



Information for Fellows with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities are leaders across the globe. The Mandela Washington Fellowship is committed to ensuring that Africa's young leaders with disabilities can fully participate in the Fellowship through reasonable accommodation and support whenever possible. The Fellowship's disability support complies with the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), one of America's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities can fully participate in American life. While the Fellowship provides appropriate resources to ensure Fellows can participate in the program, the support services or accommodations may not be the same as what you are used to at home.

More information about the support services available to Fellows with disabilities is outlined below.

General

Q: While I am in the United States, will I have access to all disability services?

A: You will be provided with reasonable accommodations that allow you to access and participate in all required activities of the Fellowship. Reasonable accommodations will look different for each Fellow, and we will work closely with you to determine disability services that will allow you to fully participate in Fellowship programming.

Q: What does “reasonable accommodations” mean?

A: Reasonable accommodations are adjustments or modifications to the environment or the way something is done in order to remove barriers and ensure full participation for Fellows with disabilities. Not all people with a disability, even with the same disability, will require accommodations or will require the same accommodations. When necessary, support will be provided to Fellows using assistive technologies or accommodative services. Examples of provisions for reasonable accommodations include:

- Physical disabilities: a motorized scooter; ramp access to buildings; and grab bars near the toilet and shower
- Visual disabilities: orientation & mobility training in a new environment; Job Access With Speech (JAWS) screen reader software; and large-print materials
- Hearing disabilities: voice amplification device; preferred seating; and sign language interpretation

Reasonable accommodations do not include the provision of full-feature smartphones like iPhones; medications; or clothing or other personal items Fellows use in their daily lives and can easily transport as part of their regular baggage.



Q: How will my Institute know my individual needs?

A: Prior to arrival to the United States, all Fellows who self-identify as having a disability in their Fellowship application will receive a survey from IREX requesting detailed information about their disability-related needs and health conditions. The information in this form will help IREX, your Leadership Institute, and your Professional Development Experience Host (if applicable) provide the support you need during the Fellowship. The information you provide will not in any way impact program selection and is necessary to ensure you are provided with reasonable accommodations for you to fully participate in the program as early as possible. When necessary, IREX will arrange a phone call, virtual meeting, or email with Fellows to confirm their accommodation needs. Please keep in mind that final accommodations may be different from what you initially request in your survey or what you are used to in your home country, and will be determined in conversation with IREX to ensure your full participation in the Fellowship.

Q: Will my responses to the disability survey limit my ability to participate in the Fellowship?

A: No, the Fellowship is a fully inclusive program, and the information that you provide in the disability survey will only increase your Institute's ability to accommodate your individual needs to the best of their ability. It is vital that your disability survey responses be timely and as detailed and accurate as possible so that IREX and your Institute can prepare for your participation in the Fellowship.

Medical

Q: What access to medical care will I have? Can I get medication if I need it?

A: For the duration of the program in the United States, all selected Fellows are entitled to a limited health benefits plan provided by the Accident & Sickness Program for Exchanges (APSE), sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and administered by Seven Corners, Inc. If you are taking any medication on a regular basis, you should bring sufficient supplies for the duration of the Fellowship. Medications available in the United States may be different from what you are currently taking or may be significantly more expensive than in your home country. Fellows are responsible for all medical costs including required doctor visit fees (known as copays) and any prescribed medications.

Q: I will need to purchase medical supplies during my stay in the United States. Will this be covered by IREX or my Institute?

A: We encourage you to bring enough medical supplies to last you the entirety of your stay in the United States. If you are unable to bring enough supplies, you can make purchases at local medical supply stores. All supply costs are the responsibility of the Fellow. Please be aware that available medical supplies may differ from those available in your home country and that prices may vary from what you are accustomed to in your home country. You can check online vendors or communicate with your Institute if you will need to obtain a specific medical supply during your stay. Please also be aware that some medical supplies require obtaining a prescription from a U.S. physician before they can be accessed.

Q: I have a medical condition that's sensitive to heat and sunlight. What will weather be like in the United States?

A: Keep in mind that the summer months in most parts of the United States are typically very hot and sunny, and Institutes will have several activities outdoors. If needed, IREX will work with your Institute to make reasonable adjustments to activities, such as providing a stool or shady spot to rest, or moving activities indoors when possible. We encourage you to bring comfortable clothing that keeps you cool and protects your skin. Providing UV-protection or any weather-protective clothing is not deemed a reasonable accommodation and will not be supported by the program. If you need sunscreen, it is easily available over the counter in the United States without a prescription.

Q: I have never traveled on an international flight before. Will someone be there to assist me?

A: Prior to your arrival to the United States, IREX will contact your airline to arrange travel assistance based on your individual needs. The level of travel assistance will vary by airline, but typically includes assistance during check-in, boarding, and connecting flights. You should anticipate traveling independently without a personal escort. You should be prepared to speak with airline personnel directly if there are any challenges with the services that are arranged.

Mental Health

Q: I have a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. Will disclosing this limit my ability to participate in the Fellowship?

A: No, disclosing a mental health condition will not have any effect on your selection status for the Fellowship, and should not limit your ability to participate in the Fellowship. During the Institute, it is important that you prioritize your mental health and well-being, in addition to your physical health. Disclosing your mental health needs will help IREX and Institute staff provide support and resources for you to manage your condition and fully participate in the Fellowship. Information you disclose will not be shared beyond necessary staff. In addition to disclosing any mental health conditions, all Fellows are encouraged to have a personal plan for managing their mental health for the duration of the intensive six-week Fellowship. If you are taking any medication on a regular basis, you should bring sufficient quantities for the duration of the Fellowship and PDE, if selected. Medications available in the United States may be different from what you are currently taking or may be significantly more expensive than in your home country. Not disclosing a known mental health condition may result in your dismissal from the program.

Q: What access to mental health support will I have? Will I have access to a counselor or therapist?

A: All Fellows will have access to ASPE Assist, which is a mental health consultant and referral services hotline accessible 24 hours a day. ASPE Assist provides a limited number of telemedicine sessions for mental health support to Fellows in urgent and non-urgent situations. Most ASPE Assist services will be provided through telemedicine, and in-person therapy options at your Institute may be limited. Keep in mind that ASPE Assist will match you with the mental health professional who is most readily available and is not able to match you with a professional with a specific identity or specialized background. If you regularly see a mental health professional at home, we encourage you to stay in contact with them during the Fellowship.

Mobility

Q: I have trouble walking for long distances. Will I be provided with assistance?

A: Yes, if necessary, a wheelchair or mobility scooter can be provided for you to use during the Fellowship.

Q: I currently use a wheelchair, but will be unable to bring it with me to the United States. Will a wheelchair be provided for me?

A: Yes, a basic wheelchair or powerchair can be provided for you to use during the Fellowship. If you require a specific type of wheelchair for medical reasons, we encourage you to bring it with you. IREX will work to identify a wheelchair that meets your needs, but it may not be exactly what you are used to using at home. Please note that IREX is unable to provide custom or prescription wheelchairs.

Q: Will classrooms and housing be accessible to me?

A: Yes, your Institute will make accommodations to ensure the classroom and residence hall environments fit your needs to the best of their ability in compliance with ADA. Each Institute will have unique accommodations depending on the educational institution where you are placed.

Q: What will the bathroom be like? Is it in the room or down the hall? Is there a tub or a roll-in-shower?

A: If necessary, your Institute will provide you with an ADA-accessible room which should meet the reasonable standards for your needs. This may include a bathtub or use of a shower chair either in your room or down the hall depending on the housing set-up on campus. Not all Institute housing is able to provide both options, and you may need to learn new methods for accommodations that are not exactly as you are used to in your home.

Q: I will require assistance with housework, such as laundry and cleaning. Will this be provided?

A: Fellows are expected to take care of their own personal needs such as light housework, laundry, and sometimes cooking. Maid service is not typically provided during the program. If you have a disability that creates challenges in handling these tasks, limited housekeeping and laundry assistance will be provided to enable you to do these things as independently as possible. Laundry machines will be available to machine-wash and dry clothing, and your Institute will provide information about cleaning supplies that may be provided or where you can purchase them if they are not provided.

Q: How much walking will I have to do?

A: During your time at your Institute, there will be a lot of walking around campus (getting to class, the dining hall, etc.). While you may have transportation to many of your site visits, community service, and other activities, there will still be a lot of walking. If you have a disability that makes it uncomfortable to stand or walk for long periods of time, a wheelchair or mobility scooter can be provided for you to use while at your Institute.

Q: How will I get to places off campus?

A: For all Institute-sponsored events, accessible transportation will be provided. During your free time, Fellows are responsible for getting around on their own but should find that most public transportation in the United States is accessible. Institute staff will help Fellows navigate situations where public transit systems may be less accessible. Please discuss with your Institute what type of transportation is available for Fellows on campus and in the local community.

Vision

Q: I am blind or have low vision. Will I have someone to assist me during my time in the United States?

A: Yes, if necessary, a human guide will be available to blind and low-vision Fellows during the first few days of your Institute. They will get you acquainted with your new surroundings and help you learn how to navigate the campus safely and independently. Human guides may be provided for some off-campus activities but will not be provided for the entire Institute.

Q: I use braille to read documents. Will materials be provided to me in braille?

A: Most materials will be provided for you electronically, and limited program materials will also be available in braille. With advance notice and when possible, your Institute may be able to provide you with some materials in braille. Please be aware that a shortened form of braille is commonly used in the United States.

Q: I use screen reader software on my computer to read documents, but will be unable to bring my computer. Will the software be provided for me?

A: Yes, if you need to use screen reader software such as JAWS (Job Access With Speech) or NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) during the Institute and you cannot bring your personal computer, you will be provided with a computer on loan that has appropriate software for you to use during your program. It may be different from what you use at home, so training can be provided.

Q: I use a voice/braille recorder to take notes during class. Will a recorder be provided for me?

A: If you require the use of a recorder, please bring the recorder you typically use. If you are not able to bring one with you, a basic recorder can be provided for you to use during your stay. It may be different from what you use at home, so training can be provided.

Q: I have low vision, and it is difficult to read documents in small print. Can materials be printed for me using large font?

A: Yes, materials can be provided to you in a larger print if needed. Please let your Institute know of this request as soon as possible, prior to your arrival on campus, so they can make the necessary arrangements. When large print is not possible, materials will be provided for you electronically.

Q: I need eyeglasses. Will these be provided for me?

A: No. If you typically use eyeglasses or contacts, you should plan to bring them with you. We strongly encourage you to bring an extra pair if you have one available. Please note that the limited health

benefits plan, ASPE, does not cover routine eye examinations, eyeglasses, or contact lenses so you would be personally responsible for those expenses.

Q: What type of telephone will be provided for me?

A: Fellows will be provided with basic smartphones configured for blind or low-vision users. However, Fellows may choose to transfer the SIM cards provided by IREX to their own handsets if they are compatible with the U.S. cellular service provider's network. It may be different from what you use at home, so training can be provided.

Hearing & Communication

Q: Will I be provided with a sign language interpreter? Will they be available 24 hours a day?

A: Interpreters will not be provided full-time, but will be provided for programmatic activities and for approximately 10 additional hours per week that you can schedule in advance for independent networking and personal time. A tablet or other technology can be loaned to you to use during your Fellowship to help you communicate with non-signing peers. It may be different from what you use at home, so training can be provided.

Q: Will my interpreter learn my sign language, or do I need to learn American Sign Language (ASL)?

A: As noted in the Fellowship application, interpretation in the United States will primarily be available in ASL, and Fellows should already be proficient in or willing to learn ASL prior to their arrival in the United States. Prior to the start of the Fellowship, Fellows who require sign language interpretation during their Institute will have the opportunity to improve their ASL skills through a Pre-Institute training at Gallaudet University, the world's only liberal arts university for the Deaf. You will need to be prepared to depart your home country as early as two weeks prior to the start of your Institute to attend. Final dates will be determined closer to the Fellowship start date.

Q: I use a tablet to communicate with my peers. Will a tablet be provided for me?

A: If you typically use a personal tablet, please bring it with you. If you are not able to do so, a tablet can be provided on loan to use during your Institute. It may be different from what you use at home, so training can be provided.

Q: I am hard of hearing. Will hearing aids be provided for me?

A: If you are hard of hearing, we will work with you to identify basic tools such as voice amplification devices, or modifications such as front row seating, that meet your specific needs. If you typically use hearing aids, you should plan to bring them with you. Please note that prescription hearing aids are not covered under the ASPE health benefits plan, and IREX is unable to provide them to you.

Q: What type of telephone will be provided for me?

A: Fellows will be provided with basic smartphones configured for deaf and hard of hearing users. Fellows may choose to transfer the SIM cards provided by IREX to their own phones if they are compatible with the U.S. cellular service provider's network. It may be different from what you use at home, so training can be provided.

Additional Resources

ASL Connect – ASL for Free

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/asl-connect/asl-for-free/asl-by-topic>

Video interview with Mandela Washington Fellow Hilda Muluh Bih (captions available)

<http://www.miusa.org/resource/story/hilda>

Getting What You Need in the U.S.

<http://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/disabilityneeds>

Disability Organizations in the U.S.

<http://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/organizations>

Top 10 Disability Resources On-Campus

<http://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/campusresources>

Your Rights and Responsibilities

<http://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/rightsresponsibilities>