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Ashoka Fellowship Selection

General Fellowship Questions:

1. **Who is a Social Entrepreneur?**
   In Ashoka’s definition, Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society’s most pressing social problems. They share qualities of leading business entrepreneurs—vision, innovation and long term commitment.

   Social Entrepreneurs are rare individuals, found in all cultures, who foresee the next step forward for their field (be it in environmental issues, health care, economic development or another area of human need).

   However, rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. They then relentlessly pursue this vision until it has become the established new reality, not just locally, but across society.

   Social entrepreneurs are not driven by profit and often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field.

   They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else.

2. **What is the Ashoka Fellowship?**
   Ashoka is the world’s field-defining association of leading social entrepreneurs—of men and women who possess the vision, creativity, and extraordinary determination of the business entrepreneur, but who devote these qualities to introducing new solutions to societal problems.

   Ashoka offers a life-time Fellowship program for individual Social Entrepreneurs. The Fellowship represents a great opportunity to spread the work and impact of these individuals as well as support them to scale up and grow. Additionally, Ashoka offers group entrepreneurs (Fellows working in the same sectors) the platform to develop broader social innovations together. We are not a grant making foundation or a service provider for social entrepreneurs but a network of entrepreneurs, and an accelerator of change.

3. **What does it mean to be an Ashoka Fellow?**
   What this means is that you will have a widespread access to leading social entrepreneurs and be one of them—people who have started things for the first time in their countries and sectors—as well as resources through Ashoka, but the onus is on you to make the most of these opportunities.

   The Fellows are at the center of inspiration and ideas that we offer to the wider world. As an Ashoka Fellow you are a role model for society, demonstrating to others how they too can create change. Ashoka invests in
you not only because you are transforming your field and imparting communities but also because you are
opening opportunities for others to engage in changemaking. Ashoka challenges you to go beyond your
individual success as a social entrepreneur.

4. Where does Ashoka get its money from?

We raise our funds for the Fellowship and for running costs from corporate partners, foundations, and
individual philanthropists. Traditionally, much of our funding has come from entrepreneurs, people who
support us to find and support system changing social entrepreneurs. The organization is in no way associated
with any religious or political organization, and Ashoka does not accept government funds.

5. What is the geographical scope of your work?

As a global organization, Ashoka works in 70+ countries. Please go to this link to find a full list of the countries
where Ashoka operates. For the Arab region, candidate social entrepreneurs are selected by the regional
office Ashoka Arab World located in Cairo, Egypt. After becoming Fellows, they still follow their engagement
plans with the same office. The Arab World elects Leading Social Entrepreneurs whose region of impact is the
Arab World regardless of their nationality.

The Ashoka Fellowship (Benefits and Other Information):

6. What does Ashoka provide to elected Social Entrepreneurs - Fellows? / How does Ashoka
support its Fellows?

Upon selection, Arab World Fellows enter into a global community of like-minded individuals (Leading Social
Entrepreneurs) and are able to learn from and collaborate with their peers, while getting assistance in creating
social change through their ideas and causes.

Ashoka Arab World helps its Fellows realize their visions and engages them in numerous ways, providing them
with much more than just money. Ashoka standard Fellowship supporting tools are as follows:

- **Identity:** Ashoka gives you the identity of being a leading social entrepreneur
- **Global Fellowship Network:** 3,000 + Leading Social Entrepreneurs across the globe. This constitutes a peer
to peer community. Fellows belong to a trusted community that shares resources and gives them
unconditional acceptance
- **Networking:** Ashoka curates introductions across fields to thought leaders, funders, business
entrepreneurs, pro-bono partners and other stakeholders to help Fellows scale their impact. Additionally,
Ashoka identifies and drives potential collaborations among its fellows on a local, regional and a global level
to shape new paradigms across fields.
- **Media Coverage and Marketing exposure:** Fellows gain visibility through Ashoka’s brand and partnerships
with news outlets and high profile national as well as regional convenings.
- **Stipends:** On a case by case basis, and if needed. A three year financial stipend for the purpose of financial
stability, is a modest way through which Ashoka gives the time and space for Fellows so they may fully
commit to their work and the development of their ideas on a full time basis and leave any other irrelevant
work that is pursued only for the sake of financial sustainability. Stipends are always on a need basis and
living standards and responsibilities. Stipends are not mean to be a funding grant for your initiative or
organization.
• Monitoring and Evaluation: Ashoka closely monitors Fellows’ progress while helping them strategically plan their work and track their impact and needs. Monitoring also helps us to understand Fellows’ responsiveness to supporting tools provided by Ashoka.

• Legal Assistance
• Technical Assistance
• Award Nominations
• Capacity Building

7. How much is the Ashoka Financial Stipend?
There’s no set or fixed amount. The Ashoka stipend focuses on each Fellow’s personal situation and is tailored to his/her needs; taking into account all sources of income and all expenses concerning their family as a whole. The stipend also considers the income received by other persons in similar fields. Ultimately the stipend should allow the Fellow to focus on their idea and cause by giving them the financial freedom to do so for an agreed start-up period.

To receive a stipend, the Fellow must agree to work full-time on the new idea for which he or she was elected. This means dropping any work and income that is not related to the new idea.

The Ashoka stipend is not meant to replace the salary that a Fellow is already receiving from his or her organization for which he was elected. A Fellow’s salary should not drop if it is for work related to the new idea.

The purpose of the stipend is to allow the Fellow to focus full time on their ideas and removing financial barriers. The Ashoka stipend does NOT cover any work-related expenses (i.e. equipment for work, traveling for work, etc). The stipend cannot be used for investing in personal or family savings.

8. What is the length of the fellowship program? / How long does Ashoka support its Fellows?
Ashoka is a lifetime engagement of support and equal partnership between the Fellow and Ashoka Arab World being the platform for Social Entrepreneurs in the region. It is not a time-limited engagement. As we say, “once a fellow, always a fellow”. Only, the financial stipend, if needed, applies for the first three years of the fellowship.

9. Will Ashoka be supervising my work and progress as a Fellow?

We are not a grant making foundation/agency nor are we an award giver. Hence, we do not intervene in your work. We help you strategize and plan, as well as maintain the ‘big picture’ in mind when you get engulfed with your work daily details. In other words, Ashoka facilitates the work of its Fellows, but does not control or direct their work. We believe that the Fellows know best how to carry out their work.

However, you will be asked for quarterly reports and annual plans.

10. Do I have to pay to join the Fellowship?
No. You have to go through a selection process to join the Fellowship. Ashoka does not take money from candidates or Fellows at any point.

11. If elected as a Fellow, what will Ashoka require from me in return? / Is the Ashoka Fellowship time consuming? / Is the Ashoka Fellowship an extra burden over my work?

The Ashoka Fellowship is not meant to be time consuming for the social entrepreneurs. Instead, Ashoka and the social entrepreneurs have an equal intellectual partnership to support the Fellows to scale up and grow. Equally, Fellows also have a chance to champion initiatives and give back to the Ashoka community.

As a part of the Fellowship community, you will be expected to attend Fellows local meetings, give back to the network by sharing experiences and skills and foster collaborations, act as an Ashoka Ambassador and use public platforms to credit the support you have received from Ashoka. You will also be expected to nominate candidates for the Fellowship to help grow the network. Additionally, you will be asked to provide updates on your work, needs and impact by using our monitoring and evaluation tool.

Scope of the Ashoka Fellowship

12. Does the fellowship offer funding for initiatives/organizations?

No. We are not a donor agency; we are our fellows’ intellectual partners, helping them focus on their social ideas in order to effect change. If needed, we enable you to live on an adequate monthly stipend for three years to cover your costs of living while focusing on your cause, and connect you with potential funders.

13. What/who is NOT eligible for the Ashoka Fellowship? What falls outside the scope of Ashoka’s support?

Clarifications: Ashoka is not an aid organization, not a grantmaking/donor foundation and not an award giver.

Ashoka does not support any of the following requests/applications:

a. Ashoka does not support ideas which have not started or implemented yet. Ashoka looks for more than someone with a good idea, but rather someone who has already begun to put that idea into practice and someone who has a very clear “how-to” map.

b. Ashoka does not finance business entrepreneurs or commercial enterprises if they are not first and foremost social ventures. We support social ventures regardless of their legal status (profit, non-profit, social enterprises).

c. Ashoka does not support purely technical innovations or inventions. Ashoka seeks individuals with social innovations rather than technical ones. Technical innovations are interesting to us only if tied into a program or a system to disseminate the innovation and its social benefits.
d. Ashoka does not support groups or associations on a whole. We only only support individuals who are starting groups/organizations/initiatives... Etc.

e. Ashoka will not elect those who propose or are providing professional services to the field or others. Any individual whose work primarily consists of applying a set of professional skills to assist social entrepreneurs and their organizations or other civil society organizations or businesses. This sort of professional activity is different from the sort of significant, structural, continental scale approach and impact that Ashoka’s mission aims for. The definition of “professional skills” includes, but is not limited to, the fields of marketing, advertising, business planning, organizational development, fundraising, computers, web and other technology, sensitivity training and small enterprise development. Creating an new industry or a field or an enabling environment for Social Entrepreneurship is a different thing though.

f. Initiatives whose sole purpose is to spread arts and culture. We do not support candidates whose work is predominately artistic. We will, carefully support social change causes that meet all our other goals in terms of social change impact as long as the artistic element is a means not an end.

g. Development projects which are bound by a certain timeline and a specific target audience after which the project ends.

h. Ashoka will not elect a Fellow whose endeavors have a primarily religious impact. Ashoka does not associate or support any particular religion, theology or spirituality, and must remain accepting and neutral on all matters of religious belief. If a program in any way would impose its views, beliefs, or practices on others who do not subscribe to them strictly voluntarily, Ashoka will not become involved. Ashoka fully respects every Fellow’s right to his or her own religious beliefs, practices, and associations. However, our Fellows must not aspire to impose their own beliefs or practices on the larger society. Fellows should in general be committed to respecting the various groups in society and aim at overcoming oppression & prejudice, not encouraging it.

i. Ashoka will not elect any individual who is themselves associated with political parties in leading positions or whose work is engaged in the same. The efforts of any Ashoka Fellow cannot support or associate with any parties that advocate violence, totalitarianism, or racism. However, Ashoka recognizes that Fellows will want to exercise their citizenship rights to vote, state their personal opinions, and provide modest personal support for candidates. However, in doing so, they must not allow themselves, their work, or Ashoka take on a partisan political appearance.

j. Building schools or clinics.

k. Research projects/proposals

l. Academic scholarships or travel funds

Ashoka Fellowship Selection Criteria and Process:

14. What is the Ashoka Search and Selection Process?
Maintaining a rigorous selection process of Social Entrepreneurs for our Fellowship and universally applied standards is critical to Ashoka, as it ensures that we elect only the most innovative social entrepreneurs with the greatest probability of achieving transformational social impact into the Fellowship.

The search and selection process involves five stages and can take place over the course of several weeks to a year. Implicit to these five stages are intermediate steps that must be considered as the process is carried out.

**Stage 1:** Nomination (The team receives a nomination of a Social Entrepreneur from our network of partners in the Arab region. Entrepreneurs can also nominate themselves).

**Stage 2:** First Opinion Review (National Team)
- a. First Opinion Interviews
- c. Reference Checks
- d. Site visits
- e. Profile Writing

**Stage 3:** Second Opinion Review (International Team)

**Stage 4:** Selection Panel (Regional Approval)

**Stage 5:** International Board Approval

After which comes the Election and New Fellow On-Boarding

15. **What are Ashoka Fellowship Selection Criteria? / Who is an Ashoka Fellow? / Who is Eligible for the Ashoka Fellowship?**

Ashoka’s criteria guarantee that social entrepreneurs elected across the globe fit our tested profile for effectiveness. Ashoka is known for having the toughest, most competitive selection process in the field and the best to identify social entrepreneurs.

**The Criteria are:**

1. **New Idea:**
   The idea must be truly innovative within the sector and the country of the candidate, not just a modification of a current approach.

2. **Creativity:**
   Does the candidate have a track record of being creative, in their vision and in problem solving?

3. **Entrepreneurial Quality:**
   Is the candidate completely committed to realizing his or her vision and able to tackle practical challenges?

4. **Social Impact of the Idea:**
   Candidates must have started implementing their ideas and proven that it works. Is the idea solving an important social problem? What is the impact so far of the implemented idea? What is the expected impact?

5. **Ethical Fiber:**
   Is the candidate trustworthy, dependable and honest? Ashoka does not engage anyone with a track record of violence or corruption.
There is no age, education, class, race, or other such bars to election. Anyone who meets the five criteria is someone Ashoka wants.

16. Do you accept Dual Candidacies? / If the organization/initiative/social enterprise is founded by two members, can they both apply for the Fellowship?

Only in rare cases will there be acceptable situations of dual candidacy. This will happen in cases when it is clear that both individuals share the following:

- An equal investment in the success and spread of the program and the new idea behind it
- An equal level of technical, methodological, theoretical, and physical investment in the effort
- An equal level of innovation, entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and ethical fiber
- The ability to contribute as exceptional social entrepreneurs to a network of peers
- That both together they form a more powerful, influential benefit for their initiative

17. What is Ashoka Fellowship’s Selection Process?

The Fellowship selection process is long and rigorous to ensure we only select the Leading Social Entrepreneurs who are truly driving a system change. The selection process starts off by submitting an application. It can range from 6 months – 1 year of continuous work and follow up with the search and selection team at Ashoka.

Please refer to the document of “Ashoka Fellowship – Selection Process and Criteria” for full details.

18. What are the terms and conditions to join the Fellowship?

Ashoka Fellowship Candidacy Agreement Terms

a. Applications are screened against the five Ashoka Fellows Selection Criteria, these are: A New idea to solve an entrenched social problem, Proven Social Impact of the idea, the candidate for the Fellowship must possess Entrepreneurial qualities, Creativity and Ethical Fiber demonstrated through their work and life time achievements.

b. By applying to the Ashoka Fellowship, you agree to five main conditions that apply to all Fellows and these are:

- You are ready and willing to work full-time on your idea and leave any other irrelevant work to your social cause for at least three years. Ashoka can help you do by offering a financial stipend
- You are ready to spend these years in the country of your primary impact within the Arab World
- You are the decision maker in your organization/company/initiative (please tell us if the case is different)
- If the legal structure of your work is a for-profit company, then you will need to agree that all the profits of your company are re-invested back in the work and the social cause for at least 10 years
- You confirm that you are not associated with any political party, either individually or through your organization
c. If your application proceeds to the next levels, this means that you will work with Ashoka closely and extensively in a responsive, open and cooperative manner over the span of at least two months, followed by attending a regional selection panel that takes place in Cairo, Egypt and lasts for about 14 days.

19. **What if I can’t attend the selection panel?**

Attending selection panels in Cairo, Egypt is a mandatory step to complete your process of selection for the Ashoka Fellowship. Selection panels are held every 6 months. If your application proceeded to this level and you received an invitation to attend a selection panel, you are expected to comply with the dates of this panel. However, if there are clear reasons for circumstances that hinder you from attending, then the team will consider this on a case by case basis and can postpone your candidacy to the following selection panel.

20. **If I live outside Cairo, will Ashoka cover my travel expenses to attend the selection panel?**

Yes, only if you are invited to attend a regional selection panel, Ashoka will fully cover your expenses.

21. **What if I can’t commit full time to my social idea/organization/initiative/project? / What if I have other business to follow besides my social project?**

From Ashoka’s very beginning, Fellows have been required to dedicate themselves full-time for the spread of their vision for at least the first three years of their Fellowship. That means, for example, someone who is a university professor, a public school teacher or private businessmen, and these jobs do not directly relate to their social cause, therefore, Ashoka will not elect them unless they cease work on these other irrelevant activities for at least the three years following their election.

The full-time policy requires an individual to dedicate their entire life to an idea for three years. If they are not prepared to do so, this indicates that either their idea is not developed fully enough, or they are not truly an entrepreneur. In either case, he or she is not a qualified candidate for the Fellowship.

Candidates will often cite financial constraints as a reason for not being willing to dedicate themselves full-time to their cause. However, the Ashoka Fellowship Stipend is designed to remove such financial barriers. If a candidate is unwilling to dedicate him or herself full-time to their efforts when basic financial restraints are removed, it is a clear indication that the candidate is not prepared to participate in the Fellowship.

22. **Does Ashoka invest in Fellows who have for-profit models?**

Ashoka supports entrepreneurs with a wide variety of organizational models. However, Ashoka is not helping launch business entrepreneurs who are socially minded – the organization is only interested in genuine social entrepreneurs. Ashoka policy requires that Fellows with for-profit models reinvest any surplus or profit derived from their efforts back into their organization or social business for at least 10 years following their election. Therefore all revenues earned from any for-profit instruments must be put towards the development, expansion, and scaling the Fellow’s efforts. This requirement excludes a reasonable wage for the Fellow and any associated employees.
Ashoka seeks to support entrepreneurs who are dedicated to bringing about lasting systems changes, not those who are mostly interested in generating profit. If a candidate has developed a model that makes a genuine social systems change and also generates a steady financial gain, he or she may be eligible for the Fellowship. However, social change must be his or her primary motive. The Ashoka Fellowship is designed to represent leading social entrepreneurs who are first-and-foremost dedicated to creating dramatic, systems changes to address the major problems of our time. Were members of this Fellowship to be primarily motivated by profit, it would dilute the effectiveness of the network, and its collaborative nature.

The Application Process for the Ashoka Fellowship

23. When Can I apply for Ashoka Fellowship?

Usually, AAW calls for Fellowship candidates twice a year.

**Round One:** Starts at the beginning of February and closes by March 1st

**Round Two:** Starts at the beginning of August and closes September 1st

24. Where can I find the Ashoka full application form?

To fill out the full application form, you must be invited to apply. In order to get an invitation to apply, you can either be:

- Nominated by someone (one of our fellows, partners, and citizen sector or academia professionals). Nominations can always be submitted throughout the year via this link

  or

- If you do not have a nominator, you can fill out the pre-application form. This is a short form that gives us an initial idea of your work and what has been done so far. You can always fill out a pre-application form throughout the year via this link

When the application round is opened, promising nominees as well as candidates who filled out a pre-application form, are sent a full application and invited to apply to the Ashoka Fellowship.

25. When do I expect a reply on my application from Ashoka?

The team will update you on the status of your application within two months of submitting it. Normally, before giving a final status update, there are always several follow up questions after the application submission. These serve the purpose of better understanding and clarification for the candidate’s idea, strategy and problem. We always appreciate your patience and understanding in this process, given the large number of applications that we receive. We also assure you that we screen everything thoroughly in a scrutinizing manner.

26. What are the documents required to complete my application for the Ashoka Fellowship?

To complete your application for the Ashoka Fellowship, you need to submit:

- A full application form (all questions answered)
- Your CV
- Links to media articles and promotional videos regarding your work
- Photos of your work
27. I am not Arab, but I am a resident in an Arab country working on a social initiative for the region, can I apply?

Yes, we support individuals residing in the region and creating a system change regardless of their nationalities.

28. If I have previously applied for a past selection round, do I use the same application?

Please update it with any new twists or modifications to the idea, further reaches of social impact, and re-send the application. Kindly highlight all the new achievements or idea twists. Please mention in the e-mail the date of your last application.

29. If I decided to postpone my application for some time, because I realized that I am not ready or because I have other engagements that will not allow me to focus full time on my cause (like studying for a post-graduate degree). Can I re-apply again?

Be sure to update us on your situation, so that we can update your status in our database. Your files will be kept in our records. However, it is your job to keep the team updated with your work and re-connect back with an updated application whenever you think you can commit to an engagement with the Ashoka Fellowship.

30. I am interested, but I am really busy with my initiative, I am not sure if I can work for Ashoka and have additional commitments.

You actually work with Ashoka, not for it, as we enable you to have enough time to focus on your social idea, rather than having to juggle work. Ashoka and the Fellows are intellectual partners. You can watch this video here, to see what Ashoka Fellows are saying about their engagement with the Fellowship to get some insight on what Ashoka will give you the time to do.

31. Which language should be used for filling out the application?

You can fill the application in whichever language that makes you comfortable (English, Arabic or French). Use the language that helps you to be best express your ideas and convey the clearest image of your work. You can even use several languages inside the same application. However, limit the answer of every question to only one language.

32. I am also a Synergos / Schwab Fellow, can I apply to Ashoka?

We have no problem whatsoever to elect Fellows who are a part of other networks which enable Social Entrepreneurs; in fact we always encourage our Fellows to seek all possible opportunities for developing themselves and their work.

33. My application was accepted and I received an invitation to attend a selection panel. However, I have a commitment that takes place during the same dates as the panel, what can I do?
We know you are busy and that there are many good opportunities out there, however, panel dates are determined depending on many factors on top of which are the schedules of the panelists and interviewers in addition to the Global Ashoka calendar. Changing selection panel dates is not possible. Attending all days of the panel is mandatory for all candidates who are invited to the panel.

**Post Selection Process**

34. **Do you require regular reporting on the progress of my work?**
To enable us to design suitable engagement strategies, Ashoka requests you to provide updates on your work for the first three years. We use a very helpful monitoring and evaluation tool that helps Fellows keep track of their annual plans and goals and assess their impact and needs. Thereafter, we request you to provide timely responses to any engagement possibilities within Ashoka.

Ashoka facilitates the work of its Fellows, but does not control or direct their work. We believe that the Fellows know best how to carry out their work.

35. **How will you help me scale-up?**
We will put you through a tough selection process designed to find out whether we think your idea is likely to scale. From our knowledge of the venture (search and selection) process, we will then work out your tailored Fellowship engagement strategy during your onboarding and orientation. Our relationship with you is unconditional, apart from signing the Ashoka conditions and terms of candidacy mentioned in question number 18. Other Ashoka Fellowship supporting tools are listed in question number 6.

36. **When I am elected as a Fellow, If I'd like to get some funding for a new project – can I ask you?**
No. Ashoka does not fund projects. We are neither a grant making organization nor an award giver. We are also not able to fundraise on behalf of our Fellows. However, many Fellows have found the time to fundraise for themselves after focusing full-time on their ideas. Additionally, many other Fellows have accessed further funds from people they have met through the Ashoka network.
Ashoka Fellowship Selection Process - FAQ

Ashoka Arab World
Regional Office for Ashoka: Innovators for the Public
For further inquiries on the Fellowship selection criteria and process, please contact: venture-assist@ashoka-arab.org
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