



April 2023

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Employment Information for Key Grant Programs that Foster Expertise in World Languages and Cultures

Why GAO Did This Study

In today's interconnected world, many career fields—such as diplomacy, national security, and business—need individuals with knowledge about world languages and cultures. To address these areas of needed expertise—both at the federal level as well as in the education, business, and nonprofit sectors—the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, authorized the FLAS and NRC grant programs. GAO was asked to review how these programs support employment in areas of need.

Among other issues, this report addresses how selected grantee universities describe encouraging employment in areas of need in their grant applications, and what Education's most recent survey of FLAS graduates shows about respondents' employment outcomes.

GAO reviewed relevant application narratives from a non-generalizable sample of 27 NRC grantee universities (25 of which were also FLAS grantees) and grouped employment activities described by grantees into nine categories. These grantees comprised about 23 percent of all fiscal year 2022 NRC and FLAS grantee universities. GAO also analyzed the results from Education's 2019 survey of FLAS graduates, the most recent available. Due to the differences in the structure of the FLAS and NRC programs, Education does not administer a similar survey to NRC grantees. In addition, GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations and program documents, and interviewed officials from Education.

View [GAO-23-105971](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov.

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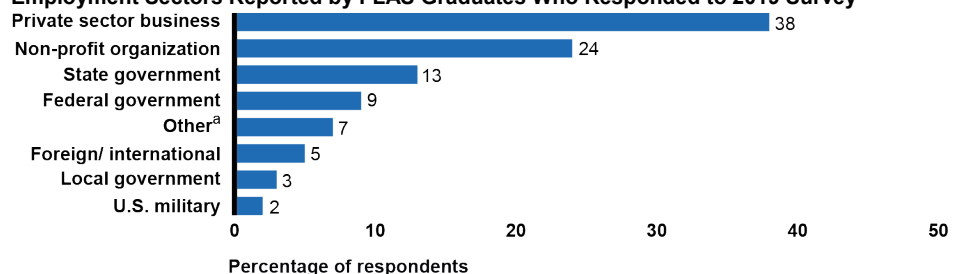
What GAO Found

The Department of Education's Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship and National Resource Center (NRC) grant programs fund education in the languages and cultures of world areas (e.g. Africa, East Asia) in different ways. While the FLAS program provides universities with grants that they then use to fund fellowships for individual students, the NRC program supports the operation of academic centers at the university level. NRCs fund activities such as curriculum development, language instruction, and outreach to community partners (e.g., government agencies or K-12 schools). GAO reviewed descriptions in applications from 27 grantee universities about how their NRC and/or FLAS grants would encourage employment in areas of need and identified the following activities as the most common:

- Helping students develop skills in languages (23 of 27), such as Arabic or Chinese, that are needed in the federal government or other sectors.
- Offering career services (21 of 27), such as hosting workshops about job-seeking skills (e.g., resume writing) and publicizing relevant internships.
- Helping students develop knowledge about world areas (21 of 27), such as equipping them with cultural competencies to navigate the global economy.
- Collaborating with community partners (20 of 27), such as helping to develop a Global Workforce Skills Certificate for community colleges.

Because FLAS awards fellowships to individuals, Education periodically surveys program graduates about their employment. GAO analyzed responses from the most recent survey (1,991 respondents who graduated between 2010 and 2018 out of 4,728 survey recipients). Of the 1,260 respondents who reported their employment sector, more reported that they worked in the private or non-profit sectors than in government (see figure below). About 46 percent of 1,881 survey question respondents reported that they had consulted or volunteered in one of a variety of employment sectors, most commonly for a domestic (about 10 percent) or international (about 8 percent) non-profit organization.

Employment Sectors Reported by FLAS Graduates Who Responded to 2019 Survey



Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Department of Education survey data about Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) graduates. | [GAO-23-105971](#)

Note: The percentages are approximate and add up to more than 100 due to rounding. Of the 1,991 respondents, 1,260 answered the survey question about employment sectors.

^aEducation did not define the "other" category in its FLAS survey.

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Abbreviations

FLAS	Foreign Language and Area Studies
Higher Education Act	Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended
NRC	National Resource Centers

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April 4, 2023

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime,
Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global
Women’s Issues
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

The Honorable Kevin Cramer
United States Senate

In today’s interconnected world, many career fields—including diplomacy, national security, business, the non-profit sector, and education—need experts in the languages and cultures of world areas (e.g., Africa, East Asia). Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (Higher Education Act), authorizes the U.S. Department of Education to provide grants to universities through eight related but unique grant programs.¹ Among other goals, these programs aim to develop a pool of international experts to meet areas of need, including encouraging employment in federal agencies and other employment sectors.²

Among these eight programs, the two largest are:

- The Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship program, which provides universities or consortia of such universities with

¹These eight Title VI programs fund: (1) Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships, (2) National Resource Centers, (3) Centers for International Business Education, (4) the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program, (5) Language Resource Centers, (6) Business and International Education, (7) American Overseas Research Centers, and (8) International Research and Studies. See appendix I for information about the fiscal year 2022 funding levels for each of these programs. Colleges or universities may receive grants individually or may receive grants as a consortium. In this report, we use the terms “grantee university,” “university,” and “consortia of such universities” instead of the statutory terms “institutions of higher education” and “consortia of such institutions.” The term “institutions of higher education” is as defined at 20 U.S.C. § 1001.

²The Higher Education Act and Education’s program documents refer to employment in “areas of national need, as identified by the Secretary [of Education], as well as in areas of need in the education, business, and non-profit sectors.” 20 U.S.C. § 1122(e)(2). Unless otherwise noted, in this report we use “areas of need” to encompass the employment needs of both the federal government and other sectors.

funding for fellowships to pay tuition, fees, and stipends for individual students pursuing training in certain language or international studies programs or centers, and

- The National Resource Center (NRC) program, which provides grants to universities or consortia of such universities to, among other things, operate centers that teach foreign languages and international studies.

Together, these two programs received 80 percent of the approximately \$70.7 million Title VI grant funds awarded in fiscal year 2022.

You asked us for information about how these programs support employment in areas of need. This report addresses the following questions:

- 1) In their grant applications, how do selected FLAS and NRC grantee universities describe encouraging employment in areas of need?
- 2) How does Education collect information on employment outcomes for FLAS graduates?
- 3) What does Education's most recent survey of FLAS graduates show about respondents' employment outcomes?

To obtain information about how selected FLAS and NRC grantees described encouraging employment in areas of need, we reviewed the section of the grant application that focused on this topic for a non-generalizable sample of 27 fiscal year 2022 FLAS and NRC grantee universities. These 27 grantees comprised about 23 percent of all grantee universities.³ Specifically, we reviewed the information grantee universities provided in their applications about how they planned to “encourage government service in areas of national need, as identified by the Secretary [of Education], as well as in areas of need in the education, business, and non-profit sectors.” We then grouped the similarly

³The non-generalizable sample of grantees from the grant cycle that began in fiscal year 2022 comprises approximately 23 percent of the 119 total grantees that received NRC grants, FLAS grants, or both. We identified these grantees by randomly selecting three applications from each of the world areas into which Education categorized grants in its award summary document. Twenty-five of the 27 grantees we reviewed received both NRC and FLAS grants, whereas two of the grantees received only NRC grants.

described activities into nine categories.⁴ The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate the types of activities grantee universities may choose to engage in to encourage employment in areas of need.⁵ Our study did not include verifying whether grantee universities implemented all described activities, or whether other grantees whose applications we reviewed also employed some of the same activities but did not describe them in the application section we reviewed. We also did not evaluate the extent to which the cited activities were likely to encourage employment in areas of need.

To identify how Education collects information on employment outcomes for FLAS graduates, we interviewed Education officials about the agency's efforts to track standardized and comparable information about the graduates, and reviewed relevant FLAS survey documentation and other documents.

To identify what the most recent FLAS graduate survey shows about respondents' employment outcomes, we analyzed data from Education's 2019 survey of FLAS fellowship graduates, the most recent available. Education instructed FLAS grantee universities to send an electronic survey link to FLAS fellows who graduated from 2010 through 2018. According to Education, FLAS grantee universities sent links to 4,728 graduates. Our analysis found that of the 2,323 graduates who completed the survey, 1,991 indicated that they graduated from their FLAS fellowship program from 2010 through 2018, for an adjusted response rate of 42 percent.⁶ Because the data Education collects does not include

⁴In the 25 of 27 cases where grantee universities received both NRC and FLAS awards in the same world area, we analyzed both applications together to identify whether the grantee described activities related to a given category in at least one application. Therefore, the counts we present in this report are for a given grantee's combined NRC and FLAS application materials. The nine categories we identified, in alphabetical order, are: Career services; Collaborating with community partners; Coordinating with other departments at the university; Developing knowledge in the world area; Initiatives to support federal careers or agencies; Language skills development; Other; Prioritizing FLAS applicants based on their career goals or study of needed languages; and Study abroad or international exchanges.

⁵In the 25 cases where grantees received both NRC and FLAS grants in a given world area we could not systematically identify which activities to encourage employment were related specifically to the NRC grant, FLAS grant, or both, because the relevant descriptions were almost always identical for a given grantee's NRC and FLAS applications.

⁶We removed survey records in which survey respondents indicated that they would graduate in 2019 or later because Education officials said that the survey's administration in 2019 was intended for FLAS fellows who graduated from 2010 through 2018.

the information needed to assess the survey results for potential nonresponse bias, we consider these results informative of general trends, but not necessarily reflective of the experiences of all FLAS graduates. Not all respondents answered every survey question. We based our analysis on the number of respondents who answered each survey question. We assessed the reliability of the survey data by reviewing the survey instrument and related documentation, speaking with relevant agency officials, and conducting electronic data tests. We determined that these data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our descriptive review.

We also obtained information about Education's efforts to collect data about graduates affiliated with NRCs, which occur primarily through the agency's annual reporting requirements. However, Education officials noted that these data are not necessarily comparable across NRCs due to the variation in how universities administratively structure their NRCs, as permitted by the Higher Education Act and program regulations, as well as how NRCs choose to use their funds for various allowable activities.⁷ Therefore, we determined that no standardized employment data were available about NRC graduates that we could analyze for this study.

To address all three questions, we also reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations and interviewed administrators from a non-generalizable sample of three grantee universities. We selected grantee universities that had received both FLAS and NRC funding during the 4-year grant cycle that began in fiscal year 2022 and that were located in different regions of the United States. Because Education awards competitive grant funding to universities based on the area of the world that their FLAS or NRC grant focuses on (e.g., Africa, East Asia), we also selected grantees that focused on different areas of the world.

⁷Specifically, as part of its annual reporting requirements, Education requires NRCs to report on the number of recent graduates affiliated with the NRC who are working in a variety of employment sectors. However, the Higher Education Act does not require NRCs to have a particular administrative structure. Therefore, there can be variation in how each NRC is structured and how it interacts with students, departments, and other units throughout the university. As a result, Education officials said the agency provides each NRC with flexibility in how it identifies which graduates of its university are affiliated with its NRC training. The employment information that NRCs report is stored in Education's International Resource Information System data system. Education officials said that they were working with the data system contractors to make such data more easily accessible to the public.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2022 to April 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Each FLAS and NRC grant generally focuses on a specific area of the world, including its related languages, history, culture, and economy.⁸ Both programs are designed to increase the United States' capacity and expertise in these areas in order to meet needs in the federal government and other employment sectors, among other goals. The two programs work toward achieving this goal in different ways.

- **FLAS fellowships.** Education awards grants to universities that then fund individual undergraduate or graduate students' modern foreign language training and courses in related areas of the world through fellowships. Fellowships last for one academic year or for a summer term, and students can receive multiple consecutive or non-consecutive fellowships.⁹ Education reported that grantee universities awarded 1,182 academic year FLAS fellowships and 745 summer FLAS fellowships in fiscal year 2022, the period roughly corresponding to the 2021-2022 academic year.
- **NRCs:** Education awards grants to universities or consortia of universities for NRCs that serve as national resources to teach

⁸The world areas for the FLAS and NRC programs are defined as: Africa; East Asia/Pan Asia; International; Middle East; Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia; South Asia; Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands; Western Europe; and the Western Hemisphere (Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean). The "International" area may focus on thematic projects related to international studies or the international aspects of contemporary issues or topics while providing instruction in modern foreign languages. In some of its materials, Education separates East Asia and Pan Asia and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. For the list of fiscal year 2022 NRC and FLAS awardees by world area, see: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsnrc/nrcflas2022grantees.xls>.

⁹Each fellowship includes an institutional payment (for tuition and fees) and a subsistence allowance (stipend). According to Education, the estimated institutional payment for an academic year fellowship during the grant cycle that began in fiscal year 2022 is \$18,000 for a graduate student and \$10,000 for an undergraduate student. The estimated institutional payment for a summer fellowship is \$5,000 for graduate and undergraduate students. The estimated subsistence allowance for an academic year fellowship is \$20,000 for a graduate student and \$5,000 for an undergraduate student. The subsistence allowance for a summer fellowship is \$2,500 for graduate and undergraduate students.

languages, world area studies, and international studies. NRCs may engage in a variety of authorized activities, such as teaching and curriculum development; research; as well as outreach to government agencies, community groups, or education organizations (e.g. universities, community colleges, or K-12 schools). Education awarded new grants in fiscal year 2022 to 98 NRCs, spread across nine world areas. Annual first-year awards for fiscal year 2022 ranged from about \$153,000 to \$335,000 per grant.¹⁰

Universities often receive both NRC and FLAS grants. In fiscal year 2022, 76 percent of grantee universities that received awards for these two programs received both FLAS and NRC awards in the same world area.¹¹

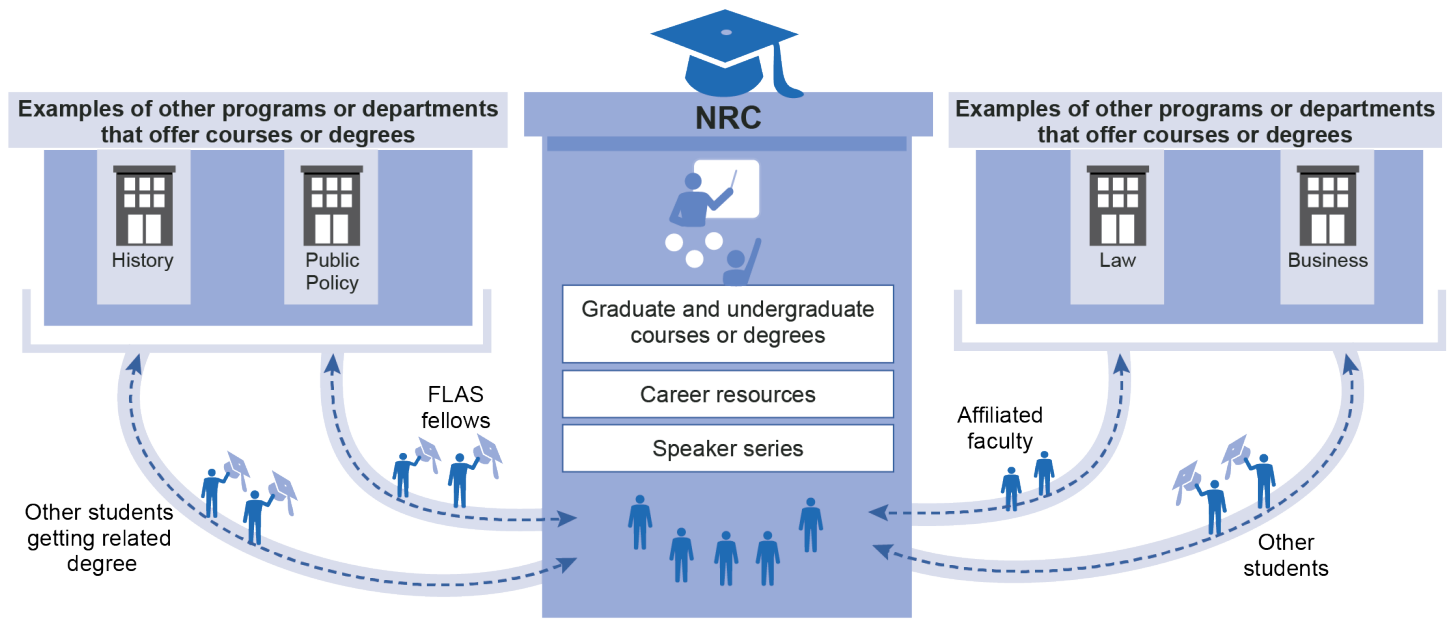
NRC grantee universities may have varying organizational and administrative structures. Therefore, students may take courses or other specialized training funded by the grant; participate in related activities such as conferences or speaker events; and/or receive undergraduate or graduate degrees through the NRC itself or from other university departments or schools (see fig. 1).¹²

¹⁰Education awards FLAS and NRC grants in 4-year cycles, but the agency annually determines how much funding the grantee will receive for each specific year of the grant.

¹¹Among the other 24 percent of grantees for fiscal year 2022, 18 percent received only FLAS awards and 6 percent received only NRC awards.

¹²A Center is defined in regulation as “an administrative unit of an institution of higher education that has direct access to highly qualified faculty and library resources, and coordinates a concentrated effort of educational resources, including language training and various academic disciplines, in...[certain] area and subject matters...” 34 C.F.R. § 656.7(c).

Figure 1: Example of One Option for How Universities May Structure National Resource Centers (NRC)



Source: GAO hypothetical example developed using documents from existing programs and interviews with Education; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: NRCs may have varying organizational and administrative structures. A Center is defined in regulation as “an administrative unit of an institution of higher education that has direct access to highly qualified faculty and library resources, and coordinates a concentrated effort of educational resources, including language training and various academic disciplines, in...[certain] area and subject matters...” 34 C.F.R. § 656.7(c).

Grant Application Process

Education awards the FLAS and NRC grants on 4-year cycles, the most recent of which began in fiscal year 2022 and runs through fiscal year 2025. Education provides prospective grantee universities with resources to prepare their applications, such as by providing information on its website and in webinars. This includes information about the required application content, the criteria used to score the applications, and areas of national need identified by other federal agencies.¹³ To be considered for funding, prospective FLAS and NRC grantee universities complete

¹³Prior to requesting applications for funding during each grant cycle, Education is required to consult with and receive recommendations from a wide range of federal agencies regarding the areas of national need for expertise in foreign languages and the world regions. For more information about these consultations and other information provided to prospective FLAS and NRC grantees, see <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsnrc/applicant.html> and <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsflasf/applicant.html>.

applications, which are evaluated and scored by external panels of technical reviewers. The reviewers are professionals with specific training in a given world area, its languages, or both.¹⁴ Education officials select reviewers and coordinate the technical review process, prescreening each application to ensure it includes all required elements before assigning it to the technical reviewers. Once technical reviewers have evaluated and scored the applications, Education officials make final approval decisions. Table 1 summarizes the types of information Education requires universities to include in their FLAS and NRC applications.

Table 1: Types of Information Education Requires in FLAS and NRC Applications

Type of required information	Details and examples
<p>Application narrative with details about the proposed grant and applicant qualifications</p>	<p>Both FLAS and NRC applicant universities must provide detailed budgets and application narratives with evidence of their qualifications in multiple areas. They also must include copies of course lists, letters of support, position descriptions, and key faculty curriculum vitae. Technical reviewers evaluate and score the application narratives using criteria review forms developed by Education. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FLAS and NRC applicant universities must provide evidence that they have the capacity to provide quality language and non-language instruction. • FLAS applicant universities must provide evidence that their activities and training programs have contributed to an improved supply of specialists in their programs' subject areas. • NRC applicant universities must provide evidence that their programs will have a significant impact on the university, community, region, and nation.
<p>Descriptions required by the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (Higher Education Act):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How the activities funded by the grant will reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views and generate debate on world regions and international affairs; and 2. How the applicant will encourage government service in areas of national need, as identified by the Secretary of Education, as well as in areas of need in the education, business, and non-profit sectors. 	<p>The Higher Education Act requires that descriptions related to diverse perspectives and employment in areas of need be included in each successful FLAS and NRC application, but does not provide criteria for what constitutes sufficient or appropriate action by the applicant universities. The Higher Education Act also does not require Education to evaluate or score the descriptions. Education ensures that each application includes this information, but the information is not evaluated by the technical reviewers.</p> <p>Given that the Higher Education Act does not define the content these descriptions must include, the content of each of these descriptions can vary. For example, when discussing efforts to ensure diverse perspectives and a wide range of views, one applicant university may describe ensuring that an NRC speaker series reflects a variety of political perspectives, whereas another applicant university may describe how the demographic composition of the program's faculty or students reflect diverse perspectives.</p>

¹⁴A panel of technical reviewers scores each application using a review form that identifies the selection criteria, the maximum score per criterion, and the overall maximum score per application.

Type of required information	Details and examples
General grant requirements and assurances	Applicant universities also are required to complete certain general federal and Department of Education grant application requirements and assurances. For example, applicant universities must complete lobbying disclosure forms as well as forms demonstrating compliance with general requirements for grants made by the Department of Education. Education ensures that each application includes this information, but the information is not evaluated by the technical reviewers.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education application materials for the National Resource Center (NRC) and Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) programs. | GAO-23-105971

After Education awards grants, both FLAS and NRC grantee universities must complete reporting requirements each year during the 4-year cycle. Education makes annual determinations about whether to continue funding the grant using information from these annual reports and other factors. FLAS grantee universities also must administer surveys developed by Education to collect employment information about FLAS fellowship graduates. In addition, the Higher Education Act authorizes Education to conduct other activities, such as research related to the programs.

Authorization for Education to Study Title VI Programs

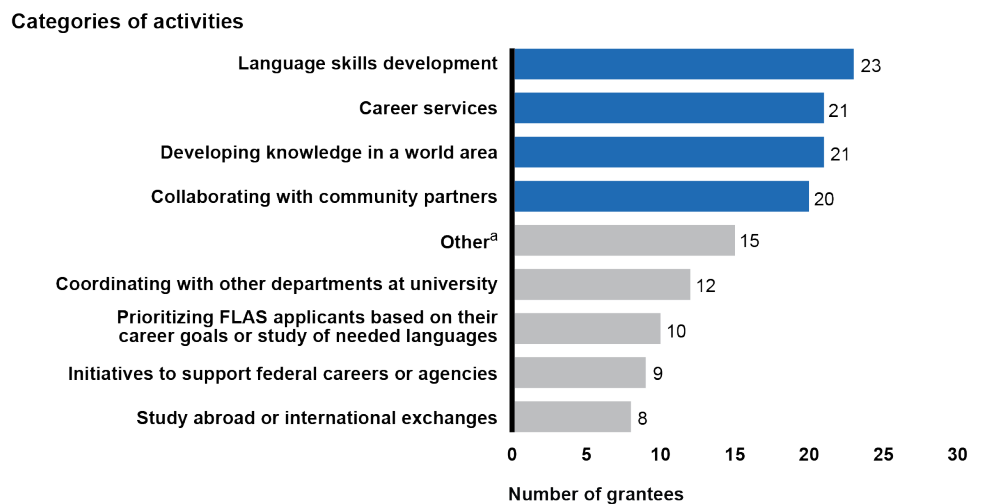
Education is authorized, but not required, to use Title VI funding to conduct certain research or studies. For example, Education is currently funding a study that will examine how National Resource Centers (NRC) encourage diverse perspectives and a wide range of views. Education awarded the contract on January 15, 2021. In fall 2022, Education’s contractor surveyed NRCs from the grant cycle that ended in fiscal year 2021. This survey asked NRCs to (1) identify the approaches they took to ensure that their programs reflected diverse perspectives and a wide range of views, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches, and (3) provide feedback to Education on these requirements and the agency’s related guidance, among other questions. According to Education officials, the study is scheduled for public release by January 2024.

Source: GAO analysis of relevant federal laws and Department of Education documents. | GAO-23-105971

In Their Grant Applications, How Do Selected FLAS and NRC Grantee Universities Describe Encouraging Employment in Areas of Need?

When describing how FLAS and NRC grantee universities planned to encourage employment in areas of need, the 27 grantees whose applications we reviewed most often listed activities related to developing language skills (23 of 27), offering career services (21 of 27), developing knowledge in world areas (21 of 27), and collaborating with community partners (20 of 27).¹⁵ (See fig. 2.)

Figure 2: Types of Planned Activities to Encourage Employment in Areas of Need Cited in Selected FLAS and NRC Grant Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees. | GAO-23-105971

Note: GAO obtained this information by reviewing the relevant section of the grant applications for a non-generalizable sample of 27 grantees from a total of 119 grantees awarded NRC grants, FLAS grants, or both during the application cycle that began in fiscal year 2022. Rows in blue were the four categories cited most frequently.

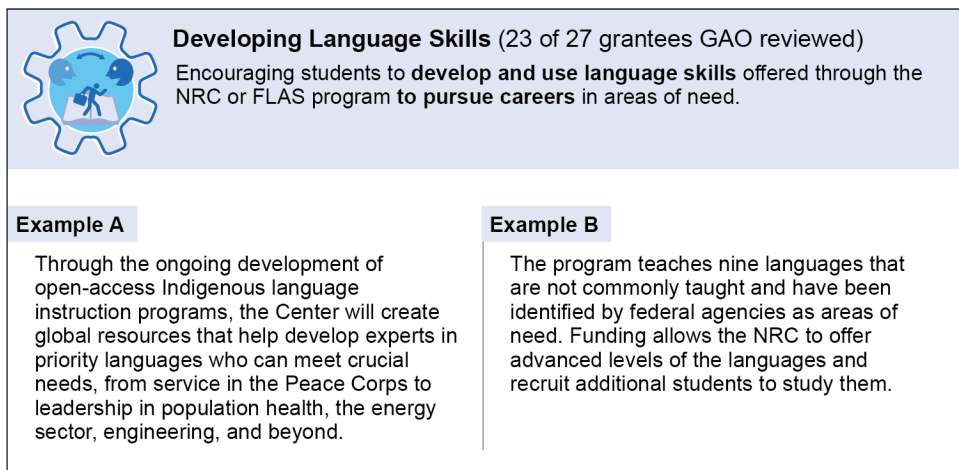
^aExamples of activities in the “other” category include using grant funds for: hiring staff or faculty with experience in the federal government, funding faculty research that helps students develop skills related to national need, and assessing how the NRC supports students and employers.

¹⁵We obtained this information by reviewing the grant applications for 27 grantee universities—about 23 percent of the total number of NRC and FLAS grantees—that were awarded NRC grants during the 4-year application cycle that began in fiscal year 2022. Twenty-five of these 27 grantees also received FLAS awards during that cycle. We reviewed the information grantees described in their applications about how they planned to “encourage government service in areas of national need, as identified by the Secretary [of Education], as well as in areas of need in the education, business, and non-profit sectors.” 20 U.S.C. § 1122(e)(2). We then grouped these activities into nine categories. Our analysis did not include verifying whether grantees implemented all described activities or whether other grantees whose applications we reviewed also employed these same activities, but did not identify them in the application section we reviewed. We also did not evaluate the extent to which the cited activities were likely to encourage employment in areas of need.

All the selected FLAS and NRC grantee universities planned to implement activities related to more than one of these categories. In most cases (19 of 27 grantees), grantees planned to implement activities related to between four and six categories.

See figures 3 through 6 for more details about the four categories of activities selected grantee universities cited most frequently in their plans for encouraging employment in areas of need.

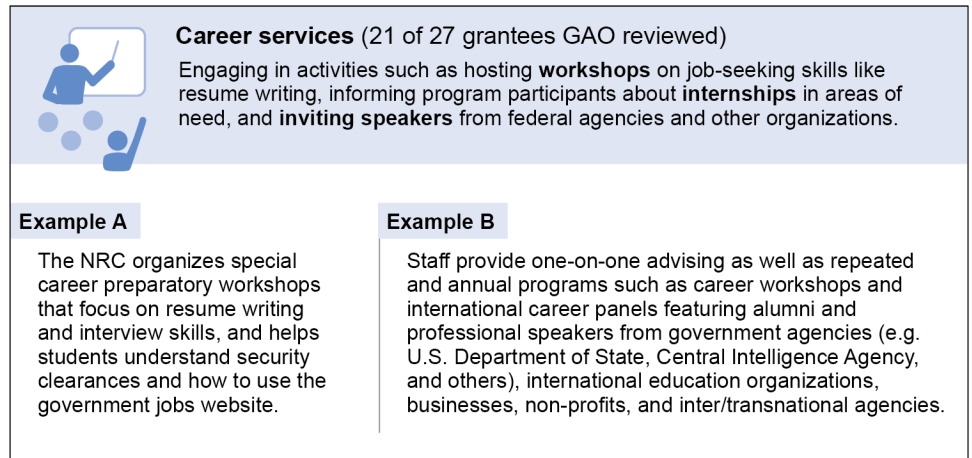
Figure 3: Examples of Activities Related to Developing Language Skills Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee university applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

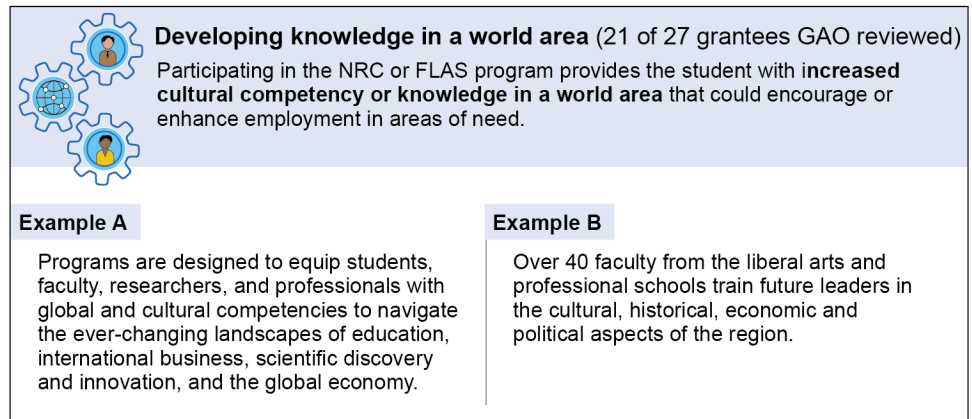
Figure 4: Examples of Activities Related to Career Services Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee university applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

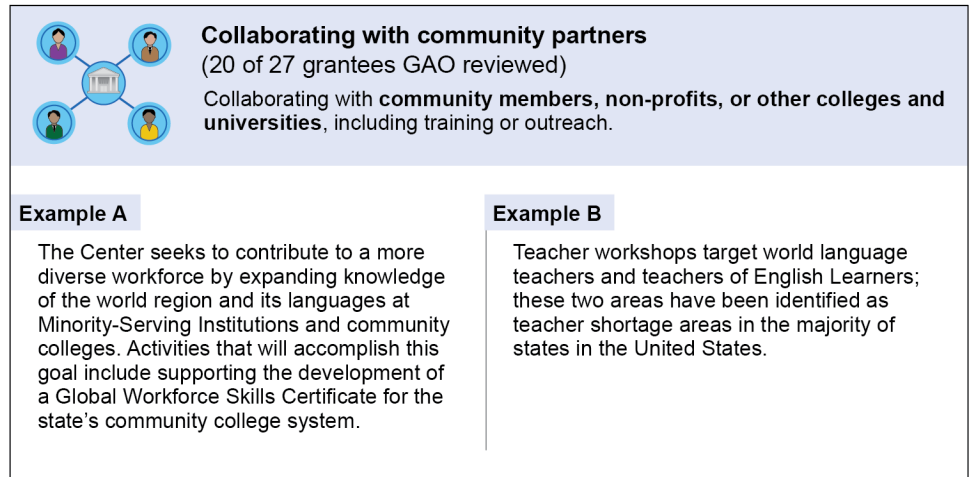
Figure 5: Examples of Activities Related to Developing World Area Knowledge Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee university applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

Figure 6: Examples of Activities Related to Collaborating with Community Partners Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee university applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

Selected grantee universities also described planned activities in other categories listed in figure 2. For example, some grantees described coordinating with other departments and schools at their university to establish degree programs or certificates, such as a public interest law certificate that prepared students for employment in areas of need. Other grantees outlined how they designed their FLAS fellowship selection criteria to prioritize students who demonstrated a likelihood of entering federal government careers. For more information about these additional categories of activities for encouraging employment in areas of need, see appendix II.

How Does Education Collect Information on Employment Outcomes for FLAS Graduates?

The Higher Education Act requires Education to work with grantee universities to survey FLAS fellowship graduates about their employment

outcomes.¹⁶ Education develops this survey and sends a survey link to grantee universities to distribute to their graduates. The agency most recently administered the survey in 2019 and plans to administer it in spring 2023 and every 2 years thereafter.¹⁷

In January 2023, Education officials stated that they are updating the survey and its administration so that the agency can learn more about trends in how individual graduate's career paths change over time, and to make other improvements aimed at increasing survey response rates.¹⁸ Specifically, officials said that the agency plans to modify the survey and its administration by:

- collecting additional contact information from graduates in case they no longer use their university email addresses;
- rewording questions that might cause confusion;
- deleting some questions to make the survey faster to complete; and
- adding additional questions related to global competencies, such as questions about awareness of different cultures.

Education reported consulting with relevant staff at FLAS grantee universities when deciding how to modify the survey. Officials also said the agency plans to conduct limited pre-tests with FLAS graduates before finalizing the survey, and hopes to improve response rates by increasing technical assistance to grantee universities about how to advertise the survey to graduates. In addition, the agency plans to add more information about the survey to its own publicity materials about the FLAS program.

Grantee universities are responsible for identifying graduates from their FLAS program who are eligible to complete the survey and sending them a link to the survey itself, according to Education officials. Representatives of two of the three FLAS grantee universities we spoke

¹⁶20 U.S.C. § 1121(d).

¹⁷Education and grantee universities did not field a FLAS survey in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related agency and university priorities, according to Education.

¹⁸According to Education reports, the response rate for the 2019 survey was approximately 50 percent. In our analysis, we removed the survey's responses from fellows who graduated in 2019 or later because Education officials said they intended to survey fellows who graduated from 2010 through 2018. With the removal of responses from fellows who graduated after 2018, the adjusted survey response rate was 42 percent.

with described taking steps to encourage graduates' participation in the survey. For example, the grant administrators said that they tell students about the survey upon receipt of their FLAS fellowships, so that fellows see the surveys as an integral part of the FLAS program. One administrator noted that fostering strong ties with FLAS graduates also increases survey response rates, because those ties motivate graduates to continue providing input to the program.

What Does Education's Most Recent Survey of FLAS Graduates Show about Respondents' Employment Outcomes?

More than three-quarters of the 1,831 FLAS graduates who responded to the survey's employment status question reported that they were employed.¹⁹ The remaining respondents identified themselves as full-time students, unemployed but looking for work, or otherwise out of the workforce. (See table 2.)

Table 2: Employment Status Reported by FLAS 2019 Survey Respondents

Employment status	Employed, full-time	Employed, part-time	Full-time student	Unemployed, but actively looking for work	Out of the workforce, not looking for work
Percentage of survey respondents	74 percent	9 percent	13 percent	4 percent	1 percent

Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Department of Education survey data about Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) graduates. | GAO-23-105971

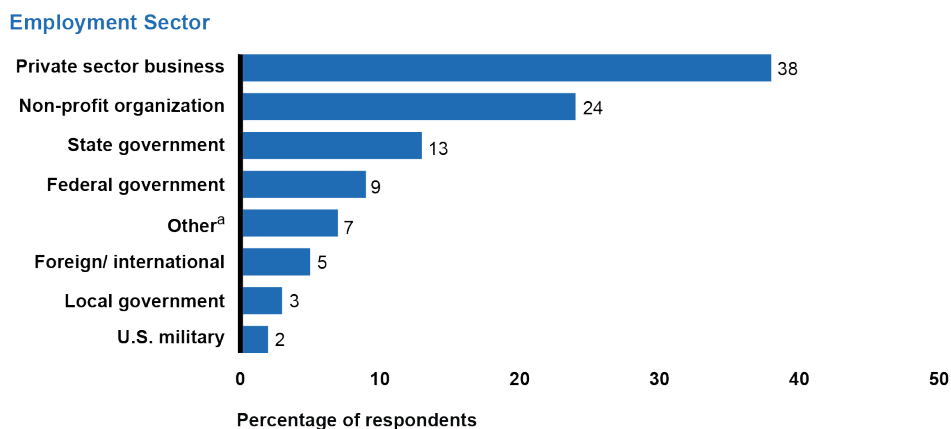
Note: Percentages in this table are approximate and add to more than 100 due to rounding. Of the 1,991 respondents, 1,831 (92 percent) answered the survey question about employment status.

Of the 1,260 graduates who provided details about the employment sector in which they worked, almost two-thirds reported that they were employed in private businesses (about 38 percent) or with non-profit organizations (about 24 percent). Fewer respondents reported working in

¹⁹The survey asks questions regarding graduates' employment and education once they have completed their FLAS fellowship and program of study. Our dataset included a total of 1,991 surveys that were submitted by FLAS fellows who indicated that they graduated from 2010 through 2018. The survey did not require respondents to answer every question. We based our analysis on the number of respondents who answered each survey question. For information on survey responses regarding participant and fellowship characteristics, see appendix III.

other sectors. For example, about 9 percent of respondents reported working in the federal government and about an additional 2 percent reported working in the U.S. military. (See fig. 7)

Figure 7: Employment Sectors Reported by FLAS 2019 Survey Respondents



Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Department of Education survey data about Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) graduates. | GAO-23-105971

Note: The percentages in this chart are approximate and add to more than 100 due to rounding. Of the 1,991 respondents, 1,260 (63 percent) answered the survey question about employment sectors.

^aEducation did not define the “other” category in its FLAS survey.

Some FLAS graduates who reported working in federal and state government provided additional details about the agencies or institutions where they were employed. Of the 117 graduates who provided a response regarding the federal agency that employs them, about half were employed by the Department of State (about 26 percent) or the Department of Defense (about 23 percent).²⁰ Among the 169 graduates who worked in state government, most (about 92 percent) identified educational institutions (e.g., state colleges and universities) as their primary employer.

²⁰Additional survey answer options were: Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, Transportation, Treasury, Veterans Affairs; Congressional Branch; Environmental Protection Agency; National Aeronautics and Space Administration; National Institutes of Health; National Science Foundation; White House; other national security agency; other federal agency; and I prefer not to disclose.

Approximately 46 percent of 1,881 respondents to the relevant survey question reported that they had consulted or volunteered in one of a variety of employment sectors since finishing their FLAS fellowship(s).²¹ They most commonly cited contracting or volunteering for a domestic non-profit organization (about 10 percent) or for an international non-governmental organization (about 8 percent). We found that relatively few graduates (about 2 percent) reported consulting or volunteering directly for the federal government. Of the 43 respondents who reported consulting for the federal government, nearly half did so for the Department of State.

In survey questions asking graduates about how the training they received during their FLAS fellowships affected their professional careers, respondents provided generally favorable responses, although many also indicated they likely would have pursued the same career field without the fellowship. In particular, about 95 percent of the 1,575 graduates who responded indicated that their career paths and initial job marketability had benefited at least somewhat from the training they gained during their FLAS fellowship.²² In addition, more than one-half of 1,601 respondents to relevant survey questions indicated that their training in either a foreign language or international and/or area studies was a requirement, or considered an asset, for their current job (see Table 3). At the same time, almost three-quarters of 1,601 respondents indicated that they were likely or very likely to have gone into the same field without the fellowship, and about two-thirds indicated they were likely or very likely to have received their current position without the support of their FLAS fellowship(s).

Table 3: Views on Effect of Language and International/Area Studies Training among FLAS 2019 Survey Respondents

Survey topic	...is a requirement or considered an asset for current job?	...is used at least once a month at current job?
Foreign language training	53 percent	43 percent
International and/or area studies training	62 percent	64 percent

Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Department of Education survey data about Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) graduates. | GAO-23-105971

Note: Percentages in this table are approximate. Of the 1,991 respondents, 1,601 (80 percent) answered each survey question described in this table.

²¹According to Education, respondents could select more than one answer option while completing this survey question. However, our survey analysis found that each of the respondents selected only one answer option.

²²Respondents indicated on their surveys that the training they received during their FLAS fellowship was either very beneficial, beneficial, or somewhat beneficial.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this product to the Department of Education for its review and comment. The agency provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Education, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (617) 788-0534 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.



Melissa Emrey-Arras
Director, Education, Workforce and Income Security

Appendix I: Funding Levels for Education’s Title VI Programs for International and Foreign Language Education

Table 4: Programs Authorized under Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, in Order of Funding Level as of Fiscal Year (FY) 2022

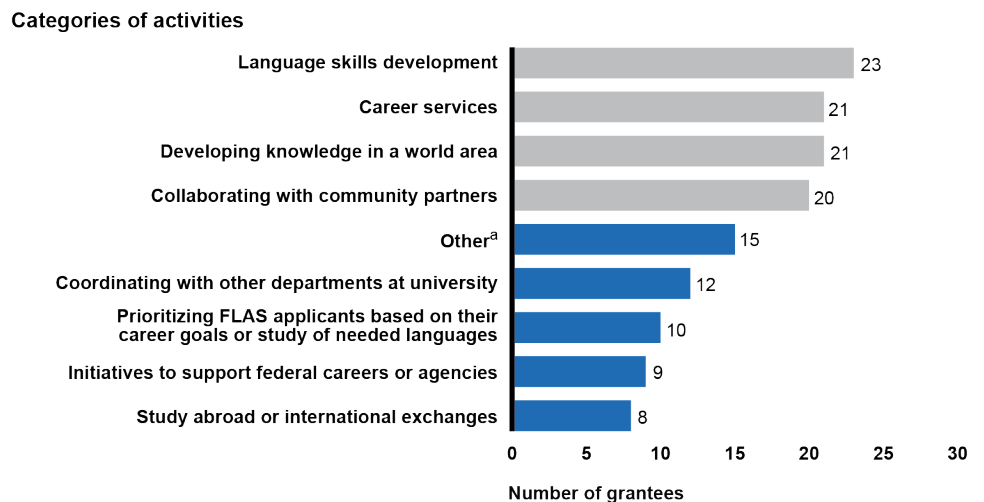
Program Name	Funding in FY 2022
Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships	\$ 31,236,116
National Resource Centers	\$ 25,560,561
Centers for International Business Education	\$ 5,071,396
Language Resource Centers	\$ 2,846,768
Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language	\$ 2,422,132
Business and International Education Program	\$ 1,644,227
American Overseas Research Center	\$ 1,015,400
International Research and Studies Program	\$ 978,215

Source: Department of Education. | GAO-23-105971

Appendix II: Activities Cited in Selected Successful FLAS and NRC Grantee University Applications Related to Encouraging Employment in Areas of Need

The following figure identifies the frequency with which the 27 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grantee universities whose applications we reviewed cited various categories of activities for encouraging employment in areas of need.¹

Figure 8: Types of Planned Activities to Encourage Employment in Areas of Need Cited in Selected FLAS and NRC Grant Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees. | GAO-23-105971

Note: GAO obtained this information by reviewing the relevant section of the grant applications for a non-generalizable sample of 27 grantees out of a total of 119 grantees awarded NRC grants, FLAS grants, or both during the application cycle that began in fiscal year 2022. Rows in grey were the four categories cited most frequently.

^aExamples of activities in the “other” category include using grant funds for: hiring staff or faculty with experience in the federal government; funding faculty research that helps students develop skills related to national need; and assessing how the NRC supports students and employers.

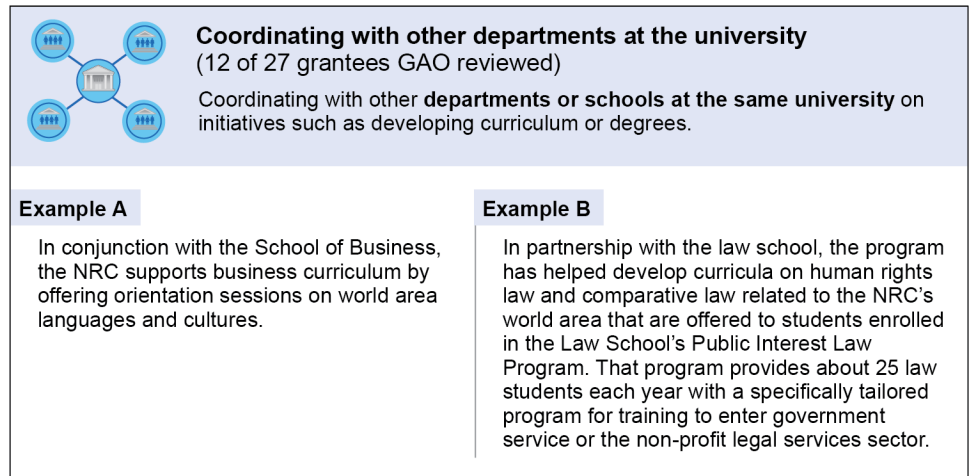
Activity categories that were cited less than 20 times in the grantee university applications we reviewed are shaded in blue in figure 8, and all but the “other” category are described in more detail in the figures below.

¹We obtained this information by reviewing the grant applications for 27 grantees awarded NRC grants—about 23 percent of total NRC and FLAS grantees—during the 4-year application cycle that began in fiscal year 2022. Twenty-five of these 27 grantees also received FLAS awards during that cycle. We reviewed the information grantees described in their applications about how they planned to “encourage government service in areas of national need, as identified by the Secretary [of Education], as well as in areas of need in the education, business, and non-profit sectors.” 20 U.S.C. § 1122(e)(2). We then grouped these activities into nine categories.

Appendix II: Activities Cited in Selected Successful FLAS and NRC Grantee University Applications Related to Encouraging Employment in Areas of Need

The four most commonly cited categories are described earlier in this report (see figures 3-6).

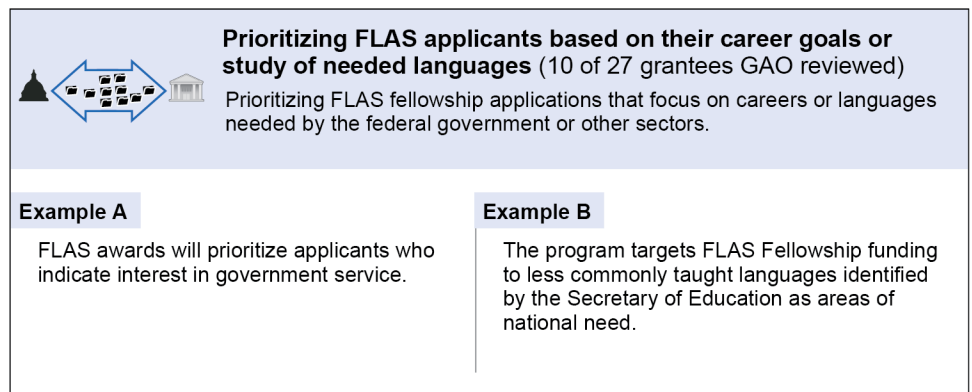
Figure 9: Examples of Activities Related to Coordinating with Other Departments at the University Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

Figure 10: Examples of FLAS Grantee University Activities That Prioritize FLAS Applicants Based on Their Career Goals or Study of Needed Languages

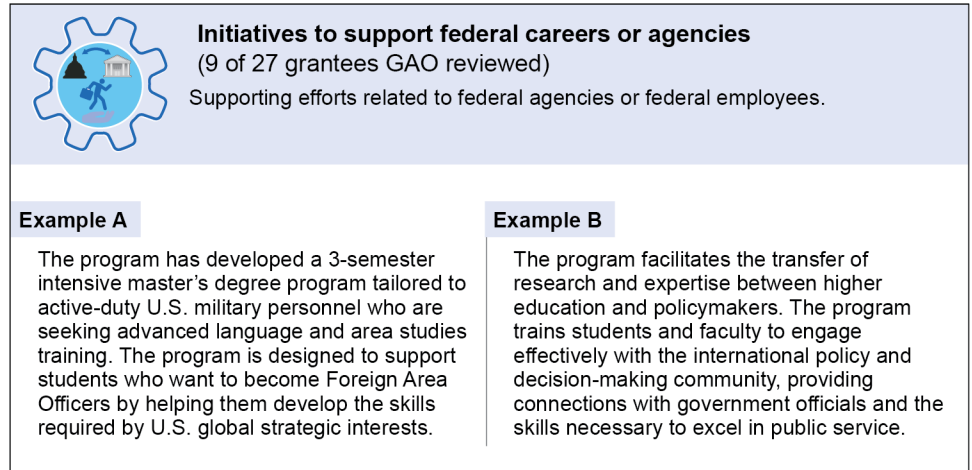


Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

Appendix II: Activities Cited in Selected Successful FLAS and NRC Grantee University Applications Related to Encouraging Employment in Areas of Need

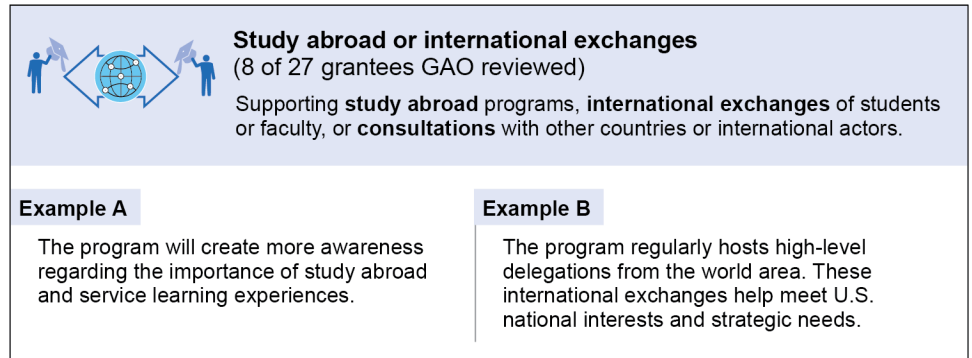
Figure 11: Examples of Activities Related to Initiatives to Support Federal Careers or Agencies Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

Figure 12: Examples of Activities Related to Study Abroad or International Exchanges Cited in FLAS and NRC Grantee Applications

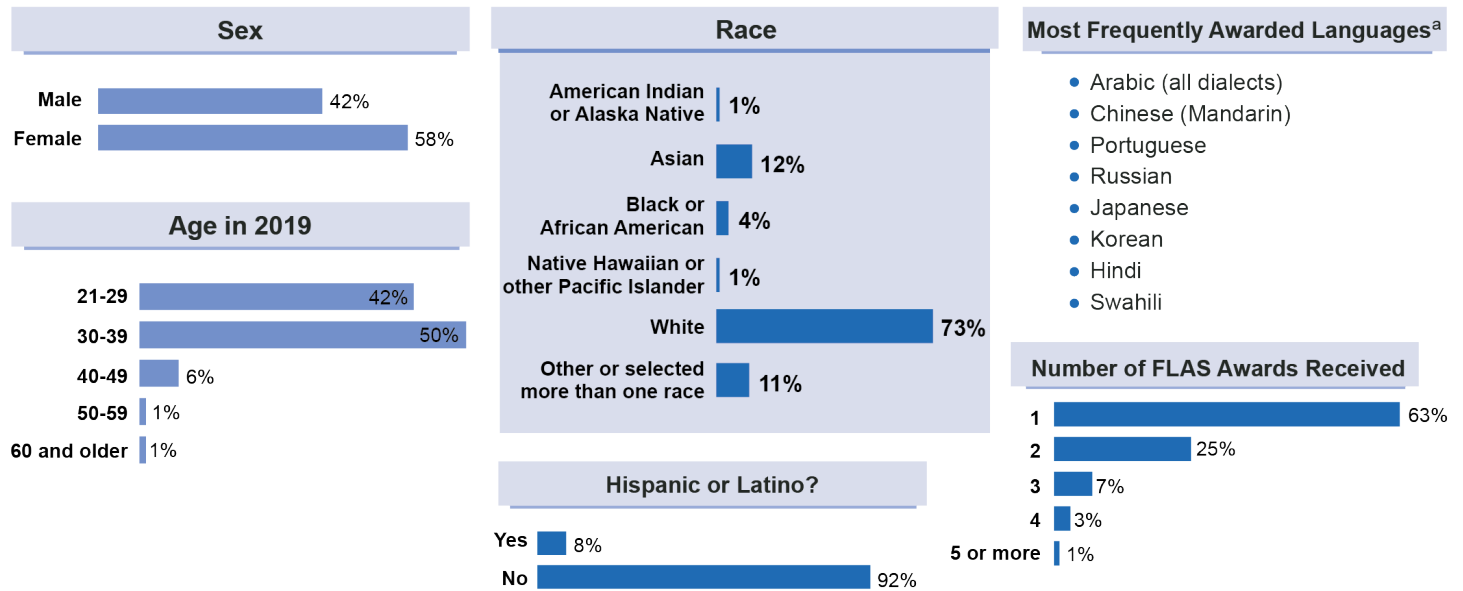


Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2022 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) and National Resource Center (NRC) grant applications from 27 successful grantees; GAO (images). | GAO-23-105971

Note: Examples in this figure are paraphrased excerpts from grantee applications, edited for brevity and to remove identifying information.

Appendix III: Additional Results from the 2019 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Graduate Survey

Figure 13: Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Program Survey Responses about Participant and Fellowship Characteristics from the 2019 Survey of 2010-2018 Program Graduates



Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Department of Education survey data about Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) graduates. | GAO-23-105971

Note: Percentages are approximate and may not add to 100 due to rounding. 1,991 FLAS graduates completed the survey. Not all respondents answered every question. The denominators for the percentages above reflect the number of respondents for a given question. Between 93 and 95 percent of survey respondents answered each question about their demographic characteristics above, and 100 percent of respondents answered the survey question about the number of FLAS awards they received.

^aFLAS fellows may receive multiple consecutive or non-consecutive awards and may change the language studied under each subsequent award. The list of most frequently awarded languages presented above is based on responses related to 2,817 FLAS awards and includes languages that were cited at least 100 times by survey respondents.

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Melissa Emrey-Arras, (617) 788-0534 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Amy Anderson (Assistant Director), Barbara Steel (Analyst-in-Charge), Leila Braun, and Geovana Mendoza made key contributions to this report. Additional assistance was provided by Isabella Anderson, Elizabeth Calderon, Brenda Farrell, Cheryl Goodman, Gina Hoover, Thomas James, Grant Mallie, Mimi Nguyen, Meg Sommerfeld, Almeta Spencer, Kelly Snow, and Adam Wendel.

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