



SWCOLT Teacher of the Year

Candidate Manual 2026

Welcome!

Congratulations on being selected as your state organization's Teacher of the Year (TOY) and moving forward to represent your state at the next SWCOLT Conference! This document serves as a comprehensive guide for submitting your materials to the SWCOLT TOY committee and judges, outlining the purpose of the award, the multi-stage application process, and the specific portfolio requirements and deadlines at each level.

Please save for future reference, read through carefully, and reach out to the committee with any questions. Thank you for participating and for your contributions to the profession.

Table of Contents

[Welcome!](#)

[Purpose of the Program](#)

[Candidate Manual Contents:](#)

[Overview of the Application Process](#)

[SWCOLT TOY candidate requirements:](#)

[Section I – Process, Timeline, and Deadlines](#)

[Process](#)

[Timeline and Deadlines](#)

[Section II – SWCOLT Teacher of the Year Portfolio Checklist](#)

[Overview and Instructions](#)

[Checklist](#)

[Section III – Portfolio Contents and Procedural Requirements](#)

[Portfolio Contents](#)

[Procedural Requirements](#)

[Section IV – Detailed Portfolio Instructions](#)

[Subfolder 1: Personal Statement and Recommendations](#)

[Subfolder 2: Student Work and Reflections](#)

[Subfolder 3: Professional Involvement](#)

[Subfolder 4: Nomination and Commitment Forms](#)

[Section V – SWCOLT Teacher of the Year Rubrics](#)

[Portfolio Rubric](#)

[Candidate Interview Rubrics](#)

[Interview Part 2: Mock Press Conference](#)

[Final Scoring](#)

[Section VI – Forms](#)

[Section VII – SWCOLT Contacts](#)

Purpose of the Program

The ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year program, which includes the SWCOLT Teacher of the Year award, aims to elevate the language profession's status and public profile. Key objectives are recognizing accomplished language professionals, involving all language organizations, creating media opportunities to highlight language learning, and acknowledging best practices in language teaching. All regional finalists, including the SWCOLT Teacher of the Year, are featured in the ACTFL Language Teacher Hall of Fame.

Candidate Manual Contents:

- ✓ Key deadlines and a detailed timeline
- ✓ A comprehensive checklist of required materials and procedures
- ✓ In-depth explanations of all required submission materials and their respective submission processes
- ✓ Evaluation rubrics and procedural specifics
- ✓ Essential forms and contact information

Overview of the Application Process

The National Language Teacher of the Year process is a multi-stage progression designed to incrementally build a comprehensive portfolio showcasing your teaching accomplishments. ACTFL provides necessary forms and samples to guide candidates, with detailed explanations available on its website.

The process unfolds through three main stages:

1. **State Level:** The journey begins at the state level, where state language organizations select their candidate. State Teacher of the Year nominations are due **via email to the SWCOLT TOY chairperson from state organizations' representatives by November 1, 2025.**
2. **Regional Level (SWCOLT):** The application from the state-selected candidate is then submitted to the regional level, such as SWCOLT. SWCOLT selects one teacher from its region to represent it in the national contest. Selection is based on a Portfolio and an Interview.
3. **National Level (ACTFL):** The finalist from each of the five regions then competes at the national level for the ultimate recognition. If you are selected as the SWCOLT Teacher of the Year, you will represent the region at the national level. You will work with SWCOLT to ensure your complete online portfolio is submitted to ACTFL. There are additional components for review at the National level: a classroom video and a reflection on the classroom video (requirements on the ACTFL website).

SWCOLT TOY candidate requirements:

- ✓ Full-time teacher with at least 50% courseload in world languages
- ✓ Planning to teach for at least another two years
- ✓ Have endorsement of the state language organization that is affiliated with SWCOLT and sponsoring the candidate
- ✓ **Full portfolio submitted by December 1, 2025**

SWCOLT Portfolio Subfolder Structure: To facilitate organization, candidates submitting their portfolios to SWCOLT will upload their materials to individual folders with the following structured subfolders:

- **Subfolder 1:** Photo; short bio.; personal statement; CV; recommendations; self-intro video.
- **Subfolder 2:** Student work and reflections; responses to questions.
- **Subfolder 3:** Documentation of and reflections on professional involvement.
- **Subfolder 4:** Nomination and commitment forms (e.g., SWCOLT TOY Commitment Form, SWCOLT TOY Nomination Cover Sheet and commitment forms)

Section I – Process, Timeline, and Deadlines

Process

- Each state will select its Teacher of the Year (TOY) in the fall and will report this name to the SWCOLT TOY committee.
- Each state TOY will receive access to an online folder from the TOY Committee in which they will upload a portfolio of work that will be considered as SWCOLT makes its TOY selection (portfolio items are detailed later in this document, but include: a Curriculum Vitae/résumé, introduction video, personal statement, student work samples, written reflections and letters of recommendation).
- Ahead of the conference, an anonymous panel of judges will be given confidential access to the materials for review.

- The day before the SWCOLT Conference (Thursday), each state TOY who has successfully submitted a portfolio will be interviewed by the panel of judges. Please ensure that travel plans will accommodate this scheduling. It is recommended that you arrive on Wednesday evening, if possible, as the interviews are typically scheduled to start at noon on Thursday.
- The interview will have 2 sections:
 1. Candidates will answer questions about teaching philosophy and practices,
 2. Candidates will present a 3 to 5 minute speech in the style of a mock press conference. That is to say, they will present a short policy statement for those outside the language education field, clearly stating the purpose and significance of language learning. **Candidates are encouraged to present this speech without notes. No handout or slide presentations are allowed.**
- Judges will use the rubrics in this manual to evaluate candidates' portfolios, interviews, and mock press conferences.
- **The SWCOLT Teacher of the Year will be announced on Friday during the Plenary Session following the Keynote Speaker. All candidates will be on stage for the announcement. Family and guests are welcome to attend this session.**
- The SWCOLT Teacher of the Year will be provided with additional information and support following the announcement, as they will then proceed to represent SWCOLT at that year's ACTFL Convention.

Timeline and Deadlines

September 2025 – December 2025

State Selection of Teacher of the Year (TOY)

Selection of SWCOLT TOY evaluation panel (various states, levels,

languages) November 1, 2025

Names of state Teachers of the Year (SWCOLT TOY candidates) due via email to SWCOLT TOY chairpersons

December 1, 2025

SWCOLT TOY candidate portfolios due (uploaded to folders provided by SWCOLT TOY committee chairs)

December 15, 2025 – January 23, 2026

Evaluation of Teacher of the Year candidate portfolios by an evaluation panel (judges selected from a mix of states, languages, and levels).

February 18-21, 2026 – TOY Interviews, SWCOLT Conference

TOY Interviews, in-person at the SWCOLT Conference (traditionally held on Thursday; candidates will be informed on time for planning. It is recommended that candidates arrive by Wednesday evening.) Announcement of SWCOLT Teacher of the Year is made on Friday during the Plenary Session. All State candidates will be on stage at that time.

March – May 2026

Selected Candidate (SWCOLT Regional Teacher of the Year) prepares portfolio for submission to ACTFL, including 20-minute classroom video; prepares for November ACTFL interview; guidance from SWCOLT and/or previous candidates will be provided

June 2026

SWCOLT Teacher of the Year submits ACTFL Portfolio and 20-minute classroom video for the national Teacher of the Year selection

November 2026

SWCOLT Teacher of the Year goes forward to the Competition for ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year at the ACTFL Convention.

Section II – SWCOLT Teacher of the Year Portfolio Checklist

Overview and Instructions

This checklist is intended to help the candidate organize their materials and form their approach to assembling the best possible portfolio—but is not a substitute for the handbook itself. Please ensure that you consult all sections of the handbook while preparing your dossier. This list serves as both an advance organizer and a final check for completeness. It is for your use and need not be included anywhere in your portfolio.

A note on formatting: except for the CV, please format as follows: Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins. Each file should be saved and uploaded as: “Last Name_Document Title_Year” (e.g., **Smith_Reflection on professional involvement_2026**; kindly use the year of the conference at which the TOY will be announced). The combined portfolio, including the CV, should not exceed 30 pages.

Checklist

- ☐ **State Nomination Form** (Nomination cover page, completed by regional organization)
- ☐ **Signed SWCOLT Commitment Form**
- ☐ **Signed ACTFL Commitment Form**
- ☐ **Headshot**
- ☐ **One-page Letter of Recommendation** from each of the following:
 - Former or current professional supervisor, mentor, or teaching coach
 - Former or current colleague
 - Former or current parent or student
- ☐ **20- to 30-second video:** self-introduction (for presentation of the TOY candidates on social media and at conference—not part of the evaluation)
- ☐ **Curriculum Vitae / Résumé:** not to exceed five pages
- ☐ **Personal Statement:** 500-word personal statement on the value of learning languages and developing cultural competence for all learners
- ☐ **Student Work:** two individual examples of student work.
- ☐ **Written Reflection on the Student Work:** a maximum of 1800 words providing a written reflection about the two individual student examples and how they:

- Demonstrate current best practices of language teaching and learning to include the integration of the World Readiness Standards for learning Languages (5 C's).
- Encourage the appropriate proficiency level use of the target language by the teacher and by the students.
- Provide the effective use of feedback, including, but not limited to, rubrics.

☐ **Response to Questions:** Each question can have a response of up to 900 words:

- Question 1: How does the teacher engage and encourage students in language-related and culture-related activities beyond the classroom?
- Question 2: How do the samples of student work reflect the teacher's personal statement on the value of learning languages and culture for all learners?

☐ **Evidence of Professional Involvement:** documentation of professional involvement referred to in the reflection on professional involvement section. Documentation may include, but is not limited to, certificates, newspaper articles, letters, and links to videos. Said documentation should not exceed 1800 words or four pages and will:

- Demonstrate professional growth and involvement in professional organizations.
- Provide evidence of a variety of leadership experiences, including advocacy.

☐ **Written Reflection on Professional Involvement:** reflection should not exceed three pages.

- Describe and analyze the significance and impact on you as a teacher.
- Describe and analyze the significance and impact on student learning and language learning in your school and/or district, or state.

Section III – Portfolio Contents and Procedural Requirements

Portfolio Contents

All documentation should be uploaded by **December 1, 2025**, to an online folder provided to you by the TOY Committee Chairs. Within your folder will be four subfolders, which you should ensure have the following titles.

- Subfolder 1: Photo, Professional Bio, Personal Statement, CV, Recommendations, Introductory Video
- Subfolder 2: Student Work, Classroom video (10 min) and Written Reflections
- Subfolder 3: Evidence of Professional Involvement
- Subfolder 4: Nomination and Commitment Forms

Procedural Requirements

1. **Portfolio:** You will upload all documents to an online folder provided to you by the TOY Committee. Your portfolio will be shared with several judges. Please make sure that all documents are PDFs, and that all files have sharing permissions open to anyone with the link. If you have any problems uploading your documentation and evidence to the folder, please contact the TOY Committee Chairs by December 1, 2025.
2. **Registration:** Please be sure to register for the conference at swcolt.org. It may be helpful to follow SWCOLT on social media and keep an eye out for early-bird conference rates and other important updates. SWCOLT does not cover the cost of conference registration for TOY candidates.
3. **Interview:** Immediately before the opening of the SWCOLT Conference, you will participate in an interview and a mock press conference (you will answer questions and present a short policy speech about language education, intended for people from outside the language teaching profession). **The exact time of your interview will be provided at least a week before the face-to-face meeting, which will likely occur on Thursday, February 19, 2026.** Please see the rubrics in Section V for more details.

Section IV – Detailed Portfolio Instructions

You will upload the following materials into four subfolders in an online folder, which will be provided to you upon your selection as state candidate for SWCOLT Teacher of the Year. Please ensure that you include all the documentation; judges will have a copy of the instructions in addition to the portfolio rubric. Not all items will be evaluated, but they may be promotional. Deadline for submission is December 1, 2025.

A note on formatting: except for the CV, please format as follows: Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins. Each file should be saved and uploaded as: “Last Name_Document Title_Year” (e.g., **Doe_Reflection on professional involvement_2025**; kindly use the year of the conference at which the TOY will be announced). The combined portfolio, including the CV, should not exceed 30 pages.

Subfolder 1: Personal Statement and Recommendations

A. Photo and Bio: a photo of yourself (resolution at least 300KB or 800 x 600 pixels) for the newsletter, posters, and programs. Please also include your full name, pronouns, and title if desired) as you would like it printed on certificates and in publications, and a short bio to accompany your photo.

Sample Bio: Name is the 2025 Teacher of the Year for the State Language Teachers Association. Name is the director of Project COACH, a staff development group working to improve world language teaching and learning. They also serve as department chair, lead instructional technology teacher, and mentor teacher at their school, and are the author of *The Language Teacher’s Handbook*, as well as the presenter of many standing-room-only workshops. Name’s approach to cultural participation and research has helped to create a rich environment that engages their students to gain new perspectives, new friends, proficiency with a new language and cultures, and motivation to use the target language in the real world.

B. Personal Statement: a 500-word personal statement on the value of learning languages and developing cultural competence/humility for all learners.

C. Curriculum Vitae / Résumé: Your CV must not exceed five pages and should include information on your contributions and/or participation in professional organizations such as district, state, or higher-level language organizations, along with specific examples of what those contributions entail.

D. Recommendations: include one-page letters of recommendation from:

- Former or current professional supervisor, mentor, or coach
- Former or current colleague
- Former or current parent or student

E. Introductory Video: a short (maximum 20-30 seconds) video recording introducing yourself. The videos can be filmed from a classroom (without showing students or others whose privacy requires protection), somewhere on campus, from home, or other appropriate settings. Note: The video is not part of the evaluation process but will be shared via social media to promote the SWCOLT Conference, and in the ceremony presenting the Teacher of the Year. *Please contact the TOY committee chairs if you have privacy concerns around social media.*

Subfolder 2: Student Work and Reflections

A. Student Work: two individual student examples, discussed next in 2B, Written Reflections on Student Work. If you are using video or audio formats, please ensure that file permissions (share settings) are open to anyone with the link and that identifying student information is masked.

B. Written Reflections on Student Work: maximum of 1800 words, providing a written reflection about your two individual student examples and how they:

- demonstrate current best practices of language teaching and learning to include the integration of the [World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages](#) (5 C's)
- encourage the appropriate proficiency level use of the target language by the teacher and by the students
- show effective use of feedback, including, but not limited to, rubrics

C. Written Reflections: maximum of two pages per question (four pages total), addressing the following questions.

1. How do you, as the teacher, engage and encourage students in language and culture-related activities beyond the classroom, including strategies that are appropriate for students at different levels of instruction?
2. How do the samples of student work and the content of the classroom video reflect

your personal statement on the value of learning languages and culture for all learners?

D. Classroom Video (a brief clear and concise snapshot from a unit that must include the teacher and must show teacher interacting with students in the target language) that is a continuous, non-edited 10 minute segment of a lesson in the actual classroom setting that

- demonstrates the effective use of the target language both by the teacher and the students;
- demonstrates a variety of instructional strategies that enhance the effectiveness of the lesson;
- is filmed during the current academic year;
- is not professionally produced

Subfolder 3: Professional Involvement

A. Evidence of Professional Involvement: a maximum of four pages, the contents of which are reflected upon in the next step. Examples include, but are not limited to, certificates, newsletter articles, letters, and video links:

- Demonstrate professional growth and involvement in professional organizations.
- Provide evidence of a variety of leadership experiences, including advocacy.

B. Written Reflection on Involvement: a maximum of 1350 words capturing the following points:

- Describe and analyze the significance and impact of your involvement in professional organizations and activities *on you as a teacher*.
- Describe and analyze the significance and impact of your involvement in professional organizations and activities *on student learning in your school, district, and/or state*.

Subfolder 4: Nomination and Commitment Forms

Each form is included in Section VI. Read the instructions carefully and ensure that all forms

are completed and signed as indicated, then uploaded to this folder. The three forms are the State Organization Nomination Form, the SWCOLT Commitment Form, and the ACTFL Commitment Form. These items are not evaluated as part of the portfolio but must be submitted as a condition of your candidacy.

Section V – SWCOLT Teacher of the Year Rubrics

This section contains three rubrics: one to assess your portfolio, one to assess your interview with the panel of judges during the conference, and one for the mock press conference statement.

Portfolio Rubric

Please review the following rubric to assist you in compiling your portfolio materials; remember that not every item you are required to submit is assessed. The panel of judges will receive copies of this rubric for their assessment; their comments will be destroyed after the final decision is made.

SWCOLT TOY Candidate _____ State _____

Scoring Criteria*

1. Very Limited Evidence / Very Weak Performance
2. Limited Evidence / Weak Performance
3. Moderate Evidence / Good Performance
4. Strong Evidence / Strong Performance
5. Extensive Evidence / Very Strong Performance

**adapted from ACTFL's TOY program*

A. Personal Statement (500-word limit) on the value of learning languages and developing cultural competence for all learners. The statement has a compelling, strong, and clear message.

Comments:

___ / 5 points

B. Curriculum Vitae / Résumé (5-page limit) demonstrates professional involvement and professional leadership.

Comments:

___ / 5 points

C. Recommendations

swcolt.org p. 11 / 22 revised July 2025

Includes letters from each of the following:

Former or current professional supervisor, mentor, or professional coach

Former or current colleague

Former or current parent or student

Comments:

___ / 5 points

D. Student Work (two individual examples)

D1. Student work shows evidence of varied instructional strategies.

Comments:

___ / 5 points

D2. Student work demonstrates the integration of the goals of [The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages](#) (often referred to as “the 5 C’s”).

Comments:

___ / 5 points

D3. Classroom Video (10 minutes, unedited)

___ / 10 points

E. Reflection on Student Work (4-page limit)

E1. Demonstrates current best practices of language teaching and learning, including the integration of the World Readiness Standards for learning languages (5 C's)

Comments:

___ / 5 points

E2. Encourages target language use among both teacher and students that is at an appropriate level of proficiency as defined by ACTFL

Comments:

___ / 5 points

E3. Provides the effective use of feedback, including, but not limited to, rubrics.

Comments:

____ / 5 points

F. Written Reflections (2-page limit per question; 4-page limit total)

F1 Prompt: How does the teacher engage students in cultural activities beyond the classroom, including strategies that are appropriate for students at different levels of instruction?

Comments:

____ / 5 points

F2 Prompt: How do the samples of student work reflect the teacher's personal statement on the value of learning language and culture?

Comments:

____ / 5 points

G. Professional Involvement Documentation (4-page limit). Examples include, but are not limited to, certificates, newsletter articles, letters, and video links.

G1. Demonstrates professional growth and involvement in professional organizations.

Comments:

____ / 5 points

G2. Provides evidence of a variety of leadership experiences, including advocacy.

Comments:

___ / 5 points

H. Reflection on Involvement (3-page limit)

H1. Describes and analyzes the significance and impact on the candidate as a teacher.

Comments:

___ / 5 points

H2. Describes and analyzes the significance and impact on student learning and language learning in the candidate's school and/or district or state

Comments:

___ / 5 points

Portfolio Total: ___ / 80 points

Candidate Interview Rubrics

Please review these two rubrics to assist you in preparing for your interview and mock press conference. The panel of judges will also receive copies of these rubrics for their assessment; their comments will be destroyed after the final decision is made.

SWCOLT TOY Candidate _____ **State** _____

Interview Part 1: Questions from Judges

Instructions / Overview: This rubric will be used by the judges in assessing your interview. The broad topics below are to help you prepare your response to a more specific question about the indicated theme.

Scoring Criteria*

1. Very Limited Evidence / Very Weak Performance
2. Limited Evidence / Weak Performance
3. Moderate Evidence / Good Performance
4. Strong Evidence / Strong Performance
5. Extensive Evidence / Very Strong Performance

**adapted from ACTFL's TOY program*

Theme 1: Culture in the Classroom

Quality Of Response: ____ / 5 points

Theme 2: Professional Involvement

Quality Of Response: ____ / 5 points

Theme 3: Value of Learning a World Language

Quality Of Response: ____ / 5 points

Interview Part 2: Mock Press Conference

This rubric is for the three-to-five-minute policy speech that you will direct to a civic group or other outside organization comprised of people who are not language educators. You may choose a specific type of audience (e.g., a school's PTO, a university curriculum committee) or keep your talk general. Candidates *may not bring additional materials* (e.g., handouts, one-pagers, notecards). The following are some suggestions to get you started; you need not consider or address all, but they are designed to help you with the quality of your message and delivery.

Preparation considerations

- Compelling, strong, and organized message
- Contains relevant, factual, data-driven points
- Contains appropriate personal or qualitative data
- Appropriate for an identified or general audience
- Speech should be rehearsed/practiced, but should sound memorized
- Mistakes, missteps, and forgetting happen; please just continue with your speech and showcase your qualifications!

Quality of Message ____/5 points Quality of Delivery: ____/5 points

Final Scoring

SWCOLT TOY Candidate _____ State _____

Portfolio Score _____ / 80

Interview Questions Score _____ / 15

Interview Mock Press Conference Score _____ / 10

Total Score _____ /105

Notes:

Section VI – Forms

The forms in this section should be digitally signed in a PDF or printed, completed, and scanned as a PDF for submission to the organization. The required forms are listed below, and the full documents follow.

1. [The Regional Nomination Form](#)
2. [The SWCOLT Commitment Form](#)
3. [The ACTFL Commitment Form](#)



Teacher of the Year Nomination Cover Sheet

This form should be completed by the state organization's nominator of the candidate.

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

___ Name of Candidate

___ Institution/Position Street Address City, State, Zip Code

___ Work Phone Cell Phone Email Address

NOMINATOR FROM STATE ORGANIZATION

___ Regional Officer / Nominator (please print name, sign, and date)

___ Organizational Role

___ Preferred Phone Number

___ Email Address



Commitment Form for State Finalists

This form should be completed by the finalist from each state organization and included in the portfolio submitted to SWCOLT.

If I am selected as the State Finalist for the SWCOLT Teacher of the Year, I agree, consent, and commit to:

- Attend the SWCOLT Annual Conference to participate in an on-site interview
- be nominated by SWCOLT as the ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year
- attend the ACTFL Convention
(Note: the hotel, registration, and transportation are paid by ACTFL.)
- serve as a spokesperson for the profession and any other duties as outlined by ACTFL

Signature

_____ Printed

Name _____ Date _____



ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year Commitment Form for State Finalists

This form should be completed by the finalist from each state organization and included in the dossier submitted at both the regional and national levels.

If I am selected as the Regional Finalist for the ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year, I agree to:

- attend the ACTFL Convention and participate in an on-site interview
- serve as a spokesperson for the language profession by attending conferences, giving presentations, and making personal appearances at various events as permitted by my teaching schedule (*note: expenses paid by ACTFL or the requesting agency*)
- provide a first-person account of my experience as ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year.

Signature

_____ Printed

Name _____

Date

Section VII – SWCOLT Contacts

Teacher of the Year Program Committee Chairs:

Carina Chiossi-Plett

cplett@swcolt.org

Maria Salas Murphy

msalasmurphy@swcolt.org

If you have additional concerns, you may contact the following:

Jocelyn Raught, Executive Director SWCOLT

jraught@swcolt.org

Melissa Carson, President SWCOLT

mcarson@swcolt.org