



Reciprocal Exchange Application Frequently Asked Questions

General

Q: Does the Reciprocal Exchange support Fellowship Alumni to travel to the United States?

A: No, the award only supports U.S. professionals to travel to African countries to collaborate with Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni on the continent.

Eligibility

Q: What are the eligibility requirements for the Fellowship Alumni Collaborator?

A: Fellowship Alumni Collaborators must be Alumni in good standing with the U.S. Department of State. Fellowship Alumni from all cohorts are eligible to apply. Fellowship Alumni may not be employees or immediate family members of employees of the U.S. Government. Fellowship Alumni must reside in the host country and be present for the duration of the Reciprocal Exchange. Fellowship Alumni may only participate in one Reciprocal Exchange Award per calendar year (i.e., implementation dates between February 1 – November 30, 2026). Fellowship Alumni do not have a limitation on the number of Reciprocal Exchanges they can participate in.

Q: What are the eligibility requirements for the U.S. professional?

A: U.S. professionals must be U.S. citizens currently living in the United States. U.S. professionals may not be employees of the U.S. Government (including a U.S. Embassy or other U.S. Government entity). U.S. professionals must have met the primary Fellowship Alumni collaborator or strengthened an existing partnership through the Mandela Washington Fellowship (e.g., through the Leadership Institute, Professional Development Experience, Reciprocal Exchange, etc.). U.S. professionals may only participate in one Reciprocal Exchange Award per calendar year (i.e., implementation dates between February 1 – November 30, 2026). Any one individual can complete no more than two in-person Reciprocal Exchange projects.



Am I eligible to apply for a Reciprocal Exchange? I have done...

- 2 in-person projects: *Yes!* You are eligible to apply for a hybrid Reciprocal Exchange.
- 1 in-person, 1 hybrid/virtual project: *Yes!* You are eligible to apply for an in-person or hybrid Reciprocal Exchange.
- 2 virtual or hybrid projects: *Yes!* You are eligible to apply for an in-person or hybrid Reciprocal Exchange.

Q: Can a U.S. professional who previously received a Reciprocal Exchange apply for a new Reciprocal Exchange with a different Fellowship Alumni in a different country?

A: Yes. You are not required to collaborate with the same Fellowship Alumni or work in the same project country for subsequent Reciprocal Exchanges. Please view the graphic above for a more detailed overview of our eligibility criteria. IREX will give preference to U.S. professionals and Fellowship Alumni who have not previously participated in a Reciprocal Exchange.

Application

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

A: Yes! You can access the application from any device connected to the internet. The application is mobile-friendly, so it is easy to apply from your phone or tablet. Please remember to submit all required attachments with your application.

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

A: Please review the eligibility requirements. The application will not let you proceed unless you meet the general requirements and have fully completed the section. Any question with a red asterisk is required and must be completed before you can progress with the application.

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

A: No, once you have submitted your application, you can no longer add any additional information or make any changes. You should upload all information and documents prior to final submission.

Q: Can multiple U.S. professionals apply for the same project?

A: Yes! Up to four U.S. professionals may apply for the same project. For in-person projects, the grant ceiling is \$5,000 per traveling U.S. professional (e.g., the grant ceiling for a project with four U.S. professionals is \$20,000). You should refer to the budget template for further guidance.

Q: Can I add someone another U.S. professional to my project after selection?

A: No. All official project participants must be included in your initial application.

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

A: Individuals with disabilities may apply for the Reciprocal Exchange component. Applicants with physical disabilities or special needs who require another person's assistance to complete an application may do so. However, the thoughts, ideas, and content of your application must be your own. While you should work together with the U.S. professional or Fellowship Alumni Collaborator on your application, you may not collaborate with the person assisting you in completing your application.

Q: Can I submit a paper copy of the Reciprocal Exchange application?

A: No, you must submit your application through the online application system. IREX will not accept paper applications or applications sent via email.

Q: When can applicants expect to receive notification on the status of their application?

A: IREX will notify applicants of their selection status approximately 8-10 weeks after the deadline.

Budget

Q: Can multiple U.S. professionals apply for a single project?

A: Yes, multiple U.S. professionals can apply together for a Reciprocal Exchange. The maximum award for hybrid Reciprocal Exchange projects is \$3,000 regardless of the number of Participants. Each U.S. applicant for an in-person Reciprocal Exchange is eligible for up to \$5,000 of grant funding. Up to four (4) U.S. Professionals may apply for a single project. Proposals with multiple applicants should consider this when formulating their budget. You must identify all participants in your application and cannot add participants to your project after selection.

Q: Can multiple Fellowship Alumni apply for a single project?

A: Yes, multiple Alumni can apply for a single project. However, the maximum award amount will remain the same regardless of how many Alumni join the project: \$3,000 for hybrid projects, and \$5,000 per U.S. Participant for in-person projects.

Q: Can a U.S. professional who wishes to partner with multiple Fellowship Alumni in different countries for the same or similar projects apply for more than one award, so as to establish a support network?

A: The U.S. applicant can propose partnering with Fellowship Alumni in different countries on the same project but will only be eligible for one award at the standard maximum funding level of up to \$3,000 for hybrid projects, or up to \$5,000 per U.S. professional for in-person projects. If one U.S. professional submits multiple applications with multiple Fellowship Alumni, IREX can only select one project, provided it meets all requirements.

Q: My proposal has extra costs. Will IREX/the U.S. Department of State be able to provide additional funding for these costs?

A: No – The Fellowship may award up to \$3,000 for hybrid projects and up to \$5,000 per U.S. professional for in-person projects to cover approved program-related costs. Fellowship Alumni and U.S. professionals will be responsible for covering additional costs. We highly encourage exploring cost-share options as early as possible in the project design process, which may include financial or in-kind contributions from partnering organizations, local stakeholders, etc. Be sure to indicate all cost-share in the appropriate column in your budget.

Q: How are funds disbursed?

A: IREX will disburse funds to the Fellowship Alumni Collaborator for hybrid projects, and to the U.S. professional for in-person projects. Projects with multiple U.S. Participants must select one Participant to receive the funds. IREX will disburse eighty (80) percent of the award prior to implementation, upon approval of required deliverables. IREX will disburse the remaining twenty (20) percent of the award upon completion of the exchange and the submission of additional required documents within 30 days of the project's completion. Fellowship Alumni Collaborator(s) and/or U.S. professional(s) must fund all other costs associated with the exchange.

Q: Are there any restrictions on how to use funds for this program?

A: Yes. All air travel paid for with Reciprocal Exchange Award funds must be [Fly America Act compliant](#), and should be the most cost effective, economy-class airfare. Flights also must be fully refundable or refundable for a fee. Costs for participant meals, lodging, and incidental expenses may not exceed [rates established by the U.S. General Services Administration \(GSA\)](#). You may not use funds to pay administrative or indirect costs, such as the U.S. professional or Fellowship Alumni Collaborator's salary. U.S. Government funding also may not pay for alcohol and other entertainment expenses such as tourism. Please see the guidelines in the budget template for additional information about restricted costs.

Q: Do travel costs include visa-related expenses?

A: If required by their project country, Participants must procure their visa prior to travel, unless it is impossible to do so. Participants may use IREX's preferred visa provider, in which case IREX will cover the cost of this service as well as the visa fee itself; you do not need to include visa costs as a line item in the budget. If the country you are traveling to offers an e-Visa, that may be an easier and faster option; however, IREX's preferred vendor cannot support the e-Visa process. *Please note that travelers to Nigeria cannot use IREX's preferred vendor for their visa procurement. Please see the budget template and the [Nigerian Embassy's website](#) for more information.*

Work Plan

Q: What must the work plan include?

A: U.S. professionals and Fellowship Alumni must collaborate on the submitted work plan. While your initial work plan may be broad, please provide at minimum your anticipated schedule and a general idea of content for each specific activity. Be sure to include at least one line per day in country in your work plan. Work plans should also include information about what activities Participants and Fellowship Alumni will undertake before and after Reciprocal Exchange implementation to ensure the project's success and impact within both collaborators' communities in the United States and Africa. Add rows if necessary so that every individual activity is included in the work plan. Please see the guidelines in the work plan template for more information.

Q: How should I demonstrate the U.S. impact of my project in my work plan?

A: All applicants must speak to their project's intended impact on U.S. companies, communities, or organization in the post-implementation section of the workplan. You should include at least one line item to reflect your plans for follow-on in the United States. Examples include establishing memoranda of understanding (MOUs), identifying new business markets, presenting work/findings to U.S. audiences including students, and more. U.S. follow-on impact is a required component of all Reciprocal Exchanges.

Q: How detailed does the work plan need to be?

A: IREX expects application work plans to be broad, but please try to be as specific as possible regarding the following items:

- Activity locations
 - During application evaluation, the U.S. Embassy in country will confirm that all proposed locations are safe for in-person activities.

- Activity types (meetings, lectures, trainings, film screenings, etc.)
- Participant types (university undergraduates, elementary school teachers, local filmmakers, conference attendees, rural hospital staff, etc.) and anticipated number of attendees for each activity
- Activity outcomes (*for the implementation period only*)
 - Describe what participants will take away from each activity (increased knowledge about a topic, a new skill, etc.)

Q: Is there a required duration for the exchange?

A: Reciprocal Exchanges' implementation periods must be less than four weeks.