

Evaluation of the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program



Background

The U.S. Congress established the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program in 1994 to develop expertise in Japanese language, politics, and culture among U.S. federal government employees. Mansfield Fellows are placed in Japanese government offices, where they gain firsthand knowledge of Japanese culture and government operations, and build networks of contacts in Japan. The program is administered by the Mansfield Foundation, with funding provided by the Department of State's Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs (ECA).

The Mansfield program's goal, as outlined in ECA's 2022 Solicitation Letter, is "to promote the exchange of government officials between Japan and the United States and strengthen mutual understanding between government officials." According to the Foundation, the Program was established to "build a corps of U.S. federal government employees with proficiency in the Japanese language and practical, firsthand knowledge about Japan and its government."

ECA sponsored an evaluation to determine how the Mansfield Program is meeting program aims. The study focused on the program's outcomes on the U.S. Government (USG) and Government of Japan (GoJ) stakeholders.

The evaluation included:



62 In-depth interviews with USG and GoJ stakeholders



98 Survey responses from Fellowship alumni

Response rate of 56% of all alumni



In-person program observation in Japan



Systematic review and analysis of nearly **300** pages of written feedback from Fellows' GoJ supervisors

Interviews included Fellowship alumni, USG supervisors of Fellows, GoJ officials, USG Personnel at the U.S. Mission in Japan, USG senior officials with U.S.-Japan relations subject matter expertise.

Key Findings

Contributions to the U.S.-Japan Bilateral Relationship

The program is unique and successful in creating Japan experts within the USG. Fellows gain the ability to navigate GoJ bureaucracy, form collaborative relationships with GoJ counterparts and each other, understand how the U.S.-Japan alliance functions, and serve as a symbol of the close relationship between the U.S. and Japan.

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Learning the Japanese work culture by actually taking part of it is very valuable for the Fellow.

GoJ written feedback

USG officials at the U.S. Mission in Japan, USG supervisors, and GoJ officials praise the program's long-term strategic ability to meaningfully strengthen the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship.

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You could live in Japan fifty years and never get these contacts [that Mansfield Fellows get].

Interview, USG official at the U.S. Mission in Japan

Fellows become more effective policymakers and strategic bilateral collaborators.

USG supervisors note that Fellows return more capable, more effective, and more able to lead, both in roles directly related to Japan and in other regional settings where their skills add value.

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For us, immediately we had a go-to person... Whether it was cultural insights, geopolitical insights, or just straight up speaking [or Japanese] translation requirements, it was a very welcome benefit to have [the Fellow] in the unit to leverage that skillset.

Interview, USG Supervisor

Skill Building

Fellows gain Japanese language skills, make progress toward professional goals, build a range of soft skills, and benefit from membership in an active alumni network.

Alumni reported that the following were strengthened by participating in the Fellowship:



100% Knowledge of GoJ structure and dynamics

99% Japanese language skills

94% Connections and relationships

82% Understanding of the Indo-Pacific Region

Long-term Value of Program Participation

Both USG and GoJ stakeholders see the value of military participants in the program, given geopolitical and regional considerations, as well as the centrality of the alliance to the bilateral relationship.

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The return on investment in this Fellowship is immense. Consider that in the security realm alone, the U.S. Indo-Pacific military posture—and thus, the National Defense Strategy—rests on the alliance with Japan. Many Mansfield Fellows have subsequently been involved in alliance management.

Survey Response, Alumni

Most Fellows apply what they learned and stay in the USG beyond the program's two-year requirement. Some face roadblocks upon returning home, saying the USG and some military branches do not provide pathways to apply their experience.

Many alumni reported enhanced collaboration and policymaking:



78% said the program increased their ability to collaborate on bilateral projects

61% said the program increased their ability to make or implement U.S. policy

Of those who gained those skills, about **nine in ten** said they used those skills professionally

The program is more likely to achieve its loftiest goals when Fellows have high Japanese language proficiency. The ability to communicate with host agency peers enables Fellows to collaborate and network during the work placements.

Evidence from a combination of the data sources suggests that **10-25%** of Fellows are not suitable for the program because they lack the language skills, motivation, and/or job pathway to meaningfully contribute to USG aims afterwards.



A Fellow who doesn't speak Japanese can only be placed in one of a limited number of sections; therefore, it is challenging for us to honor a placement request by a Fellow with such limited communication skills.

GoJ written feedback

Leadership

Long-term, the principal investment is in the strategic policymakers and current or potential leaders in the USG. In this way, the program is most likely to elevate intermediate Japan specialists into experts. The intimacy and seniority of the access provided by the Fellowship is well-suited to serve mid-level future strategic leaders. The program was not set up to create new experts out of novices—i.e., those with only basic knowledge of Japanese language and culture entering the program. However, a sizeable proportion of such novices are admitted every year (see box above); these Fellows are unlikely to serve the program's objectives in a meaningful way.

The Ideal Fellow

The ideal Fellow is outgoing, skilled in Japanese, technically proficient, and has leadership potential. Their professional roles should allow for future career growth and time within the USG, be related to Japan, and be aligned to policy issues that are strategic for the U.S. USG supervisors sometimes act as a barrier, refusing to let qualified staff vacate their roles at home.



The relationships I built as a Mansfield Fellow gave me inroads to the Japanese government that none of my colleagues in the U.S. government had, allowing me to play the role of 'fixer' in several high-profile issues.

Survey Response, Alumni

Recent Fellows are less likely to have worked with their Japanese counterparts and are less likely to do work 'somewhat' or 'majorly' related to Japan after the Fellowship.

Recommendations

Pre-departure

- 1. Communicate actively to align on objectives, strategic priorities, indicators of success, and challenges with key USG and GoJ program stakeholders.**
 - a. Consider hosting in-person annual strategic planning meetings to convene program stakeholders, including the ECA sponsors, officials from the U.S. Mission, implementers in Washington and Tokyo. Align on long- and short-term specific areas of bilateral growth or difficulty to inform consistent program mission statements, strategic and tactical plans, Fellow selection criteria, and prioritization of Fellowship activities.
- 2. Market the program more aggressively and build long-term pipelines of qualified candidates.**
 - a. Develop a strategic marketing and engagement plan to increase the number of interested and qualified applicants.
 - b. Rather than prioritizing open calls for applicants or public events, appoint and maintain relationships with champions at relevant USG agencies to promote the opportunity among intentional smaller groups. Champions may be alumni, supervisors, leaders, or human resources professionals who understand the agency's workforce needs and Japan collaboration opportunities. Collaborate with them to conduct active marketing, recruitment, and candidate pipelining within their agencies.
 - i. Alumni from the following organizations were most likely to report that their work is "majorly" related to Japan post-fellowship, so represent a strong starting point for champion recruitment:
 - Federal Aviation Administration
 - U.S. Air Force
 - U.S. Department of Commerce
 - U.S. Department of Justice
 - U.S. Department of State
 - U.S. Food and Drug Administration
 - U.S. Marine Corps
 - U.S. Navy
 - c. Promote success stories and practical benefits to the USG to encourage USG supervisors to support candidates' applications.
- 3. Be more selective, regardless of implications for the number of Fellows admitted each cohort.** While the USG would benefit from full classes of Fellows, admitting unprepared or irrelevant Fellows can undermine the program goals. Select Mansfield Fellows intentionally around policy goals.
 - a. Ideal candidates will have established pathways to leverage bilateral experience in service of mutual foreign policy objectives. Advocate for formal post-Fellowship responsibility commitments and priority hiring schemes for alumni in posts related to U.S.-Japan relations. Explore the feasibility of implementing a federal hiring authority placement mechanism to give formal preference to alumni from the legislative and judicial branches (who are in high demand by the GoJ) in finding employment with the federal government upon their return to the United States.
 - b. Focus on identifying and pipelining strong personnel with leadership potential at the GS 9-12 and O3-O4 levels, who bring sufficient experience but who plan to remain in the workforce 5+ years beyond the program. Deprioritize tactical military and late career applicants, especially military applicants with more than 15 years of experience who are likely to retire shortly after completion of the Fellowship.
 - c. Prioritize selection of Fellows with 8-12 years of work experience, which increases the likelihood they will be perceived as adding value to Japanese hosts while also allowing plenty of runway for future contributions in the USG.

- d. Pending action on Recommendation 6 below, impose stricter incoming language requirements and prioritize individuals with an existing language proficiency, when possible.¹
- 4. Require applicants to submit a more detailed plan for how they will contribute to bilateral relations, including concrete next steps, relevant USG job opportunities, and problem-solving strategies if/when barriers arise.** Require detailed mission statements. Allow a longer statement than 300 words. Failure to articulate this vision should eliminate them from consideration.
 - a. Require their supervisors to validate the feasibility and utility of their post-Fellowship responsibilities. Consider interviewing supervisors to elaborate on written plans, if vague or brief.
 - b. Whenever possible, pair promising applicants with an alumni buddy from a similar role or agency who can share lessons learned and prior placement plan templates.
- 5. Increase the USG service commitment to four years for a two-year Fellowship, commensurate with the USG investment in each participant.**

After Selection

- 6. Provide dedicated full-time pre-departure language training focused on Japanese listening, speaking, and presenting in a professional context, especially for any strategically selected Fellows who lack working proficiency.** Achieving this may involve restoration of the program's language-intensive two-year model, or another program model that ensures comparable language levels across the participant population.
 - a. Refer candidates without language skills to other short-term exchanges, language training, and professional development opportunities to develop a pipeline of qualified potential Fellows.²
- 7. Prepare Fellows to work in a GoJ office.**
 - a. Provide a template and sample monthly reports for Fellows to replicate, aligned to the needs of the U.S. Embassy counterparts and their home agencies.
 - b. Provide a pre-departure reading list related to Japanese government structure and work environment.
- 8. Streamline the placement process.** Because there is no "one size fits all" ideal plan or duration for each placement, Fellows require more support to build personalized work placement proposals. Hone placement requests between Fellows and potential host agencies as collaboratively as possible, including the applicant and the working-level GoJ counterparts.
 - a. Discourage brief placements.
 - b. Avoid placements where the Fellow is primarily seeking to learn and observe an area outside their field.
 - c. Consult with ECA on their knowledge, best practices, and strategies for international professional placements.

¹ The Department of State categorizes Japanese as a less commonly taught "critical language," which ECA in turn provides scholarships "to expand the number of Americans studying and mastering foreign languages that are critical to our national security and prosperity." No centralized repository of information about the languages spoken by federal employees exists and language proficiency is not collected by the Office of Personnel Management in the All Employee Survey. However, according to the latest relevant reporting from the U.S. Census in the "Language Use in the U.S." report issued August 2022, less than .2% of Americans speak Japanese at home in 2019, a figure which has dropped since 2000. About 4% of Americans enrolled in college pursued postsecondary Japanese language training in 2013, according to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, in interviews, U.S. officials in Japan shared that DOS intends to reduce the fluency requirement for personnel serving in Japan, due to the difficulty of the language and challenge the current requirement poses to filling vacancies. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.pdf>, and <https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/academy/multimedia/pdfs/publications/researchpapersmonographs/State-of-Languages-in-US.pdf>.

² ECA's Critical Language Scholarship is only open to degree-seeking students. However, it sums up the value of Japanese language fluency on its website: "Learning Japanese offers not only the opportunity to experience firsthand the beautiful culture and people of this island nation, but to build a career around its long-standing social and economic importance worldwide. The Japanese language will give you a competitive edge among Americans seeking to engage in East Asia's booming global market. Furthermore, Japanese language proficiency and cultural knowledge will give you the ability to form successful cross-cultural partnerships with Japanese people and in fields of study as diverse as architecture, politics, medicine, and literature." Retrieved from <https://exchanges.state.gov/cls>.

- d. Solicit GoJ inputs for areas where they would most like to host. Seek Fellows who align.
- e. Limit the number of Fellows assigned per ministry to maintain the quality of experience for all involved.
- f. Avoid framing the Fellowship as a “training” or “learning” opportunity to GoJ stakeholders. Instead, focus plans on what value hosting Fellows can add during and after the Fellowship. Share Fellows’ purpose statements, past schedule templates, and ideas for the most effective ways to spend various placement durations.
- g. Encourage private sector placements when they are highly relevant to the Fellow’s USG role (e.g., defense contracting, trade policy, etc.).

During the Fellowship

9. Adjust some processes to smooth operations.

- a. Communicate Fellows’ other commitments, including travel, leave, and language classes, to the working-level GoJ supervisors. Extend placements that fall over major holidays to recoup out-of-office time.
- b. Expand the funds available to Fellows for business travel. Allow funds to cover the travel expenses of GoJ peers who directly arrange and join the site visits.

10. Connect Fellows with USG counterparts in-country.

- a. Require Fellows to create a brief internal video bio to circulate to USG officials at all sections and consulates. Provide their contact information, monthly reports, and schedules to a dedicated point of contact who can distribute it internally.
- b. Encourage Fellows to meet individually with their U.S. embassy counterparts quarterly. Focus on discussing major new priorities, risks/threats, process insights and improvements, and new GoJ personnel. Fellows should also contribute GoJ names to Embassy social event invitation lists and IVLP candidates.
- c. Create a mandatory Mansfield Fellow and Alumni Speaker Program. Encourage Fellows to co-present with a Japanese colleague or partner organization. Ensure this includes events outside of Tokyo, in close consultation with consulate personnel. Clear Fellows to speak publicly by their home agencies as part of the onboarding process.
- d. Develop talking points for Fellows to share with their GoJ colleagues about opportunities, such as IVLP or other similar programs, for two-way exchange in which GoJ officials come to the U.S.

Post-Fellowship

11. Manage and maintain the alumni network.

Host biannual alumni events, including Congressional briefings, informal after-work mixed socials and policy talks featuring alumni and providing a venue for them to present and network informally, amplifying their expertise. Invite personnel from the Hill, the Japanese Embassy in Washington, think tanks, prospective Fellowship applicants, USG agency champions, and alumni.

- a. Consider opportunities to engage alumni outside of Tokyo and Washington via virtual events or digital networks: encourage them to submit career updates, opportunities, and achievements to foster a sense of connection and future collaborations. This would also assist record-keeping about how alumni are contributing to U.S.-Japanese relations.
- b. Provide updates about alumni activities in Japan (and a way to contact them, as appropriate) to program stakeholders in GoJ and the U.S. Mission, including both the Embassy and the consulates.

