



ADS Chapter 438

Foreign Language Program

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438.1 OVERVIEW

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

The purpose of USAID's Foreign Language Program is to strengthen the ability of Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) and other USAID personnel to implement programs mandated by Congress. The [Foreign Service Act of 1980](#), as amended, emphasizes **in several sections**, the importance of foreign language competence for members of the Foreign Service (FS). The objectives of USAID's Foreign Language Program are to:

1. Ensure FS career candidate employees meet language requirements for tenure;
2. Ensure overseas Language-Designated Positions (LDPs) are staffed with employees who meet position language requirements; and
3. Provide monetary incentives to encourage employees to acquire and maintain language skills at a higher level for proficiency in incentive languages, **in order to strengthen employees' ability to work effectively with the populations in the countries in which they are serving.**

This chapter and uniform Department of State regulations in Volume 13, [Foreign Affairs Manual \(FAM\)](#) and Chapter 3 of the [Foreign Affairs Handbook \(FAH\)](#) provide the policy directives and required procedures for USAID's Foreign Language Program. The Agency has established a monetary incentive program for qualifying FS employees who have proficiencies in incentive languages and who serve at incentive language - designated posts (see 438.3.11).

The authority for USAID's Foreign Language Program comes from **Section 702 of the Foreign Service Act (FSA) of 1980, as amended**. **Section 704(b)(3) of the Act** is the authority for language incentive pay.

This chapter is applicable to all USAID FS and Civil Service (CS) employees, and eligible family members serving or working abroad.

438.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

USAID is responsible for making foreign language training available to FS employees **in order for them** to meet tenure requirements and to achieve proficiency required for LDPs throughout their careers.

- a. The **Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM)**, or designee, **is responsible for making final decisions on appeals of unfavorable waiver decisions by the Foreign Service Center Director** (see section **438.3.10**) **and for approving waivers related to Senior Leadership Group (SLG)**

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assignments.

b. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, Foreign Service Center (HCTM/FSC) Director is responsible for:

1. Developing and implementing policy for USAID's foreign language program including for LDPs, and selecting the list of foreign languages in which career candidates should be trained;
2. Approving changes in LDPs, as recommended by USAID Mission Directors or USAID Principal Officers, and with concurrence from Regional Bureau Assistant Administrators (AAs) and Administrative Management Services (AMS) Officers;
3. Granting language training or proficiency waivers for employees assigned through the Foreign Service Assignment System (non-SLG), and providing recommendations on waivers for SLG assignments for CHCO approval;
4. Approving curtailment or postponement of language training for career and career candidate employees;
5. Deciding employee appeals regarding eligibility requirements for language incentive payments in accordance with USAID language incentive pay policy (see section 438.3.11); and
6. Ensuring HCTM Staffing Specialists initiate language incentive payments for qualifying employees serving at language-designated incentive posts and terminate payments upon their departure from post.

c. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, Center for Professional Development (HCTM/CPD) is responsible for:

1. **Overseeing** USAID's foreign language training program activities to include, but not limited to: developing and managing the language training budget; counseling employees and USAID Mission management on language studies and requirements; arranging for testing for employees to determine if they meet proficiency requirements for tenure or LDP; and making other training determinations, as necessary;
2. **Arranging and approving** USAID employee enrollment in the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) or other USAID-contracted training facilities; this includes approving language training programs organized at posts overseas or by other United States Government (USG) agencies;
3. **Serving** as the point of contact regarding USAID employee timekeeping, attendance, conduct issues and performance during language training

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assignments;

4. **Granting** extensions of language training for periods up to a maximum of 40 weeks, on a case-by-case basis, as outlined in section **438.3.9.2**, and preparing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for signature by employees who do not meet language requirements;
 5. **Managing** the contract for private language training, including directing students to individualized training, verifying hours, and approving payments; and
 6. **Monitoring, reporting progress, and advising on the continuation or termination of language training that is provided at post.**
- d. **Mission Directors and USAID Principal Officers** are responsible for:
1. Reviewing language proficiency requirements for existing positions;
 2. Certifying language requirements are adequate for existing positions and needed for new positions;
 3. Requesting HCTM/FSC to curtail **a current assignment** or postpone an employee's **onward** assignment, or to waive an employee's language training in Washington, to satisfy an urgent staffing need overseas;
 4. Ensuring employees who do not meet the language requirements for language-designated positions are provided training at the overseas post;
 5. **Ensuring employees whose language score validity for their LDP expires while they are at post either 1) retest at least 60 days prior to home leave, and/or 2) take refresher training and retest after home leave if needed to regain proficiency; and**
 6. Monitoring, reporting progress, and making decisions on the continuation or termination of language training provided at post.
- e. **Foreign Service employees** are responsible for:
1. **Setting up a language consultation with the HCTM/CPD language team to establish a language training or testing plan;**
 2. Acquiring foreign language proficiency, within established timeframes, and maintaining this competency with USAID support. All career FSOs are responsible for using the appropriate language with the degree of proficiency their jobs require, **and for arranging retesting when test scores are no longer valid for their LDP;**

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3. Signing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to proceed to post when the employee has not met the language requirement;
 4. Notifying HCTM/FSC when they meet the eligibility requirements for incentive language payments (per section 438.3.11.1); and
 5. Adhering to the policies and procedures outlined in this chapter, including adhering to schedules for training and testing.
- f. **Supervisors** are responsible for releasing their employees from duties when the employee is assigned to full-time intensive language training.
- g. **Assistant Administrators** and **Administrative Management Services Staff** in Regional Bureaus are responsible for providing support to USAID Missions and facilitating language training requests. They must concur with Mission-proposed changes to LDP designations of positions and initiate requests to waive foreign language proficiency requirements for SLG assignments in their region.
- h. The **Foreign Service Institute**, or in some instances, other **USAID-contracted training facilities**, are responsible for providing foreign language training to FS employees and others, as indicated in this chapter.
- i. The **Bureau for Management, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Payroll Office (M/CFO/P)** is responsible for paying language incentives authorized in this chapter.

438.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

438.3.1 Foreign Language Program Policy

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

To the extent possible, FS employees are trained in the language of their countries of assignment, based on an assessment of host country conditions and requirements, by the Mission Director, Principal Officers, or designees. The Agency reserves the right to train employees in any language needed for the accomplishment of USAID's mission.

FS employees are provided language training, as required, and are eligible for language incentive pay regardless of: race, color, national origin, sex, including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation or transgender status, age (except as it relates to the mandatory retirement age, see Section 812 of the [Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended](#)), religion, genetic information, physical or mental disability, marital status, veteran status, status as a parent, geographic or educational affiliation within the United States, or political affiliation. Retaliation for opposing unlawful discrimination or for engaging in a protected equal employment opportunity activity is also prohibited.

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Employees may request reasonable accommodation through the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) if a disability necessitates support in order to complete required language training and/or testing ([ADS 111, Procedures for Providing Reasonable Accommodation](#)).

FS career candidates must meet foreign language requirements to obtain tenure. Language training requirements for tenure of career candidates cannot be waived. Appointments cannot be extended beyond five years to assist career candidates in meeting their language requirements for tenure, except as provided by [Section 309\(b\)\(3\) of the Foreign Service Act](#).

Employees must meet foreign language requirements for an assignment to a LDP before departing for an overseas assignment. In extraordinary circumstances or in emergency situations, an exception to this policy may be approved by the Director of HCTM/FSC or their designee for FS employees and the CHCO for SLG (see section [438.3.11](#) for more information on exceptions).

438.3.2 Eligibility for Language Training

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

The following categories of employees are eligible for language training:

1. Career Foreign Service and Senior Foreign Service Officers and Career Candidates;
2. Civil Service employees who are non-career limited FS appointees under the Civil Service to Foreign Service Appointment Program (see [ADS 415](#)) and are assigned to LDPs; and
3. Other individuals approved by HCTM/CPD for foreign language training on a case-by-case basis, if funding and space are available, as described in section [438.3.7\(d\)](#).

Foreign Service Limited (FSL) employees on non-career appointments are not eligible for language training. If an FSL employee on a non-career appointment is selected for an LDP, they must demonstrate the required proficiency for the position, as part of the bidding process, as instructed by the bidding guidance.

438.3.3 Language Proficiency Requirements for Tenure and Assignment to Language-Designated Positions

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

Language proficiency requirements for tenure are outlined in [ADS 438maa](#). Language Designated Position (LDP) requirements are specified in the Foreign Service

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Assignments Major Listing or Update 1, published annually in the Agency Notices.

Tenure

To meet foreign language requirements for tenure, career candidates must have a tested proficiency from FSI or another USAID contracted facility, in accordance with [ADS 438maa](#).

Assignment to LDPs

An employee assigned to an LDP must possess the position's mandatory tested level of language proficiency before assuming duties at the overseas post. In exceptional circumstances, a Mission Director, other Principal Officer, or the Head of a Regional Bureau may request HCTM to approve a waiver to allow the employee to proceed to post without language proficiency (see section 438.3.10).

438.3.4 Procedures for Changing Existing or Establishing New Language Designated Positions

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

USAID Missions are responsible for proposing designations of positions requiring foreign language proficiency. Generally, HCTM makes changes in language proficiency requirements only at the time of the annual position validation exercises. HCTM/FSC reviews all LDPs created after the validation on an ad hoc basis.

Missions must not change language requirements to:

1. Avoid delays in recruitment;
2. Avoid the assignment of an employee with the right qualifications for the LDP; or
3. Establish language proficiency requirements above the S-3/R-3 levels or below the S-2 level for LDPs.

a. Designation Criteria

In reviewing and arriving at language proficiency designations for existing and new positions, Mission Directors and other Principal Officers must consider the following:

1. Program management responsibilities of the overseas post and specific offices;
2. Job content and level of contacts in the host country, including the need to conduct official business and develop useful working relations with host country officials, local private sector counterparts, local implementing partners, and other significant donor representatives;
3. Representative/social contact;

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4. Extent of the use of English in the host country;
5. Host country requirements for English proficiency for its officials who serve in counterpart positions (this judgment must not be based on a single individual's English proficiency);
6. Host country's general level of English used by local partners and local private sector and non-urban stakeholders;
7. Host country's attitude and acceptance of the use of English in the local setting;
8. Position requirement for direct supervision of Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), Third-Country Nationals (TCNs), or Personal Services Contractors (PSCs) lacking a working knowledge of English;
9. Frequency and need to deal with the general public on a continuous basis, including conducting interviews;
10. Job requirement to comprehend written materials in a local language;
11. Resources required to monitor translations made by FSNs or translate documents into the local language, where sensitivity requires handling by U.S. personnel;
12. Ease or difficulty of maintaining personal safety and carrying out normal daily living requirements without the local language; and
13. Cost of hiring interpreters and translators versus the cost of training and testing FS employees.

b. Existing Positions

During the annual validation exercise, Mission Directors and other Principal Officers, or designees:

1. Must review and certify that requirements for existing LDPs are adequate or, if duties and responsibilities have changed significantly, recommend modifications to language proficiency requirements; and
2. Must fully justify all recommended changes to the Director of HCTM/FSC. Procedures for submitting changes to language requirements for existing positions are provided in section **438.3.4d**.

c. Submission of Requests for Position Designation and New Positions

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To create new LDPs or to recommend changes to existing positions, the Mission Director or other Principal Officer, or designee, must complete the **position proficiency designation** process, as described in section **438.3.4a**, and justify in writing any language designation changes to the FSC Director. The Regional Bureau AA and AMS offices must concur with these changes. When creating a new position, the Mission Director, other Principal Officer, or designee **must state** the language and level of proficiency required. When feasible and in furtherance of USAID's programmatic needs, USAID **expands** the number and proficiency levels of LDPs to provide opportunities for FSOs to master the languages of the countries where they are serving beyond French, Spanish, and Portuguese. Examples are languages of regional importance, such as Arabic or Swahili or those spoken by large numbers of people, such as Hausa or Bahasa.

When position language designations are changed after an employee has been assigned but before they have arrived at post, the Agency must train the employee to the level set when their assignment was approved, unless both the post and the employee agree to training at the revised language requirement.

438.3.5 Language Testing

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

A standard language proficiency test (administered by FSI or another USAID contracted training provider) is required to determine an employee's speaking and reading levels in a foreign language in order to qualify for tenure, assignment to a LDP position, and language incentive pay. The following contain language testing policy directives and required procedures:

1. Tested language proficiency is rated in quantitative terms. The Agency employees are graded according to the foreign language proficiency scale set by the Interagency Language Roundtable, which was adopted by DOS and used by other federal agencies, to rank an individual's language skills. The scale has six levels, from zero to five -- with five being the most proficient -- to assess an individual's ability to speak, read, and listen in a designated language. USAID requires only proficiency in speaking and reading language skills;
2. USAID adheres to the Terminology and Rating Scales Definitions **utilized by FSI**. FSI tests are scored according to the Interagency Language Roundtable Speaking and Reading (govtilr.org) scales of zero to 5. As of October 2022, FSI caps scores at 4, designating scores of 4 or higher as "Advanced Proficiency" (AP);
3. Language testing for Eligible Family Members (EFMs) is not supported unless there is a conditional job offer to an EFM-eligible USAID position overseas which requires language proficiency. Eligible Family Members at USAID should reach

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out to the Mission who made the conditional job offer regarding testing, where required;

4. An employee who fails the initial language test may be scheduled for retesting no sooner than four weeks after the original test, for up to three retests. If the employee fails to meet the proficiency level after the four tests, the employee may not be retested for a minimum of four months; and
5. Employees who fail to meet the proficiency requirements through testing may submit a request for a test review to the HCTM/CPD Language Coordinator via [LaunchPad](#).

438.3.5.1 Scheduling Tests in USAID/Washington

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

The following are procedures for scheduling language proficiency tests.

- a. Upon receiving their initial overseas assignment, career candidates with a proficiency in a foreign language will be asked to provide a written self-assessment of their language capability to determine their skill levels in speaking and reading the language. Following the self-assessment, HCTM/CPD determines whether to schedule career candidates for a language proficiency test in a language suitable for either meeting tenure requirements or needed for the career candidate's country of assignment, or to proceed to enrollment in training;
- b. Upon receiving an assignment to an LDP, a career employee who has a proficiency in the language of the LDP provides HCTM/CPD with either a copy of their test scores, or a written self-assessment of their language capability to determine their skill levels in speaking and reading the language. Following the self-assessment, HCTM/CPD determines whether to schedule the officer for a language proficiency test, or to proceed to enrollment in training;
- c. Upon completion of the authorized training at either FSI or a contracted facility, HCTM/CPD schedules testing for proficiency. HCTM/CPD schedules tests at least three weeks before a test date. A testing team only waits ten minutes past the scheduled time for an examinee to arrive. Employees who do not take a scheduled test or fail to notify HCTM/CPD of the need to reschedule due to an emergency are required to pay the testing fee (usually over \$1500) and may be subject to disciplinary action for AWOL or other appropriate charges.
- d. HCTM/CPD must give a minimum of 24 hours notice of an appointment cancellation or an appointment that needs to be changed; otherwise, charges are levied for the testing appointment; and

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- e. HCTM/CPD will not schedule language proficiency tests for employees who receive or give notice of separation from the Agency.

438.3.5.2 Tests Overseas
 Effective Date: 12/27/2023

Official language proficiency tests overseas are conducted either remotely from Washington, D.C. by FSI or an approved USAID contractor, or by an FSI field representative. HCTM/CPD coordinates and funds language testing in consultation with Mission leadership.

438.3.5.3 Validity of Scores
 Effective Date: 12/27/2023

When determining whether an employee has the language qualifications for an LDP, test scores have the following periods of validity:

Tested Proficiency	Duration of Validity
S-3/R-3 or below	Five years
S-4/R-4 or above	Does not expire*

*Except for incentive pay (see section 438.3.11 for more information).

An employee who previously scored at the proficiency level required for a prospective position, but at less than S-4/R-4, and whose test date is past the duration of validity, must be retested, at least 60 days before departing from their current post (see section 438.3.7(c)). If language proficiency has fallen below the required position proficiency level, the employee must take a refresher course in Washington D.C. and test at the required speaking and reading proficiency levels, before departing for an overseas post.

If the employee's language score expires while they are assigned to an LDP, they must retest prior to the date of their eligibility for home leave. If language proficiency has fallen below the required position proficiency level, the employee must take language training in Washington D.C. and test at the required speaking and reading proficiency levels before returning to their overseas post.

438.3.6 Priorities for Language Training in Washington and Overseas
 Effective Date: 12/27/2023

The priorities for scheduling language training are as follows:

1. **Priority 1** – FS employees who are approved for assignment to LDPs and career candidates who have not met USAID language requirements for tenure;

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2. **Priority 2** – FS employees who are assigned to non-LDPs at overseas posts where English is not the primary language;
3. **Priority 3** – CS employees selected for assignments to LDP under the CS-to-FS appointment program;
4. **Priority 4** – FS employees who need training in languages HCTM determines to be in critically short supply in the employees' backstops;
5. **Priority 5** – FS employees who need to acquire proficiency in a USAID useful language to prepare for future assignments (see section **438.3.8** on Languages Used at USAID); and
6. **Priority 6** – Spouses, domestic partners, and adult eligible family members 18 years or older of employees assigned to LDPs and non-LDPs at overseas posts, subject to available funding and Missions' assessment of host country conditions and requirements. Eligible family members with conditional job offers for USAID **positions requiring** language proficiency will be given preference.

438.3.7 Language Training Scheduling

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

a. Language Training in Washington

Foreign Service employees take intensive, full-time language training in Washington, D.C. at FSI or at a USAID-contracted training facility. Students assigned to full-time language study are relieved of all other duties for the duration of their language training to meet the necessary levels of language proficiency. Only emergency situations are permitted to interrupt or shorten language training assignments (see **13 FAM 200-250** for additional information on language training, **and ADS 480** for sick and Family Medical Leave Act provisions). Employees **enrolled** in full-time language training will not be approved for annual leave during their training period, and should carefully plan with their supervisors to schedule leave before and after their training to avoid forfeiting unused annual leave, in accordance with **ADS 480**. Employees should review **ADS 461** and **ADS 463** for requirements related to performance management and promotion while in language training.

Scheduling procedures are as follows:

1. HCTM/CPD schedules and provides funding for training in Washington, D.C. Employees **scheduled for training at FSI or an authorized contractor** must submit an **SF-182, Request, Authority, Agreement and Certification of Training online** to HCTM via **LaunchPad** or the **HR Help Desk** for authorization and submission to FSI. The HCTM/CPD division must receive the SF-182 form at

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least five weeks before the desired training for review and processing or by another date that the Director, HCTM/FSC provided the employee. The training form must reach FSI no later than three weeks before the training begins. Employees must complete items seven and nine, Training Purpose and Training Sub Type Code, in the SF-182 form, and sign the Continued Service Agreement on page five.

2. HCTM/CPD may arrange an alternate training program at a contracted language facility. This training is only permitted in the following circumstances:
 - a) When the employee already has some proficiency in the language;
 - b) When the employee does not require the full course of training;
 - c) When the employee will study a language or start on a date not listed in FSI's Schedule of Courses; and
 - d) When a reasonable accommodation is recommended by OCR and approved by HCTM/CPD.

b. Training for Career Candidates for Tenure

1. Career candidates are usually enrolled in language training after the completion of new entry orientation, formal on-the-job training programs, and prior to their departure to an overseas post.
2. If the career candidate is assigned to an LDP and does not have the required tested level of language proficiency, HCTM/CPD will schedule training in the required language for the amount of time necessary for the career candidate to achieve the proficiency level (see section 438.3.10.2 for training time limits). If a career candidate is not assigned to an LDP for their first tour overseas and cannot test at the proficiency level required for tenure in a USAID useful language (see ADS 438maa), the HCTM Language Team, (HCTM/CPD, in consultation with other key stakeholders as needed), will assign the FSO to learn a USAID useful language and schedule training in the required language for the amount of time necessary to achieve the proficiency level (see section 438.3.10.2 for training time limits). Career candidates are expected to achieve the language requirement before departure for the candidate's initial post. This policy applies equally to career candidates who converted to the FS following a CS to FS appointment under ADS 415, as well as to career candidates newly hired into USAID.

c. Training for Career FS Employees for LDP Assignment

USAID's FS assignment policy requires each LDP to be filled with an employee who

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meets the language proficiency requirements. When individuals assigned to positions requiring language proficiency do not have required language skills, they must receive language training immediately before assuming duties at an overseas post or as indicated below.

1. **Reassignment from USAID/Washington:** Employees transferring to LDPs from USAID/Washington without the required proficiency must be enrolled in and complete language training before departure for an overseas post;
2. **Employees at Overseas Posts:** Employees on home leave and transfer (HL/T) orders or on home leave and returning to overseas post assignment (HL/RTP) orders, and who have language scores expiring before their return to post, will be tested and enrolled in language training by HCTM/CPD in the U.S. before their departure to post, if they do not have the designated proficiency requirements.

Employees who are on temporary duty (TDY) assignments or Rest & Recuperation (R&R) travel in the United States, whose scores are expiring, may be tested and assigned by HCTM/FSC to language training, in lieu of the employee immediately returning to their overseas post if they do not have the designated proficiency requirement of their LDP.

3. **Direct Transfer:** Employees reassigned to LDPs may only direct transfer without the required proficiency, if granted a waiver by the HCTM/FSC Director (for FS assignments) or CHCO (for SLG assignments) (see section 438.3.10 on Waivers).

Employees are encouraged to review the USAID General Notice, “**USAID Foreign Service Assignment System – (current cycle) Standard Authorization Language for Travel Authorizations,**” which HCTM/FSC issues annually, for additional information on language training. The Travel Authorization specifies the costs of lodging and miscellaneous expenses covered during language training, which is in accordance with U.S. Government per diem ([gsa.gov](https://www.gsa.gov)) and State Department’s [14 FAM 575.3](#).

d. Other Training Authorized in Washington

Other language training in Washington, D.C. may be authorized by HCTM/FSC, as follows:

1. **For assignment to non-LDPs:** If an employee is assigned to a non-LDP, HCTM/FSC may approve language training that is relevant to the host country or area for the employee, based on funding availability;
2. **For anticipated assignment needs:** HCTM/FSC may schedule an employee with no immediate assignment for full-time language training in a language determined by HCTM/FSC to be in shortage for the employee’s particular or

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prospective backstop. Employees with a USAID/Washington, D.C. assignment may be trained in such languages on a part-time basis, if available, based on funding availability;

3. **Eligible Family Members (EFMs)** who are spouses and domestic partners, age 18 and older, and who are expected to accompany the employee assigned to an overseas post, may be approved for distance language learning training provided by FSI and online, subject to funding and availability. The EFM must be on the FSO's orders, and the language must be spoken at the USAID mission. This training may include distance learning courses such as Mango, FSI-mentored distance learning, or other at-post language training opportunities. Training options for EFMs must be discussed with and approved by the HCTM/OHCI/EFM Unit. Training options for EFMs are subject to change based on budgetary constraints; and
4. **Civil Service (CS) employees** serving overseas, for example, on extended TDYs, are eligible for language training, if language proficiency is required for the TDY assignment, based on funding availability.

e. Post Language Programs

Overseas language training is usually provided through the interagency training program administered by the Department of State (DOS), as outlined in [13 FAM 201.3](#). It may also be organized and funded by the USAID Mission at post. The Director of HCTM/CPD, or their designee, must approve the language program at post that will be used to provide the training required in order to achieve proficiency for an LDP assignment. Posts can contact HCTM/CPD's Language Training Team via [LaunchPad](#) for guidance on submitting requests for approval of at-post programs.

In cases where overseas posts have language programs open to all employees and eligible family members, employees may attend classes to develop or improve proficiency in local languages.

f. Employee Self-Study

All USAID employees have access to online foreign language training through USAID University and may take such training at any time after hours. In addition, an employee may request their supervisor's permission to partake in on-line language study during regular duty hours at their current post for up to two hours per week for the six months prior to their transfer to a new overseas post, through USAID University. If posts have funding available, employees may also seek their Mission's support for local language training and be permitted up to two hours a week of duty time to attend such classes. Employees may amend their Individual Learning and Training Plan to include such language study. Employees should keep a record of the hours spent in such training and submit monthly reports to their supervisor.

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g. Employee Withdrawal from Training

Employees who withdraw from language training prior to completion or testing at the required proficiency may be unable to meet tenure requirements or proceed to their assignments. The employee will incur a service obligation to the Agency based on the length of training completed in accordance with [ADS 458](#), and in line with the Continued Service Agreement the employee signed upon entry to training. This Agreement provides an explanation of service requirements and consequences for employees related to their training.

438.3.8 Language Categories Effective Date: 12/27/2023

The following language categories are used at USAID and listed in [ADS 438maa, USAID Tenuring Languages](#) and [ADS 438 mab, USAID Incentive Languages](#).

1. Category A: Spanish, French, [Haitian Creole, German](#), and Portuguese;
2. Category B: Other Languages Qualifying for USAID Tenuring; and
3. Category C: USAID Incentive Languages: [Based on Section 704\(b\) \(3\) of the Foreign Service Act](#), USAID provides a monetary incentive to FS employees who become proficient in these languages and serve at language incentive designated posts where the language is used (see section [438.3.11](#) and [ADS 438mab](#)).

438.3.9 Monitoring Progress against Training Performance Standards Effective Date: 12/02/2021

FSI or the USAID-contracted training facility staff regularly assess the performance and progress of employees in language training classes and send reports to HCTM/CPD periodically on their progress.

The Foreign Service Institute uses standards of the Interagency Language Roundtable (see www.govtilr.org) to measure the progress of employees who are assigned to full-time language training at FSI. Similar standards are applied to employees who are trained in USAID-contracted training facilities.

438.3.9.1 Performance Reviews Effective Date: 12/27/2023

Performance reviews are conducted at regular intervals (every six weeks for 24-week language programs, and every 8 to 10 weeks for 30 or more-week language programs) to determine whether the employee is on track and will or will not meet the proficiency

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level by the end of the planned training. Any conduct issues raised during these reviews will be referred to HCTM/Employee and Labor Relations for action.

The FSI regularly prepares performance reports and the employee (*i.e.*, student) signs these reports to acknowledge receipt and receives copies from FSI.

If, after the first progress interval, FSI or the USAID-contracted training facility determines an employee (*i.e.*, student) may have difficulty reaching the required proficiency level by the end of the planned training period, FSI or the USAID-contracted training facility will advise both the employee and HCTM/CPD.

If, after a second, third, or fourth progress interval, the employee (*i.e.*, student) continues to have difficulty making progress to achieve the proficiency level expected, FSI or the USAID-contracted training facility must again advise both the employee and HCTM/CPD. HCTM/FSC must then advise the employee's supervisor, the backstop coordinator, and the USAID Mission of assignment, as appropriate, regarding the employee's difficulties with achieving the language proficiency level. At that time, HCTM/FSC and HCTM/CPD must review the circumstances and determine whether to continue language training.

At any time, HCTM/CPD may terminate an employee's language training program, if FSI or the language training contractor reports the proficiency level needed may not be achieved or if the employee engages in misconduct which HCTM/CPD, in consultation with HCTM/ELR, deems to warrant such termination. The HCTM/CPD division decides whether FSI should administer an end-of-training test for the record.

438.3.9.2 Training Limitations Effective Date: 12/27/2023

a. Training for FS Employees for Assignment to LDPs

FS employees assigned to LDPs for the most USAID-useful languages, which have requirements of S-3/R-3, who do not possess the required tested level or any language proficiency, may be granted up to 34 weeks to gain the proficiency before assumption of duties at an overseas post. The Director, HCTM/CPD, or designee, approves additional language training up to 40 weeks if the employee fails to achieve the required proficiency during the allowed time. (Note: Although the maximum length of USAID-paid training is up to 40 weeks, an individual employee's training plan may be shorter, depending on factors such as language difficulty, previous knowledge of the language, and learning speed). The HCTM/CPD division conducts periodic reviews with FSI or the language contractor training facility (see section 438.3.9.1) to determine how the employee is progressing. If the employee fails to achieve the required proficiency during the allowed time, HCTM/CPD in coordination with HCTM/FSC must consult with the affected Mission regarding the next steps, as required.

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The Director of HCTM/FSC, or designee, approves more than 40 weeks of language training for employees assigned to LDPs requiring the S-3/R-3 level in FSI-defined Category IV languages, such as Arabic (all variants) and Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin).

FS employees assigned to LDPs with language requirements of S-2/R-2 or less who do not possess the required, tested level of language proficiency are assigned for a suitable length of language training, based on FSI guidelines to gain the required proficiency before the assumption of duties at post.

b. Career Candidate Training for Tenure

Career candidate employees whose language proficiency requirements for tenure are S-2/R-2 or S-3/R-3 are enrolled for up to 34 weeks of training, depending on the language, and are tested during the final week of training. If the career candidate employee fails to reach the required level, the Director of HCTM/CPD, or designee, may extend training for up to 40 weeks of training, with periodic reviews.

c. Failure of Career Candidates to Meet Tenure Language Requirements After Completion of Training

If a career candidate fails to achieve the required level by the end of 40 weeks, the training is terminated and the employee is responsible for self-study or other available mechanisms to achieve proficiency.

When language training is terminated for career candidates, they may be retained in the Foreign Service up to their five-year appointment limitation. In such cases, career candidates have the opportunity to meet language requirements for tenure through self-study, participation in post-funded programs, or immersion programs or other available mechanisms at their own expense and on their own time. Employees who have not achieved the required language score after the provision of the USAID provided training must sign a "Memorandum of Understanding" (MOU) confirming the additional language training for tenure will be at their own expense. The career candidate must request annual leave or leave without pay (LWOP) if they will be absent during normal work hours to pursue independent study arrangements.

Career candidates who fail to meet language proficiency requirements are ineligible to be considered for tenure (see [ADS 414](#) for Tenure Requirements). This requirement must be satisfied prior to the date of the last scheduled tenure board before the employee reaches the end of their limited appointment.

Employees who fail to achieve a language proficiency level required for tenure by the end of the five-year period will be separated from the Agency, based on not meeting this condition of employment.

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Language **proficiency** requirements for tenure of career candidates will not be waived. Appointments will not be extended beyond five years to assist career candidates in meeting their language requirements for tenure.

d. Failure of Career Employee to Meet Language Requirements **for LDPs**

For career employees who fail to achieve the language requirement of the LDP, Missions may request a waiver of the language training in Washington, D.C. in accordance with section **438.3.10**, or request that the assignment be broken and request the assignment of another employee with the required language proficiency.

438.3.10 Language Training Waivers for Employees Assigned to a Language-Designated Position

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

USAID's FS assignment policy requires each LDP position to be filled with an employee who meets the language requirements. When employees assigned to positions requiring language proficiency do not have the required language skills, they must receive language training before assuming their duties at an overseas post. Exceptions to this requirement are rarely granted.

The Mission Director, other Principal Officer, or the Head of a Regional Bureau must submit requests for a waiver for a non-SLG employee to the Director of HCTM/FSC and they must explain in detail the emergency conditions or compelling circumstances necessitating a waiver. A Regional Bureau AA must submit SLG waiver requests through the Director of HCTM/FSC for review and recommendation prior to final approval by the CHCO. The Mission Director, other Principal Officer, or the Head of the Regional Bureau may appeal unfavorable waiver decisions by the Director of HCTM/FSC to the CHCO, or designee, for decision. The CHCO, or designee, has final decision authority. Further appeals beyond the CHCO are not allowed.

a. Direct Transfers

To permit an employee who is reassigned to an LDP to direct transfer to the new post without the required proficiency or training in Washington, the gaining post/Mission must have an HCTM/CPD-approved language training program available at post (see [Mission/Post Language Training Program Requirements](#)). If the Director of HCTM/FSC approves the waiver, the employee must be enrolled by the Training or Executive Officer (EXO) at post, at Mission cost, and may not assume work duties until the employee has met the required language proficiency for the position. The Training Officer or EXO must provide the employee's language training plan to HCTM/CPD upon approval of the waiver and prior to the start of language training. HCTM/CPD monitors training and arranges testing at FSI or another USAID contracted organization. The employee's tour of duty will not start until language proficiency has been achieved or waived. (Note: A separate waiver must be requested to permit the employee to start

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performing their duties, if proficiency has not been achieved after completion of training, similar to that outlined in the following section.)

b. Waiver Following Training in Washington

Language waivers to proceed to post without the required proficiency following training in Washington may only be requested when the employee has exhausted the training time, as established by FSI, for the given language. An employee may receive training extensions not to exceed up to 40 weeks of training.

The waiver request must specify the post has an approved At Post Mission Language Training Program. The Training Officer or EXO provides the employee's language training plan to HCTM/CPD upon approval of the waiver and prior to the start of language training. The HCTM/CPD division monitors training at post, and arranges testing at FSI (see section 438.5 for sample training plans).

c. Continued Training and Testing Upon Approval of a Waiver

Employees approved for a waiver to proceed to post (or to remain at post following at-post training for a direct transfer) must continue their language training at post, in accordance with the agreed training arrangements, which are included in a MOA signed by the employee and Mission Director/Principal Officer at post (see sample [Memorandum of Agreement](#)). Employees on a direct transfer are expected to complete their training at post and meet the proficiency requirements of the LDP before assuming their duties. Employees transferring to post following training in Washington, D.C. must continue training at the overseas post while performing their regular duties. They must be tested no later than their eligibility date for home leave.

The Mission coordinates with HCTM/CPD to schedule testing through FSI or another USAID-contracted organization. If the employee reaches the language proficiency requirement, the post notifies the servicing HCTM/FSC/FSS HR Specialist that the requirement has been met.

d. Proficiency Not Achieved Following Training at Post

An employee who is granted a waiver to do a direct transfer and receives at-post training, who then fails to meet the required proficiency for the LDP may be placed on the language training complement in Washington D.C. The Mission must coordinate with HCTM/CPD to enroll the employee in language training in connection with home leave and return to post orders, TDY in Washington, or R&R to the United States. The Mission is responsible for covering the travel expenses and per diem for training provided in Washington and HCTM must cover the cost of training and testing.

An employee who receives a waiver to proceed to post following language training in Washington D.C., who then fails to meet the required proficiency for the LDP at a two-

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tour post within two months of their eligibility for home leave, will have their assignment curtailed. In addition, a Mission which believes an employee's lack of language proficiency prevents them from adequately performing their duties may request curtailment even prior to their scheduled testing date per [ADS 436](#). For employees assigned to a one-tour post, the Mission may request curtailment if the employee cannot adequately perform their duties following the completion of their approved post training program as documented in the MOA. For employees assigned to a two-tour post, the Mission may request the curtailment prior to the first tour's home leave.

HCTM/FSC curtails the assignment of an employee granted a waiver who is unable to achieve the proficiency of the LDP under the MOA within two months of their eligibility for home leave (for a two-tour post). The Mission may request the employee be allowed to complete the full tour(s) based on an emergent requirement or priority need. The CHCO must concur and approve these requests. A Mission may appeal an unfavorable decision by the HCTM/FSC Director to the CHCO.

The Mission may request that an employee who has failed to meet the proficiency requirement of the position be allowed to complete the full tour(s) based on an emergent requirement or priority need. The HCTM/FSC Director must concur these requests. A Mission may appeal an unfavorable decision by the HCTM/FSC Director to the CHCO.

438.3.11 Language Incentive Pay

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

The Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, emphasizes the importance of foreign language competence for members of the FS. [Section 704\(b\) \(3\)](#) specifically authorizes monetary or other incentives to encourage members of the FS to acquire and retain proficiency in a foreign language. To promote the development and use of foreign language skills deemed critical to its mission, USAID provides monetary incentives for proficiency in designated languages, while an employee serves at a language-designated incentive post.

The list of USAID incentive languages and language-designated posts for the USAID Language Incentive Program is found in [USAID Incentive Languages](#). The list is updated to reflect the Agency's changing needs.

A language incentive is paid to **qualifying members of the FS** when they are assigned to a **post that uses a USAID incentive language** for the duration of the assignment.

438.3.11.1 Eligibility

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

To be eligible for language incentive pay, **FS career candidates or Officers** must meet the following criteria:

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1. Must be serving at a language-designated incentive post with a language currently on the list of USAID incentive languages; and
2. Must have a current (less than five years old) tested proficiency of S-3/R-3 or higher in an incentive language of the language-designated incentive post.

An employee who has tested twice, at least four years apart, and received a score of S-4/R-4 or above for both instances, is permanently eligible for the incentive pay for that language whenever serving in a language-designated incentive post requiring that language.

438.3.11.2 Notification of Eligibility

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

Responsibilities for notification of eligibility are as follows:

1. Employees are responsible for promptly notifying HCTM/FSC of possible eligibility for language incentive pay;
2. Employees must provide proof of eligibility, such as official test results from FSI or another USAID-contracted organization, if test scores are not on file in HCTM/FSC/FSS;
3. HCTM/CPD is responsible for furnishing a certification of test results to HCTM/FSC/FSS to facilitate payment and minimize the need for retroactive pay. HCTM/CPD distributes the test scores after an employee completes training at FSI or is tested in the field;
4. Missions are responsible for notifying HCTM/FSC of the arrival date for qualifying employees in order for language incentive payments to begin; and
5. Once Missions notify HCTM/FSC of the arrival date, HCTM/FSC is responsible for entering the incentive percentage code into the National Finance Center (NFC) system to indicate the employee meets eligibility requirements for language incentive payments. This action authorizes the Bureau of Management, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Payroll (M/CFO/P) to initiate language incentive payments to the qualified employee.

438.3.11.3 Testing

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

FS employees whose test scores are no longer valid and who believe they have the required language proficiency level to qualify for language incentive pay must arrange for a test to verify their proficiency before they leave for the overseas post. The

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employee must contact HCTM/CPD to schedule the test at FSI **or another USAID-contracted organization**. The FSI requests at least three weeks advance notification before the employee's desired test date. It schedules tests as close to the requested dates as possible. Retesting may only be requested six months after a previous test.

438.3.11.4 Employee Appeals

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

Employees may appeal disputes concerning their **qualifications for incentive payments** to the CHCO, or designee, whose decision is final.

438.3.11.5 Monetary Payment Levels

Effective Dates: 12/27/2023

Employees meeting the criteria listed below are eligible for language proficiency payments:

1. An employee who has a qualifying rating at the S-3/R-3 level receives 10 percent of their base salary, which includes overseas comparability pay;
2. An employee who has a qualifying rating at the S-4/R-4 level or better receives 15 percent of their base salary, which includes overseas comparability pay;
3. An employee who has an S-4/R-4 level or higher that is more than five years old upon arrival at an overseas post, will receive ten percent of their base salary, which includes overseas comparability pay. If the employee subsequently tests at the S-4/R-4 level, or better, **the language incentive pay is adjusted to** 15 percent of their base salary.

Note: If FSI **or the contracted training provider** does not give reading tests in the designated language, the reading requirement is waived.

438.3.11.6 Effective Date of Payments or Termination

Effective Date: 12/02/2021

1. Language incentive payments are effective at the beginning of the first full pay period after the employee's arrival at the overseas post and continue for the duration of the tour of duty. Payments will continue during periods of R&R, home leave, or other authorized leave or duty away from the post, if the employee returns to the same post;
2. When a qualifying language test rating is achieved after the employee's arrival at the overseas post, the language incentive payment becomes effective at the beginning of the first full pay period, after the employee passes the language proficiency test;

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3. When a language is added to the USAID incentive language list for host countries, payment for qualifying employees who are assigned to the language-designated incentive post begins at the beginning of the first full pay period after the language is added to the list;
4. The HCTM/FSC enters the appropriate percentage code into the NFC system within the pay period the approved language incentive payments are effective; and
5. Language incentive payments terminate at the end of the pay period during which the employee permanently departs from the post for which the incentive is authorized.

438.3.11.7 Notification to Terminate Incentive Pay

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

1. The EXO, or designee, is responsible for promptly notifying HCTM/FSC, through submission of a ticket to the HR Help Desk/LaunchPad of the termination date of an employee's eligibility, for language incentive pay;
2. The official USAID departure-from-post message on an employee receiving language incentive pay, who transfers or separates, including resignation or retirement, must contain the following statement: "Stop language incentive pay as of the end of the pay period in which the actual time of departure falls;" and
3. Upon receipt of such notification, HCTM/FSC deletes the incentive percentage code from NFC employee records at the end of the pay period in which the employee departs post.

438.3.11.8 Impact of Incentive Payments on other Pay Actions

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

Language incentive payments do not alter the waiting period for the next regular earned salary step increase. Language incentive payments are subject to statutory, and Chief of Mission pay caps (see 3 FAM 3114, Chief of Mission Pay Caps: <https://fam.state.gov/>).

438.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES

438.4.1 External Mandatory References

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

- a. [13 FAM 200-250, Language Training](#)
- b. [13 FAM 201.3 Post Language Programs](#)

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c. [Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, Sections 103, 702-704](#)

438.4.2 Internal Mandatory References

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

- a. [ADS 414, Foreign Service Appointments](#)
- b. [ADS 436, Foreign Service Assignment **Process and Tours of Duty**](#)
- c. [ADS 438maa, USAID Tenuring Languages](#)
- d. [ADS 438mab, USAID Incentive Languages](#)
- e. [ADS 459, USAID's Foreign Service Career Candidate Program](#)
- f. [USAID Foreign Service Assignment System – Standard Authorization Language for Travel Authorizations \(current cycle\)](#)

438.5 ADDITIONAL HELP

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

- a. [**Memorandum of Understanding for Language Training \(Tenure\)**](#)
- b. [**Memorandum of Agreement for Language Training Waiver**](#)
- c. [**Sample training plan for employees on a waiver following language training in D.C.**](#)
- d. [**Sample Language Training Plan for Employees who do a Direct Transfer**](#)

438.5.1 Mandatory Forms

Effective Date: 03/01/2014

- a. [SF-52-B, Request for Personnel Action](#)
- b. [SF-182, Request, Authority, Agreement and Certification of Training](#)

438.6 DEFINITIONS

Effective Date: 12/27/2023

See the [ADS Glossary](#) for all ADS terms and definitions.

Career Candidate

Text highlighted in yellow indicates that the adjacent material is new or substantively revised.

An employee hired for a time-limited appointment that leads to tenure and a full career with USAID. Career candidate appointments are appropriate for people who aspire to a long-term USAID Foreign Service career and whose qualifications meet a continuing requirement. (Chapters [412](#), [415](#), [438](#), [459](#), and [468](#))

Category A languages

French, Spanish, [Haitian Creole](#), [German](#), and Portuguese are Category A languages. (Chapter 438)

Foreign Service Institute (FSI)

The Federal Government's primary training institution for personnel of the foreign affairs community, located at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC) of the Department of State. (Chapter 438)

Incentive Language Payment

Additional salary payment (10 percent or 15 percent) made to Foreign Service employees for specific Foreign Service Institute-tested language proficiency when assigned to language-designated incentive posts. (Chapter 438)

Incentive Languages

Languages for which USAID provides a monetary incentive to an employee who becomes proficient and works at a language-designated incentive post in a host country where the language is used. (Chapter 438)

Language-Designated Position (LDP)

An overseas position officially designated by USAID as requiring a specified level of language proficiency. (Chapter 438)

Language Proficiency Test

A test designed to provide information regarding an employee's skill level in speaking and reading in a foreign language. (Chapter 438)

Language Training at Post

Supplementary or substitute training provided in the country of assignment at the Mission's expense. (Chapter 438)

National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC)

The physical site of the Foreign Service Institute operated by the Department of State. (Chapter 438)

Tenuring Languages

Languages in which USAID employees can be tested to determine if they meet tenure requirements to become career Foreign Service Officers. (Chapters 438)

USAID-contracted Training Facility

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A facility that may be used by USAID, as needed, to provide language training **and/or testing** for employees. (**Chapter 438**)

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