

# [Applying to Be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Writing a Personal Statement](#)

When you apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship, you will submit a personal statement  and other essays to introduce yourself to the selection panel. In this part of your application, you can highlight what you want reviewers to know about you.

In any personal essay, it is important to catch the reader's attention with an original, honest statement. When space is limited, it is important to compose a concise answer that highlights the work you are most proud of. Make sure you are responding directly to the question being asked and including examples or anecdotes if relevant.

Here are a few tips to help you write strong personal statements for your application:

- 1) Do not procrastinate! Start preparing your essays. It is easy to underestimate the time and difficulty involved in developing your answers.
- 2) Remember, the written application is the only information the selection panel will have when deciding the candidates who will progress to the interview stage. Do not assume the reviewers know anything about you or the topics you are writing about.
- 3) Reviewers will be reading a lot of applications. Stand out in the crowd by making your responses interesting! One way to do this is to begin your statement with an attention-grabber such as a quote or a story.
- 4) Provide concrete examples that pertain to your life, work, goals and experiences.
- 5) Be concise — do not use a lot of unnecessary words.
- 6) Check for spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes.
- 7) Make sure your ideas are coherent throughout the essay. The person reading your essay needs to understand how your thoughts fit together.

You also may be interested in [Applying to Be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Building Your Resume](#) on [yali.state.gov](http://yali.state.gov).

*Sources: Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts; the American Medical Association in Chicago*

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## [Sharing My Experience: Mandela](#)

# Washington Fellow Fatima Ibrahim

*"There is nothing you can't achieve."*

"I believe that with a clear vision and commitment, there is nothing you can't achieve," said entrepreneur Fatima (Teema) Ibrahim of Nigeria.

State Dept



"I urge us all to put our heads together and make our communities better places not only for us, but also for the coming generations," Ibrahim said weeks after returning home from her Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Ibrahim uses a passion for entrepreneurship to encourage underprivileged women in her community to go into business. She enlisted some of these women to join her company, which processes and markets neem oil, sold internationally as an ingredient in cosmetics.

The 28-year-old nurtured her passion at Clark Atlanta University as part of her Fellowship. "I was impressed with the learning methods," she said, such as visiting companies like Coca-Cola, CNN and IBM to see how things really function.

Ibrahim learned about how the challenges of running an entire business differ from those of running a single division. She also learned how corporations partner with the public sector to create organizations and how they raise money to operate those new entities.

"The lessons I got from the corporate visits are priceless," she said. "Seeing how people are very much engaged in community service despite having busy schedules was impressive. This in particular gave me a renewed impetus to expand my horizon and not limit myself when I am capable of doing other things as well."

"All the things I learned during my Fellowship are attuned to what I do back home," Ibrahim said. "I learned that the way you think could either be an obstacle to accomplishments or a gateway to success," she added.

Ibrahim continues to communicate with other YALI Network members and with her community through training and mentoring. "I always like to describe this program as a system: a group of independent but interrelated elements comprising a unified whole," she said.

Of the Fellowship application process, Ibrahim said:

*"It was a long journey: from the application, to the interview, to the series of procedures that we had to go through. At the end of it all, it was worth it."*

She wants the YALI Network members to know that "the Fellowship is a life-changing experience. If you really have your community at heart, this program is exactly what you need to give you that push, and to accelerate your drive for change."

“My accomplishments are what I was asked to share during the interview for the Fellowship. I spoke from my heart. Now my dream of uplifting the economic status of girls and women through entrepreneurship is fast coming true.”

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## Applying to Be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Building Your Resume

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A successful candidate for the Mandela Washington Fellowship demonstrates an ability to get things done. Take a marketing approach to your resume that will command the ultimate amount of attention. Think about how you want the person who reads your resume to think of you.

In preparing your resume, remember three important tips:

1. Keep your answers brief.
2. Write in the third person (do not use the pronoun “I”).
3. Proofread your resume for grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Here are a few tips to help you prepare the information you will need for the required format of the Mandela Washington Fellowship resume:

- **Professional Experience:** What professional experiences have you had? Make a list of paid or volunteer positions and summarize your work in these positions to give an instant picture of the breadth of your work or volunteer background.
- **Education:** Have you received any type of formal education beyond secondary school? If so, make a list of the education and training you received from established universities, colleges or trade schools. Include the dates you attended these schools, what you studied, and what degrees or certificates you earned.
- **Professional Training:** Did you receive professional training outside of an established educational institution? Name up to five relevant professional certifications and/or training courses you completed, including the type of training or the name of the certification and the city and country where the training occurred.
- **Community and Volunteer Work:** In addition to your professional experience, do you perform unpaid work in your community? Make a list of your volunteer activities with local charities or NGOs and summarize your work with these organizations.
- **Honors and Awards:** Have you been recognized for your efforts in something that you have done? List what honors or awards you have received, from which organizations, and for what type of

work.

- **Professional Skills:** Think about the skills you have acquired over time. What languages do you speak? Are you proficient in computer and software skills?

You also may be interested in reading [Get Your Resume Noticed](#).

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