



2024 Mandela Washington Fellowship Application Instructions

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 16:00/4:00 PM GMT on Tuesday, September 12, 2023

Applications must be submitted using the online application system at apply.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org.

We suggest printing these instructions to use as a reference while completing the application.

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About the Mandela Washington Fellowship

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is the flagship program of the [Young African Leaders Initiative \(YALI\)](#). The Fellowship brings young leaders to the United States for academic coursework and leadership training and creates unique opportunities for Fellows and U.S. citizens to collaborate as they spur economic growth and prosperity, strengthen democratic governance, and enhance peace and security across Africa and the United States. The Mandela Washington Fellowship is a program of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by IREX.

The Fellowship will bring up to 700 young leaders to the United States in the summer of 2024 for a comprehensive executive-style program that will build skills and empower Fellows to lead in their respective sectors and communities. The Fellowship includes:

- **A six-week Leadership Institute:** Fellows are placed in groups of 25 at leading educational institutions across the United States—in both urban and rural areas—that represent the diversity of U.S. higher education. Institutes, which will take place from mid-June through early August 2024, will focus on skills development in one of three tracks: **Leadership in Business, Leadership in Civic Engagement, or Leadership in Public Management**. The intensive six-week model uses leadership development as the framework to create links between academic sessions, a strengths-based Common Leadership Curriculum, site visits, community service, and cultural activities. Fellows across all three tracks will gain theoretical knowledge and practical skills that can be applied in or adapted to African contexts. While all Institutes will include common components, each program agenda is unique and is based on the particular strengths and resources of each Institute Partner.
- **A Summit in Washington, D.C.:** At the conclusion of the Leadership Institutes, all Fellows will participate in a high-level Summit. Through a variety of sessions, Fellows will have the opportunity to network with each other and with U.S. leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. The Summit will take place in July 2024.
- **An optional four-week Professional Development Experience (PDE):** As part of the Fellowship application, individuals may apply to participate in a Professional Development Experience (PDE) at a U.S. NGO, business, or government agency. The PDE is designed to provide Fellows with practical training and the opportunity to learn transferable skills, expand their professional networks, and apply concepts learned at their Institutes to real-world situations in the U.S. context. Placements will relate to each Fellow's professional sector but are typically not an exact match to their current position at home. Rather, the PDE is an opportunity to introduce Fellows to new perspectives in their fields, deepen their awareness and understanding of issues present in both their home country and the United States, and learn best practices that can be applied to their work at home. PDEs will be intensive and demanding. Up to 100 Fellows will be competitively selected for the PDE and placed independently at organizations across the United States. Selected Fellows must be available to be in the United States for a total of approximately 11 weeks (including the Leadership Institute, the Summit, and the placement with a U.S.-based organization).

- **Opportunities for Alumni:** Fellows will have access to networking opportunities, ongoing professional development, and volunteer opportunities upon their return home after the Fellowship. Leveraging Innovations in New Communities (LINC) Grants allow selected Alumni across cohort years, sectors, and regions to travel to each other's organizations or communities or collaborate virtually to learn from each other's best practices and expertise. Reciprocal Exchanges provide U.S. citizens with opportunities to engage in collaborative projects with Fellowship Alumni, building upon strategic partnerships and professional connections developed during the Fellowship program. Alumni also have access to other opportunities, including grants, events, and virtual programming.

The U.S. Department of State and IREX reserve the right to alter or suspend Fellowship activities at any time. Changes or suspensions may occur in response to local, national, or global events that impact the ability to conduct program activities.

Financial Provisions of the Fellowship

There is no fee to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship. If you are selected for the Fellowship, the U.S. Government will cover all program costs.

Financial provisions provided by the U.S. Government will include:

- J-1 visa support;
- Round-trip travel from Fellow's home city to the United States and domestic U.S. travel as required by the program. Fellows must depart from their country of residence within Africa to the United States;
- A six-week Leadership Institute;
- A concluding Summit in Washington, D.C.;
- A limited accident and sickness benefit plan;
- Housing and meals during the program; and
- An optional four-week Professional Development Experience (for up to 100 Fellows).

Please note that the U.S. Department of State, IREX, Institutes, and/or PDE Hosts will not provide funds to cover Fellows' salaries while they are away from work or funds for personal purchases, such as support for Fellows' home organizations or gifts for family.

Fellows will be housed in university dorms or similar accommodations and may share a bedroom with another Fellow of the same gender and a bathroom with one or more Fellows of the same gender. Most meals will be provided at campus cafeterias or restaurants, though Fellows may have access to a kitchen to cook some meals. Please note that campus cafeterias will not offer the same types and varieties of foods available to Fellows in their home countries. To the extent possible, care will be taken to ensure that any special requirements regarding housing, diet, and other personal activities, such as religious observances, are satisfied. However, Fellows should understand that the environment will likely be very different from what they are used to at home and should be open to new experiences.

Fellows with disabilities and chronic health conditions will be provided with reasonable accommodations and support for their participation in the Fellowship at no cost. Please review our additional [information for Fellows with disabilities](#) for more details.

Technical Eligibility Requirements

The Mandela Washington Fellowship does not discriminate against applicants because of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic location, education, income, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other protected characteristic as established by U.S. law. The Fellowship is committed to fairness, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

The Mandela Washington Fellowship is open to young African leaders who meet the following criteria:¹

- Are between the ages of 25 and 35 as of the application deadline (September 12, 2023), although **exceptional** applicants ages 21-24 may be considered;
- Are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States;
- Are eligible to receive a United States J-1 visa;
- Are not employees or immediate family members of employees of the U.S. Government (including a U.S. embassy or consulate, USAID, or other U.S. Government entity);
- Are proficient in reading, writing, and speaking English (applicants who are deaf should refer to the *English Language* instructions below);
- Are citizens of one of the following countries: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, or Zimbabwe;
- Are residents of one of the above countries, and will be permanently residing there as of May 1, 2024, and at the beginning of the Fellowship in June 2024; and
- Are not Alumni or prior participants of the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Please note that Fellows are not allowed to have dependents, including spouses and children, accompany them during the Fellowship.

The selection of finalists from all eligible countries may be subject to review in response to local, national, or global events that impact the ability to conduct program activities.

¹ Current IREX employees and consultants and their immediate family members (spouses, parents, children, and siblings) are not eligible to apply for any IREX-implemented grant programs, either as individuals or as the responsible party representing an institutional applicant.



As of fall 2023, the U.S. Department of State has temporarily suspended exchange program operations in Sudan. While applications for the 2024 Mandela Washington Fellowship from Sudan will be considered, the selection of participants from Sudan will depend on the status of Department of State exchange program activity in Sudan in early 2024. Sudanese applicants will be notified of the program's operational status via email and through a notification posted on the application website by February 1, 2024.

The U.S. Department of State and IREX reserve the right to verify all information included in the application. You will be required to provide documentation verifying your age, citizenship, and residency at the interview stage if you are selected as a semi-finalist. In the event of a discrepancy, or if information is found to be false, the application will be immediately declared invalid and the applicant ineligible.

Applicants who do not meet the above technical eligibility requirements will not be forwarded to the selection committee. If you do not meet the technical eligibility requirements for this program, we encourage you to explore other exchange program opportunities offered by the U.S. Department of State's [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#) or other resources available through the [YALI Network](#).

Application Timeline

Date	
August 15, 2023	Application opens
September 12, 2023	Application deadline
November 2023 – January 2024	Semi-finalists interviewed by U.S. Embassies and Consulates
Early March 2024	Applicants notified of their status
May 2024	Visa processing and Pre-Fellowship activities for Finalists
June 2024	Fellowship begins in the United States

Selection Process and Criteria

The deadline for applications for the Mandela Washington Fellowship is 16:00/4:00 PM GMT on Tuesday, September 12, 2023. Applications must be submitted using the online application system at apply.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org.

The Fellowship selection process is a merit-based open competition. After the deadline, all eligible applications will be reviewed by independent readers. These readers will use the following criteria to evaluate applications (not in order of importance):

- A proven record of leadership and accomplishment in business or entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and/or public/government service;
- A demonstrated commitment to public or community service, volunteerism, or mentorship;
- The ability to work cooperatively in diverse groups and to respect the opinions of others;

- Strong social and communication skills;
- An energetic, positive, and flexible attitude;
- A demonstrated knowledge of, interest in, and professional experience in the preferred Fellowship track and concrete goals for applying knowledge and skills gained from the Fellowship to current and/or future work; and
- A commitment to return to Sub-Saharan Africa and contribute skills and talents to build and serve their communities.

Following the reader review, chosen semi-finalists will be interviewed by the U.S. embassy or consulate in their home country. If advanced to the semi-finalist round, applicants must provide a copy of their international passport (if available) or other government-issued photo identification at the time of the interview. Selected Finalists are required to participate in mandatory Pre-Fellowship Orientation activities and a visa interview in their home country of residence within Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Fellowship includes an optional additional four-week Professional Development Experience (PDE) at a U.S. NGO, business, or government agency at the end of the Leadership Institute. The PDE will include support for housing, meals, and transportation for Fellows who are selected to participate. Applying for the PDE is **optional** and is not required for acceptance into the Fellowship.

PDE applicants will be reviewed using the following selection criteria:

- Potential for growth through the PDE, with the applicant demonstrating some prior work experience, but room to grow and learn through the PDE.
- Clear focus on specific goals the applicant hopes to achieve through the PDE and demonstrated vision of how they see their career progressing.
- Identification of transferable skills the applicant wants to gain through the PDE and openness to a variety of learning experiences, rather than a focus on a specific type of host institution.
- Demonstrated English fluency.
- Understanding that the goals of the PDE are for the applicant to both learn in and contribute to a U.S. organization.

Taking these criteria into account, **the selection committee will also strive for balance across countries, genders, tracks, and location types (rural and urban) within the selected Fellowship cohort, in addition to industries within the selected PDE cohort.**

General Application Instructions and Tips

- The Fellowship uses an online application system. You will need access to a computer, tablet, or mobile device and an internet browser to apply. The online application system works in low-bandwidth environments and can be used on non-Apple and non-Android devices. It is also accessible and compatible with screen readers for applicants who are blind or have low vision.

- You do not have to finish your application in one session. You may save your work and return to complete your application as many times as necessary. Once you have submitted your application, however, you can no longer add any additional information or make any changes. Be sure to carefully check your entire application for completeness. You must submit your completed application through the online application system by the deadline.
- All fields marked with a red asterisk (*) must be completed.
- **All application questions must be answered in English** and must be completed without any aid or assistance from any technological tools (including, but not limited to, translation services, editing software, and artificial intelligence tools). All answers in the application, including written responses to essays and optional PDE questions, must be your own original work. Using language copied from other Fellowship applications (including those of other applicants or Fellowship Alumni) or from other sources (including websites) is considered plagiarism and will result in your application being disqualified.
 - Applicants with physical disabilities or special needs who require another person's assistance to complete an application may use such assistance. However, the thoughts, ideas, and content of your application must be your own; you cannot collaborate with the person assisting you on the content of your application.
- You may wish to review the application fully before completing any responses. Some applicants find it helpful to draft their responses offline (for example, in a separate Word document) and then paste their responses into the appropriate sections of the application. You can preview all information that will be required to complete the online application in the next section of this document under *Application Sections*.
- This is the official application for the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders. Only applicants who complete this application using the online application system will be considered. Applications and information submitted via email or other means will not be considered.

Application Sections

Eligibility

In this section, you will answer questions to determine your technical eligibility for the Mandela Washington Fellowship. You must fully complete this section to continue with the application. Please note that **if you do not meet all technical eligibility requirements in this section, you will not be able to participate in the 2024 Fellowship**. If your technical eligibility for the Fellowship changes at any point, please email MWfellowship@irex.org, as well as your local U.S. embassy or consulate immediately. Please refer to the Fellowship's *Technical Eligibility Requirements* noted above.

General Information

In this section, you will provide general information about yourself, including your name, city and country of birth, passport status, etc.

- Provide your full legal name as spelled on your passport and/or official government-issued identification.
- Provide your biological sex as it appears on your passport and/or official government-issued identification. You will be able to provide your gender in a different part of the application.
- Indicate whether you live in and if you grew up in a national capital city.
 - A national capital city is the seat of your federal or national government (e.g., Abuja, Nigeria, or Dakar, Senegal).
- Indicate what location type best describes where you currently live and where you grew up.
 - A major city is defined as an urban area with a large population of about 100,000+ people (e.g., Cape Town, South Africa).
 - Another city or town is roughly defined as a semi-urban area with a population between 2,500 and 100,000 people (e.g., Lamu, Kenya).
 - A rural area is defined as any area with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants that is distinctively not an urban area (e.g., Chachani, Tanzania).
- Indicate whether you currently have a passport. You do not need a passport to apply for the Fellowship.
 - If you do have a passport, provide the expiration date. If you are selected as a semi-finalist, you will be asked to present your passport during the interview stage.
 - All individuals who are selected for the Fellowship will be required to have a passport that is valid through at least February 28, 2025, or March 31, 2025, if selected for the Professional Development Experience.

Résumé/CV

In this section, you must provide information about your past education, work experience, volunteer experience, any awards you have earned, etc. Some of the information that you provide in this section will be populated into later application sections to streamline the application process. For this reason, we recommend completing this section before moving onto the next section of the application. You may be asked to provide more details about your entries later in the application. **All information entered must be in English.**

- **Professional Experience:** List up to five professional positions that have been your primary occupation, whether paid or unpaid.
 - For example, you could list your role as program officer or head of sales.
 - For each professional position, you will need to provide:
 - Name and location (city and country) of the company or organization you work or worked for;
 - Professional title;
 - Start and end dates; and
 - Up to 100 words describing your position (required).
- **Education:** List up to five educational institutions that you have attended and the degree you received at each one.
 - For example, you could list your secondary school or university degree.
 - For each educational experience you list, you will need to provide:

- Name and location (city and country) of the school you attend or attended;
 - Start and end dates;
 - Course or program delivery method (online, in-person, or hybrid);
 - Type of degree;
 - Field of study; and
 - Up to 100 words describing your program (optional).
- **Other Professional Trainings and Certifications:** List up to five professional trainings and/or courses you have completed outside of degree-seeking programs.
 - For example, you could list a project management certification.
 - For each professional training or certification you list, you will need to provide:
 - Type of training or name of certification;
 - Program format (online, in-person, or hybrid);
 - Start and end dates; and
 - Up to 100 words describing the training or certification (optional).
- **Community and Volunteer Work:** List up to five volunteer roles or other unpaid work outside of your primary occupation.
 - For example, you could list the time you spend mentoring young entrepreneurs.
 - For each community or volunteer work experience, you will need to provide:
 - Name and location (city and country) of the organization you volunteer or volunteered for;
 - Start and end dates; and
 - Up to 100 words describing the community or volunteer work (optional but recommended).
- **Awards, Honors, Fellowships, Grants, and/or Scholarships:** List up to 10 awards or honors you have received at the university or professional level.
 - For example, you could list that you were recognized as employee of the month.
 - For each award, honor, fellowship, grant, or scholarship, you will need to provide:
 - Title of honor or award;
 - Organization or institution from which the award was received;
 - Date received; and
 - Up to 100 words describing the honor or award (optional).
- **Professional Skills:** List up to eight languages and/or up to 10 computer or software skills you possess.
 - For example, you could include that you speak French and English and are familiar with Microsoft Office.
- **Publications, Conferences, and Notable Presentations:** List any of your professional publications as well as conferences and presentations that you have participated in.
 - For example, you could list that you were a panelist in a discussion at your university.
 - It is recommended that you format your entries as citations according to the [Chicago Manual of Style](#), but doing so is not required.
- **Associations and Affiliations:** List any professional organizations, leadership groups, or community organizations that have not otherwise been captured and any leadership roles you hold in these organizations.

- For example, you could list your role as president of your local trade association or co-founder of a women's leadership group.

Demographic Information

In this section, you will have the opportunity to answer optional questions about how you identify yourself. These questions will help us understand how people from diverse backgrounds seek out and experience opportunities through the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

The questions in the “Demographic Information” section are optional and are for statistical purposes only. All responses will remain confidential and will not be considered during the selection process. The Mandela Washington Fellowship strongly encourages all eligible applicants to apply.

The Mandela Washington Fellowship does not discriminate against applicants because of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic location, education, income, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other protected characteristic as established by U.S. law. The Fellowship is committed to fairness, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

A **disability** is defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major activities, such as walking, speaking, thinking, working, seeing, or caring for oneself.

A **chronic health condition** is any health condition that is long-lasting, requires ongoing medical care, and/or limits activities of daily living, such as HIV/AIDS, asthma, or sickle cell disease. **Mental health conditions** such as chronic depression and schizophrenia are included under this definition.

- Indicate if you identify as a person with a disability and/or chronic health condition. Applicants with disabilities and chronic health conditions are encouraged to apply and provide information regarding their disability and any accommodations they may need while in the United States.² Your application will not be affected in any way if you disclose a disability. Please review the [information for Fellows with disabilities](#) for more information.
 - **Physical/Mobility Disability** (e.g., wheelchair users, amputees)
 - **Hearing Disability** (e.g., deaf, hard of hearing)
 - **Vision Disability** (e.g., blind, low vision) *Myopia and wearing glasses or contacts are not considered disabilities, regardless of the prescription strength.*
 - **Speech Disability** (e.g., speech impediments)
 - **Chronic Health Condition** (e.g., HIV/AIDS, diabetes, etc.)

² For more information on these disability categories, please refer to the [Office of Equal Employment Opportunity's definition](#).

- Indicate which option best describes your **gender identity or expression**. Gender identity is an individual’s internal, deeply-felt sense of being a man, a woman, both, neither, or in-between. This may or may not match the individual’s biological or legal sex.³
- Indicate if you identify as **LGBTQI+**. If you identify as LGBTQI+, you may identify with one of the following categories:
 - **Lesbian**: A woman who is sexually and romantically attracted to other women.
 - **Gay**: A man who is sexually and romantically attracted to other men. Also often used as a generic term to describe people of any gender who are sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same gender.
 - **Bisexual**: A person who is sexually and romantically attracted to both women and men.
 - **Transgender**: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.
 - **Queer**: Historically a negative term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. More recently reclaimed by some LGBT people to refer to themselves. Often used to reference a more flexible view of gender and/or sexuality. Some people still find the term offensive, while others use it as a more inclusive term that allows for more freedom of expression.
 - **Intersex**: A variety of conditions in which a person is born with or develops a reproductive or sexual anatomy or physiology that may not seem to fit typical ideas of female or male or typical development of physical sex traits.
- Indicate the **pronouns** that you prefer. A pronoun is a term used to substitute a person’s name when they are being referred to in the third person.⁴ A person’s gender should not be assumed based on their pronouns. Gender pronouns can include, but are not limited to:
 - **He/him/his**: Masculine pronouns
 - **She/her/hers**: Feminine pronouns
 - **They/them/theirs**: Neutral pronouns
- Indicate if you are part of a **racial, ethnic, indigenous, religious, or linguistic** group that is historically marginalized in your community, or if you are historically marginalized in your community because of your **socioeconomic status**.
 - **Racial or ethnic group**: Race discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably due to their race or personal characteristics associated with race, such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features.⁵
 - **Indigenous group**: Indigenous discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because they are a member of an indigenous group.
 - **Religious group**: Religious discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because they are of a certain religion.⁶

³ For more information on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, please refer to the U.S. State Department’s [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity \(SOGI\) Terms and Definitions Document](#).

⁴ For more information on gender pronouns, please refer to the U.S. Department of Labor’s [Policies on Gender Identity](#).

⁵ For more information on race and color discrimination, please refer to the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s definitions](#).

⁶ For more about religious discrimination, refer to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s definitions.

- **Linguistic group:** Linguistic discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of their language abilities, native language, or accent.⁷
- **Socioeconomic class or status:** Social class discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably on the basis of social class or economic status and the grouping of individuals based on wealth, income, education, occupation, and social network.

Contact Information

In this section, you will provide your contact information, including your phone number, email address, and address.

The contact information you provide will be used to reach you during the application and selection processes. Please provide accurate addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses that you use and check on a regular basis. It is **highly recommended** that you include an alternate email address, in case you are no longer able to access your primary email address.

Current Professional and/or Educational Experience

In this section, you will provide information about where you are currently working and/or studying.

- Select the option that describes the **highest level** of education that you have **completed** or will have completed by the start date of the Fellowship in June 2024. If, for example, you have completed four years of education at the bachelor level and half of your M.S. degree, select “Bachelor’s or similar first degree (Diploma, B.A., B.Sc., Honors degree)” as your level of education.
- Select up to five sectors in which you have expertise and/or interest to help us better understand your professional areas of focus. Please note that this information will not factor into your selection but may be used to help place Finalists at Leadership Institutes. This information may also be used by the YALI Network (if you have opted in) to provide you with tailored opportunities.
- Indicate the level of your current or most recent professional position:
 - **Entry-level:** Beginning-level employees who have a basic understanding of the occupation. Employees work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results.
 - **Mid-level, non-supervisory:** Employees have a sound understanding of the occupation and have attained special skills or knowledge through education or experience. They perform tasks that require exercising judgement. They do not directly supervise anyone, but they may coordinate the activities of other staff.
 - **Mid-level, supervisory:** Employees have a sound understanding of the occupation and have attained special skills or knowledge through education or experience. They perform tasks that require exercising judgement. They may coordinate the activities of other staff and have supervisory authority over those staff.

⁷ For more about linguistic discrimination, refer to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s [definitions of national origin discrimination](#).

- **Executive:** Employees have sufficient experience in the occupation to plan and conduct work requiring judgement and the independent evaluation, selection, modification, and application of procedures and techniques. Employees use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems. They have management and/or supervisory responsibilities.

YALI Engagement

In this section, you will answer questions about how you learned about the Mandela Washington Fellowship and your previous engagement with YALI.

If you have participated in any programs through the [YALI Regional Leadership Centers](#), you will be asked to provide information about your program(s) and the dates you attended.

If you have participated in any programs through the [YALI Network's](#) online courses, you will be asked to provide information about your participation.

Previous U.S. Experience

In this section, you will provide information regarding your experience with any U.S. Government programs and/or past or planned travel to the United States, if applicable. **Do not include information about previous participation in other YALI programs through the YALI Regional Leadership Centers (RLC), which should be included in the previous section for YALI Engagement.**

- Include all experience in the United States, such as work, trainings, degree programs, study abroad experience, personal travel, tourism (past or planned), or extended stays or residencies. Previous experience in the United States does not disqualify you from the Fellowship.
- For each previous experience traveling to the United States, you will be asked to provide your dates of entry and exit, visa type, and purpose of your travel.

English Language

In this section, you will provide an accurate assessment of your English language proficiency. **High-level proficiency in written and spoken English is required for the Fellowship.**

Applicants who are deaf should indicate their proficiency in reading and writing in standard English and their proficiency in interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, and listening in American Sign Language (ASL). Please note that interpretation in the United States may only be available in ASL, so selected Fellows should be proficient in, or be prepared to learn, ASL prior to arrival in the United States. Prior to the start of the Fellowship, selected Fellows who require sign language interpretation during their Institute will have the opportunity to learn ASL through a pre-

Institute training at Gallaudet University, the world’s only liberal arts university for deaf individuals. Gallaudet University also offers [free resources for learning ASL](#).

- Indicate whether English is your native language. Native language refers to the language a person learned as a child (usually from their parents or guardians). Children from bilingual homes can have more than one native language.
- Complete a self-assessment of your English language skills as accurately as possible. English language proficiency is required for participation in the Fellowship. All activities—including academic sessions, discussions, meetings, cultural activities, and social interactions—will be in English.
- Read the statements corresponding to each proficiency level. Then, select the level (Absolute Beginner, Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, or Very Advanced) that most closely aligns with your English language abilities for each skill. Applicants who are deaf should indicate their proficiency in reading and writing in standard English and their proficiency in Interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, and listening in ASL.

Institute Track

In this section, you will rank in order of preference the three tracks according to what most closely aligns with your daily work, education, community involvement, or future goals. The three tracks are Leadership in Business, Leadership in Civic Engagement, and Leadership in Public Management.

Leadership Institutes are designed to provide Fellows with background on U.S. practices and to help Fellows expand their networks to include U.S. citizens with whom they may find opportunities to collaborate in the future. **The Fellowship is not designed to help Fellows identify specific funding for projects or organizations.**

Fellows should be prepared to examine U.S. case studies and approaches to challenges and relate them to the African context. The Fellowship does not encourage Institute Partners to teach African models to Fellows – as such, Institute speakers may not be specialists on African subjects. As leaders, Fellows should be prepared to consider what elements of each U.S. approach or strategy might be useful in their own contexts.

While Institutes focus on specific tracks and themes, not all sessions will directly relate to each Fellow’s current work. Sessions are designed to help Fellows broaden their understanding on a variety of topics to prepare them for leadership outside of their current role or focus area. Fellows are encouraged to build their own networks and connections by reaching out directly to U.S. citizens in their host communities during unstructured time. The Fellowship Terms and Conditions require all Fellows to attend and fully participate in all required sessions and program activities scheduled by their Institute.

- **Leadership in Business:** Leadership in Business Institutes will provide Fellows with an overview of U.S. entrepreneurial strategies in the for-profit sector and socially minded enterprises. Institute programming will examine the development, history, challenges, and

successes of U.S. enterprises in both the United States and global markets, while providing space for Fellows to discuss related challenges and opportunities on the African continent. Fellows will develop key skills in business and entrepreneurship such as business plan development, sustainability in business, marketing, business ethics, regional and international trade, and the importance of public-private partnerships. These Institutes will give Fellows the opportunity to engage with the local business community to spur the development of innovative ideas, identify new markets, and establish links for future collaborations.

- **Leadership in Civic Engagement:** Leadership in Civic Engagement Institutes will provide Fellows with an overview of how citizens have shaped U.S. history, government, and society both as individuals and as groups. Institute programming defines civic engagement, studies its development in the United States, and examines U.S. case studies with particular relevance to the African continent. Fellows will develop skills and study approaches as they relate to citizenship, economic development, social justice, political activism, grassroots organizing, volunteerism, and the use of media and technology to advance civic causes. These Institutes will connect Fellows to community organizations to gain new insights into the intersectionality of issues and their impact on civic participation.
- **Leadership in Public Management:** Leadership in Public Management Institutes will provide Fellows with an overview of how regional economic and workforce development, financial management, and the global knowledge economy shape both the domestic and foreign policy processes. Institute programming will delve into topics such as rule of law, education, public health, climate change and environmental sustainability, and public sector transparency and accountability. Fellows will develop skills and approaches as they relate to policy development and evaluation, public finance and budgeting, ethical leadership, and good governance. The Institutes will provide access for Fellows to leaders at the local, regional, and state levels to learn about the implications of policy decisions on communities and businesses.

Please rank your preferred sectors/tracks (first choice, second choice, and third choice) according to what most closely aligns with your daily work, education, community involvement, or future goals. In the Personal Statements section of the application, you will be asked to explain what skills and knowledge you hope to gain from the Fellowship through your preferred track. Note that if selected, you may not be placed in your first-choice track, but you may be placed in a different track that, based on your application materials, fits your profile.

Note: Residents of Zimbabwe are not eligible to apply for the Leadership in Public Management track.

Personal Statements

In this section, you will answer essay questions. The Fellowship selects qualified and dedicated individuals who have demonstrated the potential to be great leaders.

*Note: Be sure not to plagiarize content—which is taking someone else’s work or ideas and presenting them as your own—in your response. This includes using wording from another applicant or

Fellowship Alumni in your application. The U.S. Department of State and IREX will be checking all applications for plagiarism, and those who plagiarize their application materials will be disqualified.

- Each response has a space limitation and a designated word limit. Please use specific, concrete examples that support your statements. It is important that you provide some background information since the reader may not be familiar with the situation in your community or country, but you should focus primarily on your experience and examples.
- **All responses must be written in English.**

Long Essay

You will have 250 words to answer each of the long essay questions.

- Provide an overview of your major professional accomplishments from the past year, as well as your long-term goals and aspirations. What motivates you to work in the field that you do?
- Based on your understanding of your preferred Institute track of study, what skills and knowledge do you hope to gain from the Fellowship that you would not be able to develop through other opportunities? How will you use those skills and that knowledge to enhance your activities in your community within the next three to five years?

Short Essay

You will have 150 words to answer each of the short essay questions.

- Nelson Mandela said, “A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dreamt of.” Public and community service are essential responsibilities for leaders. What needs do you believe are most evident in your community? How are you working to address these needs?
- The Mandela Washington Fellowship values diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) and strives to include and support diverse identities and ideas in all program design and implementation. How do you approach working with people who have identities and ideas that are different from your own? How have you used inclusive leadership to resolve conflict and achieve progress despite differences?
- Resilience—especially in the face of sudden change—is a critical quality in effective leaders. Provide an example of how you have demonstrated resiliency during challenging times. How has this experience influenced your current work?

Optional Professional Development Experience (PDE)

In this section, you will indicate whether you would like to apply to the Mandela Washington Fellowship Professional Development Experience (PDE).

- The PDE component of the program is optional and competitive. You do not have to apply for the PDE component in order to be considered for the Fellowship.
- To apply for the optional PDE, you will be required to answer two additional essay questions.
All responses must be written in English.

- More information about the PDE component is provided in this section of the application. Applicants should read the information provided closely before completing these essays.
 - Provide a brief description of your current work, both professionally and in your community (if applicable), and your long-term goals and aspirations. If you are selected for a PDE, this will be used as a short profile to share with U.S. organizations. (150 words)
 - What are your goals for the Professional Development Experience, including the specific transferable skills and knowledge you hope to gain? How would you apply an experience working with a U.S. organization to your work after returning to your home country? (250 words)

Submit Application

In the online application system, after fully completing a section, it will be marked as “Completed”. When all required sections of the application are marked as “Completed”, click “Submit Application” at the bottom of the application dashboard. **Please note: your application is not considered complete until you submit it.**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Application

Q: Can I access the application from my phone or tablet?

A: Yes, you can access the application from any device that is connected to the internet. The application is mobile-friendly, so it is easy to apply from your phone or tablet.

Q: I don't have reliable access to high-speed internet. Can I still complete an application?

A: Yes. The application system functions in low-bandwidth environments and can be saved. As such, you can complete the application over multiple sittings, which may be useful if you do not have constant access to the internet or are traveling to internet cafés or co-working spaces to complete your application. Please save your application often to avoid losing your responses due to potential internet disruptions.

Q: How do I enter my name into the application?

A: You should type your name exactly as it appears on your passport or other official government identification documents. For example, John's passport lists Ngozi as his surname and John Michael as his given name. He should type John Michael in the First Name(s) (Given Name(s)) field and Ngozi in the Last Name (Surname or Family Name) field of the application.

Q: I am unable to move past the Eligibility section. How do I apply?

A: Please review the eligibility requirements. The application will not let you proceed unless you meet the technical eligibility requirements and have fully completed the section.

Q: What if I am not eligible for the Fellowship?

A: If you are not eligible to apply, we encourage you to join the [YALI Network](#) and explore other exchange program opportunities offered by the U.S. Department of State's [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#).

Q: I signed up for email updates from the YALI Network and cannot get into the Mandela Washington Fellowship online application system. What do I do?

A: Signing up for YALI Network email updates does not create an account for you in the online application system. You must create a separate account at apply.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org to apply through the Mandela Washington Fellowship online application system.

Q: How can I log in to the application system and see my information from a previous year?

A: All previous applications have been erased. You will need to register again at apply.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org to complete the 2024 application.

Q: Can I submit a paper copy of the Mandela Washington Fellowship application?

A: No, you must submit your application through the Mandela Washington Fellowship online application system (apply.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org). Paper applications or applications via email attachment will not be accepted.

Q: Can I submit more than one application for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you may submit only one application. Submitting additional applications will disqualify you.

Q: I have multiple email addresses, including some for personal use and some for my work. Which one should I use for the Fellowship application?

A: You should use the email address that you access most frequently and that can be accessed from any internet connection. Work email addresses that cannot be accessed outside your office, or that you will not be able to access if you change jobs, are not recommended. It is **highly recommended** that you include an alternate email address, in case you are no longer able to access your primary email address.

Q: I cannot afford to pay an application fee. How should I apply?

A: There is no fee to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Q: The application instructions say all answers must be my “own, original work.” What does that mean?

A: All answers must be your own ideas and in your own words. Be certain not to plagiarize, which is taking someone else’s work or ideas and presenting them as your own. If you use another person’s writing, ideas, words, or materials, you must credit the source. Do not cut and paste text from the internet or other sources. Plagiarism is strictly forbidden at many organizations and academic institutions in the United States, and those who plagiarize their application materials will be disqualified. This also includes using wording from another applicant or Fellowship Alumni in your application. The U.S. Department of State and IREX will be checking all applications for plagiarism. For more information, please visit the [Plagiarism.org website](https://www.plagiarism.org).

Q: After I complete and submit my application, can I make changes or add supplemental documents at a later date?

A: No, all submitted applications are final. Once you have submitted your application, you can no longer add any additional information or make any changes, either through the online system or via email. All information must be entered prior to your final submission, so be sure to check everything carefully before you submit. If you have any questions about or problems with your application, please contact MWfellowship@irex.org before you submit. If your technical eligibility for the Fellowship changes at any point, please email MWfellowship@irex.org, as well as your local U.S. embassy or consulate immediately.

Q: I’m not sure which track to list as my first choice. How should I choose how to rank them?

A: You should list the tracks according to what best aligns with your current work and/or long-term professional goals. All tracks will have a focus on leadership development and will help Fellows strengthen widely transferable skills, including strategic planning, communications and marketing, financial management, and organizational management. For more detailed information on each track, please review the *Institute Track* section above.

Q: My current work doesn’t seem to fit into any of the tracks (Leadership in Business, Leadership in Civic Engagement, or Leadership in Public Management). Should I still apply?

A: Absolutely! Past Mandela Washington Fellows have come from many different backgrounds and have worked in a wide variety of fields. All three tracks instill transferable skills, and the overarching topics are applicable to a variety of sectors, including but not limited to: entrepreneurship, non-profit management, healthcare, journalism, public service, education, tourism, human rights, agriculture, and environmental protection. Check out the bios of past Mandela Washington Fellows in our [online directory](#) to get a better idea of the variety of industries that Fellows represent.

Disability and Other Accommodations

Q: I have a physical disability or other special need, and I need another person's assistance to complete my application. Is this considered plagiarism?

A: Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship. Applicants with physical disabilities or special needs who require another person's assistance to complete an application may use such assistance. However, the thoughts, ideas, and content of your application must be your own; you cannot collaborate with the person assisting you on the content of your application.

Q: Can applicants with disabilities apply? Why does the application ask if I have a disability?

A: Yes, applicants with disabilities are encouraged to apply. The Mandela Washington Fellowship does not discriminate against applicants because of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic location, education, income, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other protected characteristic as established by U.S. law. The Fellowship is committed to fairness, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. The application includes a question about disability so that we are aware of what kinds of accommodations you may need if interviewed or selected. IREX and the U.S. Department of State also use these responses for statistical purposes. Your answer to the question regarding disabilities is voluntary and will not impact your chances of acceptance.

Q: How are Fellows with disabilities or chronic medical conditions supported during the Fellowship?

A: Each Fellow's needs are evaluated individually so that the Institute Partner and IREX can determine reasonable accommodations to ensure the Fellow's full participation in program activities. Please [review the information for applicants with disabilities](#) for more on what types of reasonable accommodations may be available during the Fellowship.

Q: How are pregnant Fellows supported during the Fellowship?

A: Applicants who are pregnant are encouraged to apply. The Mandela Washington Fellowship is committed to supporting a positive learning and networking environment for all Fellows. The Fellowship is an intensive program that includes long days and extended periods of time sitting in a classroom or walking on excursions and site visits. Airlines also have different policies for flying while pregnant and may restrict travel for individuals who are pregnant after a certain period in their pregnancy. If you are pregnant and are less than 20 weeks pregnant by the start of the Fellowship in June, you should be able to fully participate in the program. Please [review the information for Fellows](#)

[who are pregnant](#) for more on the support and resources available to pregnant Fellows during the Fellowship.

Technical Eligibility Requirements

Age

Q: I am currently 35 years old but will turn 36 before the Mandela Washington Fellowship application deadline closes. Am I eligible for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you are not eligible to apply for the Fellowship. Applicants must be between the ages of 25 and 35 as of the application submission deadline, although exceptional applicants ages 21-24 will be considered. If you are still 35 on September 12, 2023, you are eligible to apply. No exceptions will be made for candidates older than 35.

Q: I am younger than 25 years old. Am I eligible for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: Yes, you may be eligible to apply for the Fellowship. Exceptional candidates between the ages of 21 and 24 on or before the application submission deadline may be considered. If you are 21 on September 12, 2023, you are eligible to apply. No exceptions will be made for candidates younger than 21.

Q: I have submitted my application. How do I report future changes to my employment or residency that affect my technical eligibility prior to the start of the 2024 Fellowship?

If you do not meet all technical eligibility requirements in this section currently or at the start of the program, you will not be able to participate in the 2024 Fellowship. If your technical eligibility for the Fellowship changes at any point, please email MWfellowship@irex.org as well as your local U.S. embassy or consulate immediately.

Citizenship

Q: I am not sure if people from my country are eligible for the Fellowship. Where can I find a list of eligible countries?

A: Visit the [Mandela Washington Fellowship website](#) to view the list of countries eligible for the 2024 Mandela Washington Fellowship or reference the *Technical Eligibility Requirements* section above.

Q: I left my African home country as a refugee and am now a U.S. citizen. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you are not eligible to apply for the Fellowship. U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and green card holders are not eligible to apply for the Fellowship under any circumstances.

Q: I have dual citizenship in my African home country and another country. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: Maybe. If you live in one of the sub-Saharan African countries eligible for the Fellowship and reside in another sub-Saharan African country that is eligible, you are eligible to apply. If you are accepted as a Fellow, you must apply for your U.S. visa and enter the United States on your eligible country's passport. If you live in any country outside of Sub-Saharan Africa, you are not eligible to apply for the

Fellowship, regardless of your citizenship. Please see the information on residency below for more details.

Q: I am an employee of the U.S. Government but am a citizen and resident of an eligible country. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you are not eligible to apply for the Fellowship. Employees and immediate family members of employees of the U.S. Government are not eligible to apply for the Fellowship.

Residency

Q: What do you mean by country of residence?

A: Your country of residence is the country in which you currently live and have a physical address. You must live in one of the countries eligible for the Fellowship to apply.

Q: I am a citizen of Ghana currently living in South Africa. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship? What option do I choose for my country?

A: Yes, because both Ghana and South Africa are listed as eligible countries for the Fellowship, you are eligible to apply. Applicants living outside their eligible country of citizenship but in another eligible country may apply. Select the correct country of citizenship and list your current permanent address.

Q: I am a resident of the United States, but I am originally from an African country. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you are not eligible for the Fellowship. Residents of the United States, or of any non-eligible country, are not eligible for the Mandela Washington Fellowship under any circumstances, even those with temporary residency, such as students.

Q: I am an African student studying in France (or another non-eligible country). Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you are not eligible for the Fellowship. Residents of non-eligible countries are not eligible for the Fellowship under any circumstances, even those with temporary residency, such as students. You may be eligible for a future Fellowship year once you permanently return to your home country, provided that you meet the other technical eligibility requirements.

Q: I previously resided in the United States for school or work but have returned and am now a resident in an eligible African country. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes, if you are currently both a citizen and a resident of an eligible African country, you are eligible to apply, provided that you meet the other technical eligibility requirements.

Q: I am a citizen of a non-eligible country but have lived all my life in Sub-Saharan Africa. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: No, you must be both a citizen and resident of an eligible country to apply for the Fellowship.

Q: I am currently a resident of an eligible country, but I will be temporarily in China for work in May 2024. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: As a current resident of an eligible country, you are eligible to apply; however, you will not be able to participate in the Fellowship if you are not living in an eligible country as of May 1, 2024, to participate in required pre-Fellowship activities, such as a visa interview.

Q: I am currently a resident of Sudan. Am I eligible to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship?

A: As of fall 2023, the U.S. Department of State has temporarily suspended exchange program operations in Sudan. While applications for the 2024 Mandela Washington Fellowship from Sudan will be considered, the selection of participants from Sudan will depend on the status of Department of State exchange program activity in Sudan in early 2024. Sudanese applicants will be notified of the program's operational status via email and through a notification posted on the application website by February 1, 2024.

Language

Q: I am not proficient in English. Can I participate in the Mandela Washington Fellowship using another language?

A: No. The Fellowship will be conducted entirely in English. High-level proficiency in written and spoken English is required for the Fellowship. Applicants who are deaf should note that interpretation in the United States may only be available in American Sign Language (ASL). If you are selected as a Fellow, you should be proficient in, or be prepared to learn, ASL prior to arrival in the United States.

Q: How will language abilities be assessed?

A: Language abilities will be assessed through the online application and, if you are chosen for the next stage, during an interview at your local U.S. embassy or consulate. TOEFL scores are not required. You can practice and improve your English language skills for free through the [Online Professional English Network](#) or through the [Voice of America's Learning English website](#). Selected Fellows will also have access to Fellowship-provided ESL materials to help them prepare for the Fellowship.

Q: My native language is not English. Can I complete my application documents in my native language?

A: No. All applications must be written in English. If your application is not in English, it will not be considered for selection.

Miscellaneous

Q: Must I have attended university or have a university degree to apply?

A: No. While formal education may contribute to your overall competitiveness in meeting the Fellowship's selection criteria, you will not be disqualified if you do not have a formal diploma or degree.

Q: I am currently serving in my country's military, defense ministry, police, or other law enforcement. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes. Applications from members of the military, defense ministries, and police are eligible and will be considered.

Q: Do I need a passport to submit my application?

A: You do not need a passport to apply for the Fellowship; however, if you are selected, you will be required to have a passport that is valid through at least February 28, 2025, or March 31, 2025, if selected for the Professional Development Experience.

Q: Will I be able to apply for a visa to another country while in the United States?

A: If you are selected as a Fellow and are planning to pursue business, education, or other opportunities in a foreign country after the Fellowship, you are required to secure the required visas prior to your travel to the United States. In most instances, it is impossible to apply for visas to travel to other countries while you are away from your home country. We also strongly encourage you not to send your passport to any embassy or consulate since processing times are typically several weeks, and a delayed return of your documentation could impact your ability to depart per the terms of your J-1 visa.

Q: Will I be able to take time off during the Fellowship to attend to other matters?

A: No. Fellows are expected to be fully engaged during the Fellowship. This includes full attendance at and participation in all required activities, events, and sessions during the Institute, the Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit, and, if applicable, the Professional Development Experience.

Q: I have a family and would like to bring them with me to the United States if I am selected as a Fellow. Is this allowed?

A: No, you may not bring any members of your family with you to the United States. Program rules prohibit Fellows from bringing their dependents or other family members, and no dependent visas will be issued.



About the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is a program of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by IREX. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State fosters mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries to promote friendly and peaceful relations. ECA accomplishes this mission through academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges that engage youth, students, educators, artists, athletes, and rising leaders in the United States and more than 160 countries. For further information, please visit the [ECA website](#).

About IREX

IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board) is a global development and education organization. We strive for a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world where individuals reach their full potential, governments serve their people, and communities thrive. We work with partners in more than 100 countries in four areas essential to progress: cultivating leaders, empowering youth, strengthening institutions, and extending access to quality education and information. For further information, please visit the [IREX website](#).