

## University's Mandela Washington Fellows awarded grants to fund entrepreneurial ventures

*Reno cohort receives largest number of awards out of 20 fellowship host institutions*

RENO, Nev. – Seven Mandela Washington business and entrepreneurship fellows hosted by the University of Nevada, Reno received \$25,000 grants through the [United States African Development Fund](#) during a conference via Skype Wednesday, July 29.

The USADF, an independent federal agency that provides seed capital and technical support for African-led development, awarded a total of 40 grants to fellows in the business and entrepreneurship track. The Reno cohort received the largest number of grants awarded among host institutions, competing against fellows from Dartmouth College, University of Notre Dame, Clark Atlanta University, University of Texas at Austin, University of Wisconsin-Stout and Northwestern University in a business plan competition.



United States African Development Fund grant recipients and mentors from left to right: Dave Croasdell, University professor, Cosmos Shaduka, Lisema Masheane, Ethiopia Wondimu Robi, Miriam Kyasiimire, Carina Black, executive director of the Northern Nevada International Center, Andrew Bright Chikomba, and Haruna Fatawa Ndahi.

Fellows receiving grants are Andrew Bright Chikomba, Zimbabwe; Miriam Kyasiimire, Uganda; Lisema Masheane, Lesotho; Ethiopia Wondimu Robi, Ethiopia; Cosmos Shaduka, Namibia; Haruna Fatawa Ndahi, Nigeria; and Fatoumata Binta Baldé, Guinea, who called in from Africa after returning home early.

This is the University's first time hosting the [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#) program, as well as the first time competing in the business competition grant competition.

"Nevada is very special to us," Michele Rivard, USADF chief of staff, told the assembled group via Skype. "The business and entrepreneurship track has traditionally been an east coast thing, and you are taking your knowledge gained in Nevada back to your home countries. We welcome being part of your next steps."

In partnership with the [Northern Nevada International Center](#), the University hosted 25 of Africa's emerging business and entrepreneurial leaders for the fellowship, a six-week academic and leadership institute running June 22 through July 31, as part of President Barack Obama's [Young African Leaders Initiative](#).

The fellowship provides insight into American business practices through visits to regional companies and educational centers, participating in workshops and discussion groups as well as attending area cultural events including the Reno Rodeo and Artown events. The University is among 20 American universities hosting 500 fellows in one of three tracks: business and entrepreneurship, civic leadership or public management.

More than 35 University faculty and staff have participated as speakers, mentors and workshop leaders, and twice that number of community members have delivered content, mentored and hosted activities for the fellows.

With the help of local these resources, 21 Reno fellows developed business plan proposals and applied for the grants.

“The Mandela Washington Fellows have used the opportunity to develop their ideas through local contacts and academic curriculum,” Dave Croasdell, the Charles and Ruth Hopping professor of entrepreneurship and the chairman of information systems in the College of Business at the University, said. “These awards are validation of the collaboration, mentorships and partnerships this community has shared with these African business leaders.”

Jubilant cheers, hugs and handshakes erupted as each recipient name was announced. Croasdell said the group represents \$175,000 in development funds spread across Africa that will continue to make great impact in their home countries for years to come.

“It is never just the grant winner who succeeds,” Croasdell told the group. “Keep your dream alive and keep your business going.”

The Reno cohort joins the entire 500 fellows in Washington, D.C., next week for a three-day Presidential Summit with President Obama.

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**Photo cutline:** United States African Development Fund grant recipients and mentors from left to right: Dave Croasdell, University professor, Cosmos Shaduka, Lisema Masheane, Ethiopia Wondimu Robi, Miriam Kyasiimire, Carina Black, executive director of the Northern Nevada International Center, Andrew Bright Chikomba, and Haruna Fatawa Ndahi.

*Founded in 1874 as Nevada’s land-grant university, the University of Nevada, Reno ranks in the top tier of best national universities by U.S. News and World Report. With nearly 20,000 students, the University is driven to contribute a culture of student success, world-improving research and outreach that enhances communities and business. Part of the Nevada System of Higher Education, the University has the system’s largest research program and is home to the state’s medical school. Bringing outreach and education programs to all Nevada counties and home to one of the largest study-abroad consortiums, the University extends across the state and around the world. For more information, visit [www.unr.edu](http://www.unr.edu).*

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