testing instruments do existing Language Flagship programs currently use to assess their students' reading and listening proficiency?

A: Flagship programs currently use Flagship assessments developed by the American Councils for International Education, Brigham Young University Chinese Adaptive Reading Test (ART) and Adaptive Listening Test (ALT), and University of Texas Austin Arabic Online Listening and Reading Comprehension Tests to measure students' reading and listening proficiency. The Flagship reading and listening online tests developed by American Councils are used for Flagship pre-Capstone selection of students going overseas and for the post-Capstone exams. American Councils has developed Flagship tests for Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Swahili and Persian; tests for Hindi, Urdu, Turkish and Portuguese are nearly complete. The Flagship program also uses Arabic ACTFL-scaled exams that have been developed jointly by UT-Austin and BYU to test Flagship students that go to a domestic summer program. We also use an ACTFL Chinese reading and listening assessment that was developed at BYU that is used for Flagship students doing overseas summer study. We do not use tests for French and Spanish in Flagship, but there are other existing tests for these and other languages.

Q: How are OPIs administered in Flagship programs that currently exist? Do they have trained people on staff or do they outsource testing to ACTFL or some other organization?

A: Current Flagship programs test students at many points during their studies. During their studies in the domestic program, on average they will have one OPI a year, which is generally administered by university staff - these are non-official OPIs to check student progress. It does vary from program to program and language to language how often the students are tested unofficially. In advance and upon completion of the required yearlong Overseas Capstone studies, students receive official OPI scores (double rated). All official OPIs are administered and rated by LTI/ACTFL.

Q: Can you give an example of a Flagship practice that might be used to boost test scores?

A: No one practice is used to help students improve their language proficiency and increase their test scores, rather a variety of elements and strategies such as student-centered learning, tutoring, and use of authentic materials are integrated into the curriculum.