


Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship; What is a 'proven record of leadership'?

One insight into Nelson Mandela's leadership skills comes from his famous saying, "It's  always impossible until it's done." (© AP Images)

A 2016 Mandela Washington Fellow from Botswana described being a recipient of the fellowship named after the former South African president and initiated by the first African-American president as "mind-blowing."

No doubt many 2018 MWF hopefuls share this sentiment as they finalize their applications (due by October 11!). They may also notice that the very first item on the list of [selection criteria](#) is "A proven record of leadership and accomplishment in public service, business and entrepreneurship, or civic engagement."

In other words, the fellowship named for Nelson Mandela is not meant for people who are aspiring leaders, but who are already leaders in practice.

Balarabe Ismail, a 2016 Fellow from Nigeria, said, "Not many people can apply because some of the questions cannot be answered by somebody on the street. It has to be somebody doing something for society."

How do you become a leader? It's true that many became Fellows after having already founded and led a business, a nonprofit organization or another formal group. But that's not a requirement. Neither is having a formal diploma or degree.

Here are two questions to consider:

- What impact are you having in your community?
- How are you changing the space you live or work in?

It could be that what you are doing in your neighborhood or religious or civic organization is providing an important community service, even if you hadn't previously thought of it as "leadership."

If you see there is a challenge in your community and you are actively doing something about it, you are a leader.

As 2016 Fellow Mwanga Simwanda from Zambia said: "Yes, we have a lot of problems, but what are you doing about it as a leader? They want somebody who has resolutions and not just a list of challenges. So that's the key. What are you doing to solve the problems?"

How can you demonstrate that you are a leader in your application? Don't be afraid to contact MWF alumni and those who are familiar with your work for advice. You can connect with them and find more helpful tips by becoming a YALI Network member and by following the [YALI Network Facebook page](#) or the [YALI Network Face2Face group](#).

Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: Use the YALI Network!

YALI Network members in Nigeria show their stuff. (State Dept.)



If you are reading this blog, following the [YALI Network Facebook page](#) or the [YALI Network Face2Face group](#), and otherwise taking advantage of YALI's ability to connect people online and through local events, you have a great advantage as you pursue your quest to be a 2018 [Mandela Washington Fellow](#).

But don't just take our word for it. Several 2016 Fellows whose previous applications had not been successful found different ways to use the YALI Network to get advice, feedback or other help with their next attempts.

Rita Zaumu from Cameroon said, "The Network helped me a lot because the past Fellows ... gave a lot of heads-up about how to go about applying for the fellowship. I spent something like five hours a week on the YALI Network and Face2Face pages to see what people are doing in their communities."

Zambian Fellow Mwanga Simwanda said the YALI Network "really made it possible for me because they got in touch with me after my first application, and through the Zambian Embassy I received a lot of emails allowing me to network with other people and the Zambian YALI alumni."

Through her participation, Simwanda discovered local events with Fellows where she learned tips on how to improve her application and understand what the recruiters were looking for.

The Zambian YALI Network coordinator "would contact us and host seminars for us on how to apply and link us with the alumni that came and their experience and how they applied. She really was just encouraging us to apply and apply and apply. ... I got to network with other people and through the network I met a lot of different people," she said.

Simwanda, overcoming her disappointment from earlier unsuccessful attempts, learned what they had done differently on their applications. "So I tried the third time, and here I am. I made it!"

Wilfrid Marx Abidji from Benin turned to the YALI Network for advice when he found out he had been selected for an interview and he was working to improve his English-language skills.

"I was really impressed with the speed and the proactive way people reacted on the Network," he said.

Abidji advises, "Don't close your door and be alone. Open yourself, go to the YALI Network and ask questions."

Agang Ditlhogo from Botswana said the encouragement she received from successful applicants “kept me going” and motivated her to try again.

“All through the application I would ask for advice, like ‘This essay is only 200 words but I want to go on for 700 words. Where do you think I should cut it? Where do you think I should modify it? So they offered that platform for us,” she said.

She said Fellows are especially important in countries like hers where not everyone has access to the internet. “They are a precious resource,” she said. “They went back to their communities [and explained] this is how they started, and that is very inspirational.”


Perhaps, like Fanta Coumba Karembé from Mali, you knew someone before they became a Fellow, and were amazed by the transformation.

“When my friend came back from this program he was completely changed. I could see stars in his eyes, lots of confidence in himself and all the things he wanted to achieve. It was like he was on a different level,” she said.

The YALI Network can help by offering a platform to learn about Fellows’ experiences. “When you read about young leaders and their stories, what they want to do in their countries and share information, it’s exciting. You realize you are not the only one thinking in these ways and you feel that change is possible. They give you motivation,” Karembé said.

Good luck with your application!

[#YALI Network Events Across Africa](#)

Aspiring entrepreneurs in Kigali, 
Rwanda (Courtesy photo)

In the two months since we launched #YALILearns, there has been a flurry of activity among #YALINetwork members organizing and sharing events in our Facebook face2face group. Dozens of meetings and hundreds of people have shared their knowledge and connected with other young African leaders across the continent.

Papy Sibomana got together a group of prospective young entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda, to teach business and entrepreneurship using the YALI Network Online Courses. There was also discussion of the #YALINetwork and its benefits for younger entrepreneurs and an overview of the Mandela Washington Fellowship application process.


Discussing the activities of the Regional 

Leadership Center at a meeting in Addis Ababa. (Courtesy photo)

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Frehiwot Negash joined with Yigrem Ashenafi, Asmeret Gebre, Edie Zachs and Helina Stiphanos to organize a #YALILearns event and even created a separate Facebook group.


“It was so inspirational,” Frehiwot said. “We look forward to our next monthly event.”

Zakariyyah Freeman Musa, a Nigerian working in Kenya, connected with the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania to develop a #YALILearns event at the American Corner in Zanzibar. Thirty people discussed the YALI Network Online Courses on leadership and took the quiz to get their certificates.

YALILearns meeting in Harare (Courtesy  photo)

Southern Africa was particularly active, including Vincent T. Mabotja’s event in South Africa to discuss xenophobia and another that involved a march against corruption. In neighboring Zimbabwe, several events took off.

“#YALILearns is an amazing tool to seeing people grow and develop ideas into actual projects and livelihood,” said Kelvin Tinashe Mutize after a networking event he organized with #yalicreatives in Harare.


Munya Bloggo, a 2015  Mandela Washington Fellow, teaches business in Gweru, Zimbabwe. (Courtesy photo)

Munya Bloggo shared another Zimbabwe event, this time in the central part of the country where several Network members used the YALI Network Online Courses to discuss business planning and modeling at the American Corner in Gweru.

“We had a feisty discussion with students on how we can apply the lessons to a local context,” Munya said, before adding a competitive element to #YALILearns. “I think when it comes to advancing education, Zimbabweans go at it like it was the Olympics.”

Just north, in Zambia, Patience Chisanga shared her expertise at a multi-day event.


“I spoke to 25 young talented and exceptional filmmakers about redefining entrepreneurship, the importance of turning art into a business, the basics of developing a business idea, a business plan, and how to deliver a business pitch to investors,” she said.

YALINetwork members take a quiz on  leadership for a YALINetwork certificate at a meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania. (Courtesy photo)

To the west, Ruddy Kielo Lingela held an event that utilized the YALI business lessons in Lubumbashi, #DRC, at the American Space there.


“More than 20 young entrepreneurs were present,” he said. “I was much impressed (with the audience). All the participants arrived 30 minutes before the launch of the meetup. The Congo is changing my friends.”

Over in Ghana, Oxford Bonsu put together a group of 320 undergraduates at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology for an event.

A huge YALILearns event in Ghana saw 
320 people show up for a meeting
organized by Oxford Bonsu. (Courtesy photo)

“I used resources from YALI Learns to engage the students, and there was a positive feedback,” he said. “#YALILearns is a sure way to give back to your community and to empower young Africans to make real difference.”

If you want to hold your own [#YALILearns](#) event, you do not need any special tools or experience, just a willingness to gather people together and share knowledge. Use our courses or your own material, but please do share the results with us on our [#YALILearns feedback page](#).

Patience Chisanga, a 2015 Mandela 
Washington Fellow, teaches about
filmmaking at a YALILearns event in Lusaka,
Zambia. (Courtesy photo)
