

Special edition U.S. elections #YALICHAT wrap-up

Political consultant and public relations specialist, Kitty Kurth, joined the YALI Network team to answer your questions about the United States' elections. This historic presidential election caught the attention of YALI Network members and people across the globe.

Still have questions about the electoral process? Learn more with these snapshots from our special edition #YALICHAT or visit our Facebook [page](#) for more election information.

VOTING

Americans began heading to the polls as early as 46 days before Election Day. Early voting allows Americans to elect their officials without waiting in long lines.



Local officials, party representatives, volunteers and international election observers organize and monitor the election process in the U.S. to ensure the protection of voters.



ELECTORAL COLLEGE

The Electoral College ensures each state is represented based on its population. Population size determines the number of a state's electoral college votes.



A candidate wins the presidency when he or she earns 270 Electoral College votes.



If neither presidential candidate wins 270 electoral votes, there would not be a "re-run." The election would go to Congress for a decision.



Presidential candidates try to win states with a significant number of electoral votes. These states where the election is close are called swing states.



For more information about how the next president of the United States is chosen, check out "[YALI's guide to the hows and whys of the 2016 U.S. elections.](#)"

Avoid these common CV and resume mistakes!

A training specialist offers advice to a job seeker at a resume-building seminar in  Arizona. (© AP Images)

Pity the poor job recruiter who has to sort through an inbox that is usually overflowing with applications from would-be employees. If you are one of the hundreds or even thousands of people competing for the same position, you will need your resume or curriculum vitae (CV) to stand out from the others. In most cases it is a recruiter's first impression of you, so a well-written and well-coordinated document is your only chance to get your foot in the door.

Tom LeaMond is a career consultant at Devex, a business and recruiting organization that focuses on global development. In a [webinar](#), he offered some helpful tips that many job candidates overlook in their efforts to impress future employers.

- Remember that the top of the page where you list your summary and key qualifications is the most important section, since it will determine if the reviewer wants to read more. Be sure to include job-specific keywords and phrases that match the position description.
- Use bullet points in the sections where you describe your job experience, in a manner that LeaMond called the CAR (context + action + results) approach. For example, "Led team of five direct reports in a previously underperforming office. After six months, our office achieved the fastest growth rate in the organization."
- Give a professional-sounding email address as your means of contact (for example, name@gmail.com instead of footballer@hotmail.com), but don't use the address at your current job.
- CVs can vary from country to country, so search online for sample resumes from a specific country if you are unfamiliar with what is normally included or not included there.

LeaMond said the most common mistake people make is not having a well-written CV that shows their experience and is tailored to the job description.

For more information on how to present yourself to a prospective employer, be sure to read the articles on writing a [personal biography](#) and an [admissions essay](#). You can also take a free YALI Network [Online Course](#). Be sure to check back with the [YALI Network](#) blog for additional advice on writing and other tips for your professional development.

Setting and Achieving Goals

As a leader, you know how important it is to have a vision for the future. The best way to accomplish that vision is to set goals. You will need both long- and short-term goals, with short-term goals serving as the building blocks to reaching your long-term goals. Follow the steps below to get started defining and, more importantly, achieving your goals. Our [Setting and Achieving Goals Worksheet](#) [PDF 82kb] will help you keep track of your goals - check it out now!

Step 1: Define your long-term goals. Working towards and achieving goals in all aspects of your life is a great source of motivation and fulfillment. Long-term goals are the bigger goals that you set for yourself, such as to become a doctor, receive an advanced degree, or start a business. When creating goals, make sure you also define how you will measure success. For example, if your goal is to start a business, you might say you are successful if the business is still operational one year from the time you establish it.

A strong goal will be SMART, which means that it is:

- **Specific:** Define your goal in detail. A vague goal is hard to work towards!
- **Measurable:** Identify the ways you will know your goal has been accomplished.
- **Achievable:** Make sure your goal is something you realistically can accomplish. Ending poverty may not be possible on your own, but providing educational opportunities for underprivileged youth may be.
- **Relevant:** Your goals should align with the direction you want your life to take and, if applicable, the needs in your community.
- **Time-bound:** Putting a deadline on your goals will keep you motivated and on track.

Give each goal the SMART test. If it passes, you have created an excellent goal for yourself.

Step 2: Define your short-term goals. Short-term goals keep you on track to achieving your long-term goals. If your long-term goal is to start a business, your short-term goals may be to conduct market research, make a business plan, meet with a mentor, etc. Based on the outcome of a short-term goal, you may need to reevaluate your long-term goal. Perhaps when developing your business plan, you find out that the cost of starting a business is greater than you anticipated. Will this change your long-term goal? Are there additional short-term goals you can establish to help you work towards your long-term goal? Make sure you reevaluate your long-term plan as you complete each short-term goal. And remember, short-term goals do not need to be as ambitious as your long-term goal may be. Developing your professional skills is a great short-term goal. If that's one of your goals, check out our resources on [how to write a biography](#), [prepare for a job interview](#), and [deliver a speech](#).

Step 3: Identify the resources you will need to achieve your goals. After you define your goals, make a list of the resources you will need to achieve each goal. Resources may include research and information, money or financial support, or help from others, such as your family, friends, members of your community, or your coworkers. By having a list of what you need, you will know where and to whom to turn for support. After you have defined your goals and what you need to achieve them, make sure you continue to review your established goals so you can stay on track. The best way to

do this is to write everything down. You can also watch our free online lesson on [Setting and Achieving Goals](#) for additional tips.

Start the process with our [Setting and Achieving Goals Worksheet](#) [PDF 82kb].

[YALI's guide to the hows and whys of the 2016 U.S. elections](#)

(State Dept./Doug Thompson)



Millions of onlookers around the world will be joining Americans the night of November 8-9 to be among the first to learn who the winners and losers of the 2016 elections are. We have compiled some useful articles, videos and interactives to help explain the process and what to expect next.

Click on these links to learn:

- Why is voter fraud [unlikely](#)?
- Who is [responsible](#) for the conduct of U.S. elections?
- Are there [international](#) election observers?
- Do Americans need [identification](#) documents to vote?
- Why are national elections always on a [Tuesday in November](#)? Why will [December 19, 2016](#) be the real U.S. election day?
- Why has the U.S. presidential campaign season lasted longer than one year? This interactive will guide you through the [lengthy process](#).
- Why are people more interested in presidential election results from “[swing states](#)” like Ohio or Florida than bigger states like California or Texas? Try this interactive to test [what factors](#) could make the difference in a swing state.
- Why is the presidential result determined by the “[Electoral College](#)” instead of who simply got the most votes? Using this interactive, you can see the many ways to achieve the [270 electoral votes](#) needed to win.
- How does public opinion [polling](#) affect elections? Learn also how [social media](#) plays a role and use this [online tool](#) that shows who is trending on Facebook.
- What else are Americans voting for [besides](#) their next president?
- Why do voters expect election losers to [make a speech](#) acknowledging [their defeat](#)?
- What does a “peaceful transition of power” [look like](#) in the United States?

Confused by some of the terminology? Here is a [handy reference](#) explaining some of the words you might be hearing on the news. There is also plenty [more content](#) here if you are interested, including free graphics, videos and articles you can read and share with your friends on social media.

Advance your career by using an essay to talk yourself up

(Shutterstock)



Whether you're writing an [essay](#) to apply for admission to university, graduate school or the [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#) to take your career to the next level, your job is the same: demonstrate to the decisionmakers that you're the best choice.

Emphasize outcomes

"Sometimes we focus on things we've done" — an initiative or a job we undertook — "but we don't talk about what the result of that was," said executive coach Patty Beach, who is a managing partner of LeadershipSmarts. By describing the tangible benefits created by your previous work, you can overcome what Beach calls the "'So what?' factor," which leaves the decisionmakers uncertain whether your work had any measurable value or not.

Remember three things

Beach suggests thinking about three things before writing an essay: what you're good at (your natural and cultivated talents), what you're passionate about (the area to which you'll direct your talents), and how what you're applying for will help further your goals. "If you can effectively communicate those three things, you put yourself in the best position to be selected."

Enough but not too much

Shawn Abbott, dean of admissions at New York University, has seen more than enough admissions essays to know what works when it comes to selling yourself to an admissions board. He suggests limiting your personal statement to one page. "Admissions officers are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of applications. We have to be able to read quickly, and you want to capture our attention. One page is enough."

If it's factual, it's not bragging

Your essay is the first way an employer or school gets to know you, and you are competing against other qualified candidates.

"Your ability to tell — to communicate — about yourself is absolutely critical. If you don't communicate your strengths, accomplishments and life stories effectively, you put yourself at a disadvantage," said Lynell Engelmyer, an admissions expert at [CollegeRaptor.com](#). Many are uncomfortable communicating their strengths and accomplishments, but if you keep descriptions factual, such as what you have created or managed, awards you have won, or successes you have achieved while overcoming challenges, "you'd be surprised at the context you can provide to your

reader,” to give them “a very full picture of who you are” without sounding boastful, she said.

MWF Applicants: This is your best YALI Network resource for tips



In case you hadn't heard, the deadline for submitting your application to the 2017 Mandela Washington Fellowship is October 26 at 16:00 UTC. For the past several weeks, the [YALI Network blog](#) has been posting advice designed to help this year's applicants. There is a lot of information, so we have compiled links to all of the blog posts here as a convenient reference you can use before you [submit your application](#). Many of the posts, especially the advice on writing skills and how to best present yourself and your accomplishments, are also very helpful to consult if you are applying for jobs or admission to university and graduate school.

Experts from the U.S. Department of State answered some of the most common questions, such as who is eligible to be a Fellow, what documents are required, how applicants are selected, and what to expect after you submit your application. Be sure to check out the summary of a recent [Facebook #YALICHAT](#) and their advice in a separate [blog post](#). You can also see the summary of the 2016 Facebook #YALICHAT with [Britta Bjornlund and Todd Haskell](#) to get more advice from State Department experts.

Advice from former Fellows is particularly helpful, not only because they can help explain why their applications succeeded, but in some cases they can share [what they learned](#) from previous mistakes. Many Fellows have responded to questions on the [YALI Facebook page](#), and a blog post summarizes some of their [best recommendations](#).

Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Fellow from Nigeria, compiled her own list of tips as a 2015 [guest blogger](#). This year, she wrote a whole series of posts on the YALI Network's [Face2Face](#) page offering advice on how to answer the [2017 essay questions](#).

For more tips on writing, be sure to check out previous blog posts on how to pitch yourself in the [personal essay](#), how to write a [personal statement](#), and advice on preparing your [resume](#).

Several 2016 Fellows, with the application experience still fresh in their minds, had good advice on ways to [improve your English](#) skills, which of the three [tracks](#) you should choose, how best to [show your accomplishments](#), and what the Fellowship means when it asks for a “[proven record of leadership](#).” They also highlighted many ways that using YALI Network's [power to connect people](#) will give you an advantage.

Lastly, be sure to read the guest blog post by Alfousseni Sidibé, a 2016 Fellow from Mali who was an unsuccessful applicant in 2014 and 2015. He has a message for every applicant: [Never give up!](#)

How to Prepare for a Successful Interview

Interviewing for a job can be stressful. You want to make a good impression, but there is a lot at stake and you can't always anticipate what will happen. *Will you be asked a question you don't know how to answer? Will you appear nervous?* Remember that interviewing is a skill: you can improve your abilities with preparation and practice. Whether you're interviewing for a new job (or you are selected to interview for the Mandela Washington Fellowship), thorough preparation is the key to success:

1. Do Your Research.

- **Spend some time learning about the company** or organization you're applying to, including its history, mission, and leadership team. If the organization has a blog, news releases, and/or social media channels, be sure to explore them.
- **Investigate the organization from the outside in.** Who are their top competitors? What are the biggest challenges or issues facing the organization? A simple Google search should help you find the information you need.
- If you **know who your interviewer is**, learn about their background and current role ([LinkedIn](#) or other professional networking sites are a good resources for this).

2. Anticipate the Questions—and Plan Your Responses.

- Familiarize yourself with common interview questions in your industry and **think about the single-most important thing that you want to communicate.** Perhaps you want to showcase your creativity, leadership abilities, or versatile skills. Write your responses down so you can study and refine them; when possible, add anecdotes or "proof points" to strengthen your argument. For example, "I am a trusted and reliable manager. Over the past three years, I have gone from managing a team of two direct reports to a team of eight."
- **Perfect your 30-second elevator speech.** Requests such as "Tell me about yourself" or "Walk me through your background" are common at the beginning of an interview; your answer is important because it sets the tone for the rest of the meeting. Your elevator speech should pertain to the job you are applying for only—don't give a detailed breakdown of your resume or share irrelevant details about your personal life. Instead, focus on your passions, skills, and what interests you about the organization to which you are applying. If you don't know where to start, fill out the "Accomplishments and Leadership" section of the [YALI Network Biography Questionnaire](#) [PDF 107 kb]. And remember, keep it short! Thirty seconds is plenty of time to get your key points across.
- Know your strengths and **know how to talk about your weaknesses.** Be prepared to share three or four strengths including examples of how you have demonstrated these skills. For example, "Creative writing is one of my greatest strengths. I studied poetry and six of my stories have been published in fiction magazines." On the contrary, when you talk about your weaknesses, emphasize

what you are doing to address and/or improve them. You might say “Public speaking is a challenge for me, but the more I can practice and prepare in advance of a speech, the better I perform.”

3. Prepare Questions of Your Own.

- While it may feel strange to “interview” your interviewer, you should always compile a list of questions prior to the meeting. **Asking questions is another way to demonstrate that you have done your research** and are serious about the opportunity. Need some ideas? Check out our new resource, [Good Questions to Ask During an Interview](#) [PDF 80 kb].

4. Practice, Practice, Practice.

- *Thinking* about how you will answer a question is one thing; saying it aloud is another. **Consider asking a friend to conduct a mock interview**, where they ask questions and you give your best (practiced) responses. A mock interview is a great opportunity to identify your areas for improvement; perhaps you manage an important project at work, but have a hard time explaining your role and what you do. If you can’t do a mock interview, try reciting your interview responses in the mirror, or use a recording device to review your speech.
- **Plan how you will approach a question you are unsure how to answer.** It’s okay to take a deep breath, repeat a question back, and/or collect your thoughts for a few moments before you respond.

5. Don’t Forget to Sleep

- Hours of interview prep can be wasted if you arrive to the meeting feeling tired and sluggish. Make sure you are well rested so you can **impress your interviewer(s) with your energy and clear thoughts.**
- Always dress professionally, bring extra copies of your resume, and leave plenty of time to travel. If you’ve done the necessary preparation, the interview is yours to ace. Good luck!

[YALI Voices Podcast: Education changed his life. Now he’s giving back.](#)

Fombah Kanneh poses with some of the children he is helping with his startup Gift 2 Change. 
(Courtesy of Fombah Kanneh)

Fombah Kanneh grew up in a makeshift house in the slums of Monrovia, Liberia, during the country’s civil war. As in many other cities, slum life in Monrovia is notoriously hard — plagued by drugs, poverty, hunger and peer pressure to engage in destructive behavior.

Speaking with the State Department’s Macon Phillips in a YALI Voices podcast, Kanneh said that, due to his circumstances, he faced “one solid wall” barring a successful future. But thanks to his

mother's sacrifices and determination, he also had "one narrow, slim opportunity" to improve his chances: education.

Kanneh, a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, founded the startup [Gift 2 Change](#) as a way to give back to his community by supporting single mothers and children who are facing the same challenges he did.

"It's my responsibility to get somebody from somewhere, especially in the rural areas, in a slum community, to this stage, that one day too, they can have the opportunity to explain their success story," he said.

"They are not just kids today. But they are the future leaders of tomorrow," he said.

Gift 2 Change combines environmental sustainability with community building and education projects. Kanneh mobilizes young people from the streets to help him collect scrap materials, compost, bottles and other waste to sell to a friend who runs a recycling center. He uses the money to provide clothing, books, educational materials and training to Liberia's most marginalized children.

Listen to the full podcast to learn how Kanneh found the inspiration to dedicate himself to his community, and like former South African President Nelson Mandela, has come to believe that education "is the most powerful weapon we can use to transform the world."

Don't have access to [SoundCloud](#), [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#)? Read a transcript of the podcast below:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS (IIP)
"YALI Voices Podcast: Fombah Kanneh"

[MUSIC: GRACE JERRY, "E GO HAPPEN"]

MACON PHILLIPS: Welcome, young African leaders. This is the YALI Voices podcast, a place to share some of the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. My name is Macon Phillips, and I'm so glad you've joined us today. Before we get started, don't forget to subscribe to the podcast, and visit yali.state.gov to stay up-to-date on all things YALI.

When speaking about having achieved success, people often claim that they started from the bottom. My guest for the edition of YALI Voices, Fombah Kanneh, really did. He grew up in the slums of Monrovia, Liberia, during the civil war. Fombah and his mother were forced to live day to day, often not knowing where they'd sleep, or what they'd eat.

It would have been easy for Fombah to fall in with the wrong crowd. But early on his mother stressed the value of an education. Fombah embraced education as the narrow opportunity he had to escape poverty and violence. After graduating university, he decided he would dedicate his life to helping lift children and single mothers out of poverty.

Now let's jump right into my interview with Fombah Kanneh.

[MUSIC: GRACE JERRY, "E GO HAPPEN"]

Fombah Kanneh, it's great to have you here, and I hope you have had a nice trip from Liberia, and a productive time here. I'm looking forward to talking to you today.

MR. KANNEH: It's an honor to be on YALI Network. Thank you.

MR. PHILLIPS: Absolutely. So we like to, in these conversations, just kind of get a sense of where you're coming from, and what you're working on these days, and look ahead to some of the challenges that are facing us. So let's start by kind of asking the simple question. When you meet somebody for the first time, and they say, hey it's great to meet you, what do you do? How do you answer that question?

MR. KANNEH: I said, thank you, it's an honor to meet you. My name is Fombah Lasana Kanneh. I'm from Liberia. I basically aim to children-related issues, supporting kids in rural Liberia, and in urban slum communities as well, and kids that can't afford. Because once upon a time, I was just like those kids in rural Liberia, especially on the streets of Monrovia. So I have to give back to them. Just summarizing what I do.

MR. PHILLIPS: I think that's an experience that not a lot of people can understand, what it's like to be a kid on the streets in Liberia. So paint a picture of what life was like for you when you were really young.

MR. KANNEH: Well, terrible. Again, born in poverty as a child was not a decision I made, but to get out of poverty as an adult was a decision I consciously made. Because life, it's not about where you're coming from, it's about where you are going. Yes, I was born in poverty. Yes, my dad passed on. So I grew up with a single mother.

And in the slums of Monrovia, things are really hard, tough. So to some extent, my mom searched up coal or firewood to send me to school during the crisis, the Liberian civil crisis, at the time. So I have one solid wall, and one narrow, slim opportunity.

This solid wall — poverty, corruption, growing up in a violent community — indeed, was really painful. But the slimmest of opportunities I had, at the time, was to go to school. That was the narrow slims of opportunity. It was not deep, it was narrow.

Because you know the time, you want to go to school, your mom is sending you to school, when you're coming back to a community, you have peer pressure. Your friends you play with, today, they're not in school. They want you to just join them. So growing up in the slums of Monrovia was really painful, terrible.

Sometimes you don't even have a square meal. And if you have a square meal, you never know where next you will sleep. If you know where next you'll sleep, you don't know what next activities you guys will do. There was nothing planned. Because your shadow, your clothing, was just at a time where it could come off anytime, because of the crisis.

MR. PHILLIPS: So you're living day to day. You're living in poverty. There's a lot of children that grow up in that situation. I'm sure you have friends and people you know from when you were younger. What was different about you? Why do you think you made some of the right choices, and took advantage of that slim opportunity that education offered?

MR. KANNEH: Thanks to my mother, and thanks to all single mothers out there, you know. Mom encouraged me a lot to go to school. At the time, I told her that it was not really a good stuff to go to school. Like people would say, why do you want to force your son to learn Western education, for example. And unfortunately, my mom is not an educated lady. She doesn't know how to read and write.

But she had a sense that she must send us to school. So I was forced to go to school, to some extent. Until I realized the importance of education, when I graduated from high school, and I started to support myself in college.

But what I do, with the question of what I do, especially giving back to kids in slum communities in rural Liberia. Because a few years ago, I was in that same situation. So I deem it necessary now to give back. I'm talking to you, Macon and the rest, because somebody somewhere, along with my mom, gave me the light, which is education.

So that's why I'm here. So indeed now, it's my responsibility to get somebody from somewhere, especially in the rural areas, in a slum community, to this stage, that one day too, they can have the opportunity to explain their success story.

MR. PHILLIPS: And that's one of the reasons, I'm sure, why you put together Gift 2 Change.

MR. KANNEH: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Why don't you tell us a little about that? That's the project you're working on right now. And I know that was heavily influenced by your respect for your mother, and sort of came from that. So tell us a little about what that project's all about.

MR. KANNEH: What Gift 2 Change is social entrepreneur startup for sustainability [INAUDIBLE]. Now, thanks to the YALI Network, online, I met this guy. He was a 2014 Fellow, and he also encouraged me a lot to participate in the Mandela Washington Fellowship, through his mentorship, through the YALI online network, I got close to him.

Coming to my project Gift 2 Change — so say he ran a big company, a recycling company. Not really a huge one. So I help collect bags with the young people, from the streets of Monrovia, to give to his company, called Green Cities Incorporated, where he manufactures these into large production. For me, I'm just mobilizing young people, getting my team on the streets, and sent it to him.

So what I would get from this selling of those scrap materials — blocks today, bottles, compost materials — it was to sustain my vision of giving back to impoverished kids, with that campaign called Leave No Child Behind. And I learned that campaign, in many ways, through my fellowship. There's a campaign called Leave No Child Behind. So I said, OK, at least we can take this back home. Especially to my village, my country, then we can run it through Africa.

So that to sustain our vision of giving by whatever I sell to him, sustain myself, and give back.

MR. PHILLIPS: Now in addition to that, you're also teaching classes some. I know that you have used the YALILearns platform, and the classes from that. Can you talk a little about your experience using the resources on that, and from the standpoint of other people who might be listening right now, who might be considering that, how did you find it useful?

MR. KANNEH: Well, it is a library. It is a huge resource center. It's not just the video that you watch for entertainment. It's a video that you watch to inspire you. What are you into? Civil society, for example. What if you're into business and entrepreneurship, or civil leadership? It helps to generate the kind of person you want to see.

So yes, I've benefited from it. So others want to be like me, a role model, right? Or have opportunity at the same time. So what I do with the materials I got through YALI online, through the internet, or through flat disks — so I share it through PowerPoint presentations.

Soon, for example, we have free and popular speaking. And the lady will come on display, the YALILearns materials from the video presentation, they all watch it, university students. And people from local communities who watch those videos. If they can't understand the American way of speaking, maybe they see it as serious or standard English, they find it difficult.

We have to come — as someone who has participated in a YALI program — and break it down to their level, to the simplest form, so at least communication can flow. So that it can get a message, and be the leader that we all can be, in Africa, in the world at large.

MR. PHILLIPS: So now you're in Liberia, you've got these initiatives, you're teaching these classes. Tell me what the future looks like for you. What are some of the big projects that you're planning to take on?

MR. KANNEH: The future looks bright. But it's only for prepared people. Getting a lot of their materials from YALI online, been a Mandela Washington Fellow, going to the U.S., coming back. It's easy. You can set up bridges virtually. But it's not a point to celebrate here, until you can liberate somebody through education. Like Mandela said, education is the most powerful weapon we can use to transform the world. And as someone that benefited from education, and is still benefiting, I think it is a responsibility, and a driven passion to help kids in rural and slum communities.

In terms of how the future looks bright, we can do it together, by sharing and helping others. It's easier for us to sit in this room and criticize. It's easier for us to lament the years I was born in poverty. So what? Yes, I don't have resources. And so what? Who cares?

I'm thinking right, I've been taking one step. If you can't say, 'I am,' no one will say you are. So you have to, especially young people across the world, in Africa, if you can't be the change that you want to see, and rise up to the occasion, then no one will be. But if you just sit there and don't do nothing to build your future, you become an instrument of violence.

Especially as to what is going on in West Africa. Extremism is all over.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, let me ask you a question on that. Because I couldn't agree with you more. But I think you would agree that breaking through, sometimes, to people, particularly kids, can be really difficult. In particular, when they're in poverty, or they're not in a good education system. And they kind of turn it off. And you have to break through to them.

For all the people listening today that are focused on similar issues, that are focused on children, that are trying to break through, what have you learned, both from your own experience growing up in poverty, and now doing work focused on children? What are some pieces of advice you could give

to those who are trying to pierce through that, and help people understand that they need to stop making excuses and take that initiative?

MR. KANNEH: Well, growing up as a kid in a slum community, and those experiences that I had, personally, I think if we all can just take one single action, it starts in your home. It starts with your own family. Then you can take it out. You have to sacrifice, yes. The challenges ahead of sharing those training materials with kids are very sharp and difficult. I can tell you that it is bread-and-butter stuff.

Well, again, if you don't do it, who will do it? If you can't rise up to change that mention, no one will do it. We all seem to be busy because we want to make profit. Yes, it's good. But the initiative of giving back to kids, you learn to be more tolerant, you learn to be more patient-mannered. You try to understand that you're not doing it because this is the kids of Liberia, but you're doing it for kids. They are the future.

Not just Liberia, but Africa. Not just Africa, but the world. So in order to fill the gap, especially in Africa, we have to educate the kids. You run a program on YALI online called Africa for All. That's a great initiative. And where people are signing, or encouraging people to stand up for women's rights, no violence against women, now having a large campaign around electorate issues. Those are great initiatives.

But if I can recommend an appeal, which of course you already started. We can say Africa for Kids. Stand up for kids. Those campaigns, you know — you may just sit in D.C. and just send messages, you're all OK. But you don't know the impact that you made, except you meet the Fellows interacting with them.

YALI Go Green. We all want to go green, now. We all want to wear green shirts, and sensitize others. Well, if we can all just rise up, Africa stand up for kids. Stand up for kids against violence. Stand up for kids with education. Social injustices, kids suffer from social injustices.

We have a lot of juveniles in prison across Africa. Maybe they can't afford, besides education, dozens of children I earn go to school every day, but go to school hungry. So if we can just start running those campaigns, and we don't have to sit for mark on the rest of the stuff for YALI online to do it — but if you're listening to me, wherever you find yourself, we can create those online platforms, especially through social media, and sell the idea that we need to stand up for kids. They are not just kids today. But they are the future leaders of tomorrow.

MR. PHILLIPS: Totally agree with you, and I know we've done some work already on climate change, done some work already on women's empowerment. I really appreciate your point that people shouldn't wait around for people in D.C. to come up with this stuff. You're already working on this. So tell me a little bit, something, about you that might surprise most people.

MR. KANNEH: Well, like African youths, we love soccer. And if I'm really down, well, I gain inspiration from soccer. If I can gain inspiration from soccer, and I just look and sit, and see people that don't have anything I have, and they still appreciate themselves. So what does that mean? I have something. So those are the two areas I really get inspiration from.

If you want to give up, and you say, OK, I'm this, I'm that, just look at someone around. They don't

have eyes to see. They don't even have feet to walk. What's about you? You have five senses. Beautiful ideas. But just wake up and take something positive.

Like many youths, what stops us from achieving our full potential is the fear factor. When I started, especially when I came out of university with this campaign, Leave No Child Behind, people would say, you're not going to make it. You'll fail. Come on, we'll have a job here for you. You can do this one five hours a day, earn this.

I said no, this is my dream. You don't believe in my dream, then compared to you, I believe in my dream. If my dream of helping one kid to be successful, I can do it.

And lastly, through the YALI online, I'm sharing this vision to a Fellow from Tanzania. So Leave No Child Behind, now, is not just in Liberia, now, but it's crossing borders. From Tanzania, now Fellows from Sierra Leone want to repeat the ideas, because they've been inspired.

Even Alieu Jallow, from The Gambia, have all been inspired. If Fombah can do it, we all can do it.

MR. PHILLIPS: That sounds like the kind of thing you want spreading. You know, sounds like a great thing to grow.

MR. KANNEH: If it can grow, then we all would make an impact.

MR. PHILLIPS: So my next question, this is just a little bit more specific, maybe a personal question. Which is would you consider yourself a morning person or someone who does better late at night?

MR. KANNEH: I think in the morning.

MR. PHILLIPS: You wake up early and get started.

MR. KANNEH: Yes.

MR. PHILLIPS: Do you have any routines or anything that you feel like you do every day or every week that helps you be more organized, and focused?

MR. KANNEH: I'm more focused on building my mind, then focus on taking exercise and building my own body. We need to balance work, with fun, with exercises. But if we balance our mental capacity, which of course is the mindset. The mind, for me, I believe, is the most powerful weapon.

So when I wake up in the morning, for me, before going to bed, the first thing I do is to have an agenda for the next day. If I wake up, where do I start my day from the start? My agenda is already set. When I wake up, I'm strictly into it. Start work at like 5 o'clock in the morning, check a few emails, and follow my daily activities.

From 5 in the morning till 12 are my productive hours, because anything after 12 it would just be a bonus. That's exactly what I focus on.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah, I'm hearing that from a lot of people I talk to. It's just get it done in the morning, that's when you're most productive.

OK a final thing is you've been answering a lot of questions. I appreciate it, but if you could ask a

question of President Obama, what would your question be?

MR. KANNEH: See if I had the opportunity, I'd say, Mr. President, thousands of kids in Africa don't have the opportunity to go to school. What you can do, in your own weak way, as president of the free world, as a fighter, to help kids in Africa? Kids in the world? Not just limited to Africa. Giving an education.

MR. PHILLIPS: OK, great. Well, I really appreciate it. We've had a great conversation with Fombah, and wish you the best of luck back in Liberia.

What a great conversation that was with Fombah. It's hard not to be inspired by his story and his commitment to help others facing similar situations. He figured out, early on, that education unlocks the key to a better life. Thank you, Fombah, for taking the time to chat with us.

If you'd like to get in contact with Fombah, you can find him and his organization on Facebook under Gift 2 Change. That's gift, the number two, and change. Be sure to come back for more inspiring stories from young African leaders on the YALI Voices podcast.

Join the YALI Network at yali.state.gov and be part of something bigger. Our theme music is "E Go Happen," by Grace Jerry, produced by the presidential precinct. The YALI Voices podcast is brought to you by the U.S. Department of State, and is part of the Young African Leaders Initiative, which is funded by the U.S. Government. Thanks for listening, everyone.

[Mandela Washington Fellowship Tips: How do I answer the essay questions?](#)

Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow from Nigeria,  has offered helpful insights into what reviewers are looking for in the 2017 MWF essay questions. (Courtesy of Adepeju Jaiyeoba)

When you get to the essay questions in your application, don't see them as a barrier to be overcome. Instead, consider them as an opportunity to tell reviewers about the great things you have been doing and how being a 2017 Mandela Washington Fellow would benefit your community as well as yourself. The essays offer a chance to explain in your own words, and with your own energy and positivity, your track record of making change in the community and how you plan to do even more as a Fellow. (Here is a [great article](#) if you need general writing tips.)

Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow from Nigeria, offered some helpful advice to applicants in a [previous blog](#) for the YALI Network. This year she teamed up with several other Fellows on the YALI Network's [Face2Face page](#) to discuss this year's essay questions, with specific ideas on how to approach each one. Click on the link after each question to read the tips and the

discussion.

- 1) Please give a brief description of your professional background and current work. Why have you chosen this work? ([read more](#))
- 2) Nelson Mandela said, “It is in your hands, to make a better world for all who live in it.” What are you doing to improve your community? ([read more](#))
- 3) What role do you want to play in your community/country in 10 years? What are you currently doing to achieve this? ([read more](#))
- 4) Describe how your participation in the Mandela Washington Fellowship will influence your activities when you return home. ([read more](#))
- 5) What do you consider to be your most significant professional accomplishment or most innovative idea? Explain the accomplishment or innovation, why it was important, and what obstacles you overcame to achieve it. ([read more](#))
- 6) Nelson Mandela was awarded the Nobel Peace prize for working with leaders of the South African government to agree on a peaceful transition to multiparty rule and end to Apartheid. He was able to forgive those who enforced his imprisonment to achieve a greater goal. Leaders are able to achieve progress despite differing views or identities. Please explain a situation where you have used your leadership skills to resolve a conflict or disagreement with others. What actions did you take and how did you encourage respectful discussion? ([read more](#))

Albert Muragijimana, a 2016 Fellow from Rwanda, said that when he first applied he made the mistake of telling stories about himself and his hard work in the essays without demonstrating the impact he was having on his community.

“If possible show the numbers,” he advised. “How many people are going to be reached? How many lives are you going to change? If you are running a school for example, how many kids are you going to take at school? If you are looking to improve access to education or access to health, how many people are going to have access to those services? So always make sure that you have demonstrated both the action and the impact,” Muragijimana said.

If you are having trouble, don’t be afraid to contact MWF alumni and those who are familiar with your work for advice. As Agang Dithogo, a 2016 Fellow from Botswana, said, the encouragement she received from previous Fellows “kept me going.”

“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.

In addition to reading Jaiyeoba’s posts on the [YALI Network Face2Face group](#), be sure to visit the [YALI Network Facebook page](#) and the [MWF Application Information page](#) to get more tips and information on preparing a great application. Good luck!

2017 Mandela Washington Fellowship Application Tip: 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 2017 MWF hopefuls share this sentiment as they finalize their applications (due by October 26!). 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](#).
