



2027 Mandela Washington Fellowship Application Instructions

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 16:00/4:00 PM GMT on Tuesday, October 13, 2026

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 Fellowship

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders (the Fellowship) is the exchange component of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). The Fellowship brings accomplished young African innovators and professionals to the United States for academic coursework, professional site visits, and structured networking. Fellowship activities prepare Fellows to collaborate with U.S. citizens on advancing U.S.-Africa trade and economic prosperity, promoting technological innovation, and enhancing peace and security. 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 550 young leaders to the United States in the summer of 2027 for a comprehensive executive-style program that will empower Fellows to lead in their respective sectors and communities and build partnerships with their American counterparts. The Fellowship includes:

- **A six-week institute program:** Fellows are placed in groups of approximately 25 at leading educational institutions across the United States in both urban and rural areas. Institutes will take place from mid-June through early August 2027. Each institute's academic curriculum and programming will focus on one of three tracks: **Business and Trade, Emerging Technologies, or Governance and Security**. The intensive six-week model includes academic sessions, site visits, networking, community service, and cultural activities. Fellows across all three tracks will gain theoretical knowledge and practical skills and participate in facilitated networking opportunities with established leaders from American businesses and industries. While all institutes will include common components, each program agenda is unique and is based on the particular strengths and resources of each institute.
- **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. business, non-profit organization, or government agency. The PDE is designed to provide Fellows with substantive professional experiences within U.S. companies or organizations to enhance their understanding of U.S. business, innovation, and leadership and establish professional relationships with U.S. industry counterparts. Placements will relate to each Fellow's professional sector but are typically not an exact match to their current position at home. PDEs will be rigorous and immersive. Up to 50 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 10 weeks: six weeks for the Fellowship institute and four weeks for the PDE.
- **Opportunities for alumni:** Fellows will have access to networking opportunities, ongoing professional development, and collaboration opportunities upon their return home after the Fellowship. Alumni also have access to other opportunities, including events and virtual programming, such as Reciprocal Exchanges that 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. 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.

Program costs funded 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 an eligible Fellowship country in Africa to the United States;
- A six-week institute;
- A limited accident and sickness benefit plan;
- Housing and meals during the program; and
- An optional four-week Professional Development Experience (for up to 50 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 housing or similar accommodations that are appropriate for professional adults. Every effort will be made to provide single-occupancy housing; however, Fellows may share a double-occupancy bedroom with another Fellow of the same sex and a bathroom with one or more Fellows of the same sex. Most meals will be provided at campus cafeterias or restaurants, though Fellows may have access to a shared 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. Fellows with dietary, religious, or medical needs should communicate these needs as early as possible. Institutes will work to accommodate individual needs to the extent possible, but Fellows should expect an environment that is different from what they are used to at home and be prepared to approach the experience with flexibility and openness.

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 Fellowship is open to young African leaders who meet the following criteria:

- Are between the ages of 25 and 35 as of the application deadline (October 13, 2026), 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;¹
- Are not employees or immediate family members (spouses, parents, children, or siblings) of employees of the U.S. Government (including a U.S. embassy or consulate or other U.S. Government entity);²
- 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 February 1, 2027, and at the beginning of the Fellowship in June 2027; 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 participant travel and/or the ability to conduct program activities.

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.

¹ Nationals of countries subject to a full or partial suspension of entry to or visa issuance from the United States are eligible to apply, but selection of finalists from these countries will be considered on a case-by-case basis. See travel.state.gov for more information.

² 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.

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	
September 22, 2026	Application opens
October 13, 2026	Application deadline
October 2026 – January 2027	Semi-finalists interviewed by U.S. embassies and consulates
February/March 2027	Applicants notified of their status
March – May 2027	Visa processing and Pre-Fellowship activities for finalists
June 2027	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, October 13, 2026. Applications must be submitted using the online application system at apply.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org.

The Fellowship selection process is a merit-based open competition. The following criteria will be used to evaluate applications (not in order of importance):

- Proficiency speaking, reading, and writing in English;
- A proven record of accomplishment in business, trade, emerging technologies, governance, and/or security;
- A demonstrated and clear interest in building and maintaining partnerships with American organizations and businesses that advance shared goals;
- A commitment to return to Sub-Saharan Africa and contribute skills and talents to build and serve their communities;
- The ability to work cooperatively in groups and to respect others;
- Strong social and communication skills; and
- Demonstrated adaptability and the ability to lead effectively in varying and changing environments.

Following application 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 within Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Fellowship includes an optional additional four-week Professional Development Experience (PDE) at a U.S. business, non-profit organization, or government agency at the end of the Institute for a limited number of selected finalists. 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. Applicants who do not indicate they wish to be considered for the PDE in the application will not be able to apply for this component separately.

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.
- You must complete all fields marked with a red asterisk (*).
- **You must answer all application questions in English**, and answers must reflect your own experiences and ideas. Guidance on originality and responsible use of technology, including generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), for writing, editing, and/or translation assistance is provided below and within the application. All answers in the application, including written responses to essays and optional PDE questions, must be your own original work, based on your own creativity and effort. **Your application will be disqualified** if you copy language from other Fellowship applications (including those of other applicants or Fellowship alumni) or from other sources (including websites or blogs), as this is considered plagiarism.
 - 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.
 - **Responsible use of technology** is permitted with transparency. Many applicants use spell-check, grammar support, translation applications, or other technology to help with clarity or language mechanics; however, the substance of your responses - your experiences, examples, reasoning, and plans - must be your own. If you use any technology (including AI) to help prepare your responses, you must disclose this where asked in the application, and you remain responsible for the content you submit.
- 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.

For more information, please review the application's [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

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 2027 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.

- **Country of Residence:** Indicate your current country of residence and where you will be permanently residing prior to the Fellowship if selected as a semi-finalist.
- **Date of Birth:** Provide your date of birth as it appears on your passport and/or official government-issued identification. If your birth date does not appear in the dates provided within the application, you are not eligible to participate in the Mandela Washington Fellowship. If selected as a semi-finalist, you will be required to provide this document to verify your date of birth.

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.
- 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, but you will be required to have a valid passport if you are selected as a finalist.
 - If you do have a passport, provide the country of issue and 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 from an eligible Fellowship country that is valid through at least February 28, 2028, or through March 31, 2028, 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 automatically populate in later application sections to streamline the application process. For this reason, we recommend completing this section before moving on to the next section of the application. You may be asked to provide more details about your entries later in the application. **All information must be entered 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;
 - Work format (in person, remote (virtual), or hybrid);
 - 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;
 - Work format (in person, remote (virtual), hybrid);
 - 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 Adobe Acrobat.
- **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, used for statistical purposes only. **All responses will remain confidential and will not be considered during the selection process.** The information provided may help your local U.S. embassy or consulate prepare

the necessary accommodations for your interview, if selected as a semi-finalist. While these questions are optional in the application, if you are selected to participate in the Fellowship, you will be required to complete a detailed Medical History Form and, if applicable, an Accommodations Form to ensure you are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable you to fully participate in the program. **The Mandela Washington Fellowship strongly encourages all eligible applicants to apply regardless of your medical history or accommodations you may require.**

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 based on the definitions above. 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. **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.)

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 lose access to 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 2027. 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 six 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 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.
 - **Executive:** Employees have sufficient experience in the occupation to plan and conduct work requiring judgement and independent evaluation, selection, modification, and application of procedures and techniques. Employees use advanced skills and expanded 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 the [YALI Network](#).

Previous U.S. Experience

In this section, you will provide information regarding your engagement with the United States and experience with any U.S. Government programs and/or past or planned travel to the United States, if applicable.

- Include all experience in the United States, such as work, trainings, degree programs, study abroad experiences, 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.**

- 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 multilingual 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 American Sign Language (ASL).
 - Please note that interpretation in the United States may only be available in ASL, so selected Fellows who are deaf should be proficient in, or be prepared to learn, ASL prior to arrival in the United States.

Institute Track and Sector Alignment

In this section, you will rank in order of preference the three tracks according to what most closely aligns with your current professional work and future goals. The three tracks are Business and Trade, Emerging Technologies, and Governance and Security.

Institutes are designed to provide Fellows with practical hands-on training through a lens informed by American expertise and innovation. Institutes will also facilitate structured networking opportunities between Fellows and U.S. business that could lead to future partnership and collaboration. **The Fellowship is not designed to help Fellows identify specific funding for projects or organizations.**

Fellows should be prepared to develop an understanding of American society, innovation, and institutions as relevant to one of the three tracks. The institutes will not 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. Fellows are encouraged to build their own networks and connections by reaching out directly to U.S. citizens and with U.S. businesses 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.

- **Business and Trade:** This track is designed for professionals working in the private sector or at the intersection of business, entrepreneurship, trade, and workforce development. Institutes in this track emphasize U.S. business principles and practices, entrepreneurship ecosystems, commercial engagement, trade facilitation, and the role of business in driving economic growth, and provide opportunities to engage with leading U.S. enterprises and businesses. Fellows in this track may be starting new enterprises or scaling existing businesses into new domestic or international markets.
- **Emerging Technologies:** This track is designed for professionals working to harness emerging technologies such as AI and machine learning, biotech, robotics, and advanced computing to drive innovation, productivity, and competitiveness across sectors. Institutes in this track emphasize applied technology, innovation ecosystems, and responsible technology adoption, including engagement with U.S. technology firms, research institutions, and innovation hubs. Fellows in this track may work in areas such as agriculture, mining, public health, cybersecurity, or resource management.
- **Governance and Security:** This track is designed for professionals working in public institutions, civil society, or related fields that strengthen governance, accountability, stability, and security to create environments that attract investment and support economic growth. Institutes in this track emphasize policymaking and policy implementation, public administration, rule of law, and institutional effectiveness, with opportunities to engage with U.S. Government entities, policy organizations, and civic institutions. Fellows in this track may work to address issues related to law enforcement, cybersecurity, health security, or conflict resolution.

Please rank your preferred tracks (first choice, second choice, and third choice) according to what most closely aligns with your current work, education, or future goals. 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.

After selecting your preferred track(s), you will then select the sectors most relevant to your work within each of your chosen tracks to help us better understand your professional focus.

You will also complete a short essay question:

- Why is your first choice track the best fit for your current work and goals? (200 word maximum)

Leadership Assessment

In this section, you will provide information about your leadership experiences.

- Read the statements corresponding to each activity. Then, select the level (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Very Often) that most closely aligns with how often you engage in each activity in your work or within your community.

Personal Statements

In this section, you will answer essay questions. The Fellowship selects qualified individuals who have demonstrated leadership potential, professional achievement, and a commitment to applying their skills to build partnerships that advance shared goals in Sub-Saharan Africa and the United States.

**Note: All answers in this section must be your own original work, based on your own creativity and effort. 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 originality and plagiarism, and those who plagiarize their application materials will be disqualified.*

Responsible use of technology is permitted with transparency. Many applicants use spell-check, grammar support, translation applications, or other technology to help with clarity or language mechanics; however, the substance of your responses - your experiences, examples, reasoning, and plans - must be your own. If you used any technology (including AI) to help prepare your responses, you must disclose this where asked in the application, and you remain responsible for the content you submit. **Applicants should ensure the core content and expressions are their own, that the content represents their own unique experiences, and that responses accurately demonstrate their level of English language proficiency.**

- 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.**

Please note: 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.

Essay Questions

You will have between 150 and 350 words to answer each of the long essay questions.

- Describe one significant professional accomplishment from the past 24 months that best demonstrates your strengths as a leader. Explain the context, your role, the specific actions you took, and the outcome. Where possible, include measurable results or concrete changes that occurred because of your actions. (350 word maximum)

- Describe a specific challenge in your professional sector and how you are working to address it. Why does this challenge matter in your context, and what concrete skills, knowledge, or perspectives do you hope to gain through the Fellowship to address it more effectively? (250 word maximum)
- Describe one way you plan to build or strengthen a partnership with a U.S. organization, business, or professional network after completing the Fellowship. What shared goal would this partnership advance, what would you contribute, and what is a realistic first step you would take within six months of returning to Sub-Saharan Africa? (250 word maximum)
- Describe how you plan to apply the skills, networks, or perspectives gained through the Fellowship after returning to Sub-Saharan Africa. Include one specific initiative, role, or goal you intend to pursue within 12 months of return and who will benefit from your efforts. (250 word maximum)
- Describe a professional situation where you had to make a difficult or unpopular decision. What factors did you consider, and how did you handle the outcome? (150 word maximum)

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).

Up to 50 Fellows will be competitively selected for the four-week experience and placed independently at organizations across the United States.

PDE applicants' profiles and essay responses will be reviewed using the following selection criteria:

- Ability to work professionally and contribute meaningfully to a U.S. organization;
- Articulation of clear and specific learning goals;
- Demonstrated flexibility and openness to developing transferable skills across a range of U.S. organizations;
- Identification of clear alignment between professional background, institute track, and potential U.S. organizations;
- Demonstrated interest in sustaining engagement with U.S. professionals after the PDE; and
- Strong English proficiency sufficient for full participation in a professional American work environment.

***Note:** Only applicants prepared to dedicate preparation time prior to the start of the PDE and who can guarantee active participation during the Fellowship and PDE should apply.

- 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 additional questions, including three additional essays. **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 overview of your current professional role and responsibilities, as well as your long-term career goals. This summary may be shared with potential U.S. organizations if you are selected for the PDE. *(150 word maximum)*
- Describe two or three specific, transferable skills or areas of professional practice you hope to strengthen through the Professional Development Experience. Explain why these skills are important to your work and how you would apply them after returning to Sub-Saharan Africa. *(250 word maximum)*
- Explain how your participation in a Professional Development Experience with a U.S. organization would benefit a U.S. host organization. What perspective, skills, or insight would you bring to a U.S. organization, and how could this experience support your continued professional engagement with U.S. institutions, businesses, or networks after the Fellowship? *(250 word maximum)*

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.**

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.**

Technology Use Disclosure

You will be asked to list the different types of technology you used to help prepare your application and how you used them.

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

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 creates lasting people-to-people ties that make America stronger, safer, and more prosperous. ECA programs increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through educational, professional, and cultural exchanges. Exchange programs strengthen the national security of the United States through improved foreign relations, support U.S. international leadership, and provide a broad range of domestic benefits by breaking down barriers and by investing in American communities and organizations. For further information, please visit the [ECA website](#).

About IREX

IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board) is a global solutions provider that partners with communities and institutions in the United States and around the world to cultivate leaders, expand access to education, and create economic opportunity. With deep expertise, a forward-looking vision, and world-class practices in AI for Education, Future-Ready Workforce, Higher Education Solutions, Leadership Development, and Online Safety, IREX delivers innovative and proven solutions that help people, institutions, and communities thrive in a rapidly changing world. For further information, please visit the [IREX website](#).