

# EHLS PROGRAM ESSAY GUIDANCE

The EHLS program seeks motivated and knowledgeable scholarship applicants with a desire to lend their distinct skill sets to federal service. There are five required essays for the EHLS program, where applicants show that they are a strong candidate for the program. Applicants are measured against a **set of criteria** (<https://www.ehlsprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/EHLS-Program-Selection-Criteria-Definitions-2026-2027.pdf>) that will enable them to succeed both in the intensive program of study and in government positions. Be as specific as possible in your essays, showing clear ways you will benefit from the program, and a clear idea of the work you would like to do after the program. Make sure to answer the question that is being asked, and don't copy the website word for word.

## **Essay 1 - Language Goals and Motivation**

*The EHLS Program is an advanced language learning program. In order to be successful, you need concrete goals and the motivation to improve your English skills. Describe a situation where your English was a limitation. How have you been able to work on this? How do you see this program helping you to further address it?*

This essay is an opportunity for applicants to describe their language goals as they connect with program participation and professional aspirations. A goal of the program is to improve scholars' professional communication in English in all domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Explain what motivates you to improve in your English through the program. For example, learning how to write in the federal style, oral communication and presentation skills. We talk in more details about what scholars will learn in the 'What to Expect During and After EHLS' webinar recording (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvKtOnFVDoU>), you can talk about your motivation for specific classes and skills you would like to hone in the different classes.

The program's classes are Reading and Writing for Professionals, News Analysis, Career Skills Development, and Professional Oral Communications. The EHLS curriculum focuses on tasks that are crucial to professional interactions in a government workplace, such as:

- Making oral presentations
- Conducting research for federal agencies
- Drawing sound analytical conclusions
- Reading articles on current issues
- Organizing and writing concise reports
- Using accepted email protocol
- Negotiating with supervisors and clients
- Running effective meetings
- Creating résumés
- Preparing for job interviews

Applicants can review Alumni testimonials on their language growth in the Alumni videos linked on the EHLS website.

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale descriptors are a good resource to help advanced language learners identify specific skills that can be improved:

<https://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale2.htm>

### **Essay 2 - Cultural Knowledge**

*Native speakers are needed by the federal government not only because of their language skills but also because of the cultural lens they provide, which enables them to aptly interpret information in context. Describe a workplace experience where your native cultural knowledge was necessary to ensure linguistic understanding or to facilitate cross-cultural communication.*

EHLS Scholars have highly sought-after linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as subject-matter knowledge. This essay is an opportunity for applicants to articulate the importance of this cultural knowledge in the federal workplace. Applicants should discuss specific examples of their cultural knowledge and connect it to workplace experience if possible. Any experience in a school or social context can also be relevant to show that you are comfortable in your critical language and culture and in navigating different cultural contexts and social situations with different communities and interpreting news outlets and nuances in communication. You should talk about your personal cultural background. This essay is an opportunity to show off your expertise and how you think it can be useful. Keep in mind that the federal government values these experiences that may seem normal to you but provide a lot of context and insights for them.

### **Essay 3 - Research Skills**

*The capstone project for the EHLS Program is an analytical report and a formal presentation based on open source research about a topic that is of interest to the federal government. It requires the ability to gather, analyze, and evaluate information from a variety of publicly available sources to investigate and answer a question using your language skills and cultural knowledge. Describe a project you have worked on, in school or in work, that used these types of research skills.*

This essay is an opportunity for applicants to describe a research experience and the skills and methods they can use to produce research outcomes. Applicants should both reflect on past experience and demonstrate how it will make you successful in completing the EHLS capstone project: the Open Source Analysis Project (OSAP). Using non-classified open source materials, scholars conduct research in English and their native languages on topics provided by federal agencies. You then present your analytic findings to federal agency representatives and government contractors both orally at a formal symposium in June, and in a written report. View the following Alumni Series video to learn more about the Open Source Analysis Project (OSAP): <https://youtu.be/RIENQ4BDIBY>

#### **Essay 4 - Professional Adaptability**

*In both the EHLS Program and the federal workplace, working collaboratively with others is a critical skill. Describe an experience you've had on the job working with others to solve a problem or resolve a difficulty. How did this experience demonstrate your ability to adapt to a new situation and collaborate with others?*

This essay is an opportunity for applicants to highlight an ability and a willingness to adapt and work collaboratively. Applicants should describe strategies used and share original lessons learned from their experience. Think about how your experience has led to growth and how it will assist you in preparing for the intensive instruction during the EHLS program and what you will bring as a leader in the federal workforce.

When selecting an experience to highlight, applicants should seek to demonstrate their adaptability, self-management, accountability, and collaborative problem solving. The essay should assure selection panels that the applicant is prepared for the challenging growth experiences during and after the EHLS program.

#### **Essay 5 - Federal Employment Goals**

*The goals of the EHLS Program are to train advanced English speakers to be effective communicators and strong candidates for federal jobs. How would you use your current skill set, including your work and educational experiences, in a federal position? Name one or more preferred agencies of employment and what role you would like to fill and why. To assess your skills and interests in relation to the federal job market, visit these websites:*

- **USAJobs**, which lists all available federal jobs except those in the Intelligence Community: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>
- **Department of Defense jobs**: <https://www.dodciviliancareers.com/>
- **Department of State jobs**: <https://www.state.gov/job-seekers/>
- **Department of Homeland Security jobs**: <https://www.dhs.gov/homeland-security-careers>
- **Intelligence Community jobs**: <https://www.intelligencecareers.gov/>

This essay is an opportunity for applicants to explain why preferred agencies of employment are a good fit. Applicants should demonstrate that they have researched different positions and that their work and educational experiences have the potential to be relevant to government service. Applicants should show that they understand the hiring processes and necessary qualifications for those positions; i.e. they should explain the short-, medium-, and long-term steps they will take to achieve their professional goals.

As a scholarship recipient, you will be expected to seek a position that has national security responsibilities for the 1-year federal service requirement as a condition of receiving and accepting a scholarship. Preference will be given to applicants who demonstrate a desire to have a career in the federal government.

Past EHLS scholars and graduates of other NSEP programs have found positions with national security responsibilities in the agencies on this list of examples (<https://www.ehlsprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/EHLS-Examples-of-Federal-Agencies.pdf>)

**Focus on Priority Agencies:** Any position with the four priority agencies -- the Department of Defense (civilian or military), the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State (including USAID), or any element of the Intelligence Community -- will fulfill the service requirement. Other positions with the federal government may fulfill the federal service requirement but must be approved on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, a career plan that includes consideration of the priority agencies will help to demonstrate the seriousness of an applicant's commitment to public service.

**Consider the Odds:** Many of the agencies in the list of examples are quite small and specialized, and job openings there are seldom and highly competitive. Larger agencies will post more entry-level positions more often and are therefore more realistic options to begin a career in public service. Applicants with highly specialized career ambitions should consider how they may enter federal service, gain a security clearance, and build the experience necessary to achieve those goals.