



## Fellowship Planning Strategies

### We asked five Fellows to share their strategies for planning their Fund for Teachers Fellowships:



**Monica Harned** For her FFT Fellowship she investigated the design, history and art integration of various bridges in The Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic and Poland to create a STEAM unit for gifted students and increase interest in related careers with girls in upper elementary grade levels.



**JoAnn Dixon**

JoAnn traveled to Australia to attend the EdTechSA Conference in Adelaide to connect with educators and learn current trends for integrating coding and computational thinking into the middle school technology curriculum.



**Rebecca McVey** traveled to Switzerland to attend the International Science and Technology Conference in Vienna, Austria, explore the Bernese Oberland and Reichenbach Falls regions of Switzerland, and tour the European Center for Nuclear Research in Geneva to improve STEM instructional practices using the underlying theme of energy.



**Susan Kopecki** teamed with **Maria Avery** and explored the history and culture of New Spain in Spain, Mexico and California to broaden curricula around Spain's intricate role in the history of Colonial America and cultural fabric of present-day United States.



### ***How did you get started? What was your initial inspiration?***

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**Monica Harned:** I had to envision what I wanted my students to gain from my fellowship. What was the big idea I wanted them to take away and how would this fellowship afford me that opportunity? I knew I wanted my fellowship to reflect STEAM ideology and getting girls more involved in STEAM careers. This was my drive and motivation. I chose to focus on bridge design and construction because it is also a passion of mine and I wanted to share that with my students.

**JoAnn Dixon:** My main guiding question was: what area of my practice could be improved or expanded? When considering my options, I applied some specific criteria: English language, schools in session, conference to attend, contacts and experts, practice, collaboration opportunities. I had two areas of focus that I was able to combine: global collaboration and coding.

**Rebecca McVey:** Initially I had countless ideas, but I kept asking myself: what can I design that my students will be most interested in? I wanted to incorporate unique professional development,

curriculum initiatives, and a deeply personal experience to bind it together. I decided to focus on energy transformation as it permeates most of the ninth grade science curriculum and is a topic that sparks a great deal of interest in my students. They are fascinated by particle physics. I also thought about how passionate the students are on the topic of climate change.

**Susan Kopecki and Maria Avery:** While on a study tour in California, we visited our first California Mission. We fell in love with the stories of the Missions and were quite amazed to discover how little we knew of their history. This was the spark that ignited our FFT Fellowship! We knew that the story of our nation's Spanish roots was relevant to our large population of Latino students. Our small idea of the history of the California Missions and their place in the history of New Spain grew to encompass the need to travel to Spain, Mexico and California.

### ***How did you decide where to go and why?***

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Monica, with the Chief Construction Engineer of the Redzin Bridge.

**Monica Harned:** I began writing the curriculum for my unit on bridges. When this was completed I was able to design the itinerary around my curriculum. Deciding where to go was difficult! I knew that traveling to The Netherlands was a non-negotiable. The modern architecture there is spectacular and I didn't want to miss several of the bridges located there. I also knew that I wanted to go to Poland for two reasons; first, that I understood the language and could brush up on my conversational skills and second, that I could potentially interview a civil engineer. Once that was confirmed, I looked at the surrounding countries and found many bridges that were of interest. I created an itinerary that had one feature in common, all were canal cities, and where there are canals there are bridges! I also chose locations that would bring in the art history component as well as architecture, since my unit on bridges was integrating STEAM ideology.

**JoAnn Dixon:** Global collaboration was always something that I "wanted to do" but just had not taken the steps to get started. I thought if I went far and had an authentic experience, that I would take the risk, get connected, and get connecting! Since I had attended the ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) conference, both in person, and virtually for several years, as well as attending other virtual conferences, I was familiar with presenters and experts in the field. I know from my experiences that many Australian educators are involved in global collaboration efforts.

As I researched, I found that their coding and computational thinking curriculum is more defined than ours and I was seeking to benefit from their experience.

Australia met my criteria. The more I researched, it was evident to me that I would have a life-changing experience.

### ***What did your research process look like?***

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**Monica Harned:** For each component of the proposal, the guiding question I asked myself consistently was, "How will my students' benefit from the information I am bringing back?" If I had a limited answer or none at all then I knew it wouldn't be a worthwhile visit other than just for pleasure. Since bridge design construction is something that really interests me, I developed a unit that was problem-based and relatable to students. The unit will also focus on women in architecture and art history.



**JoAnn Dixon:** I searched for conferences in Australia and found an EdTech conference in July, which was a perfect match for my professional interests. I researched the Australian computer science/coding and computational thinking curriculum. I participated in virtual collaboration conferences and joined a group to help expand my network. I made note of the school calendars for the Australian states. I also surveyed my students to discover, if we were to collaborate with students in another country, which countries interested them and where was their passion? Fortunately, their passion and my passion overlapped and Australia was one of their front-runners. It was also interesting to note that many students had interests in other countries – good to keep in mind for future fellowships!

JoAnn with Australian students and their coding projects at Camberwell South School.

**Rebecca McVey:** I thought that if I could share information about the research taking place at CERN in Geneva, Switzerland from a first-hand experience, then it might make the possibility of a career in those fields a reality for students. I also realized that I would be in the heart of Europe's glacial melt and the resulting renewable energy initiatives. I envisioned that I could bring this content alive by immersing myself in the Alps, hiking from town to town, and documenting glacial retreat along the way. I researched self-guided hikes through the Alps and found a program (Sherpa Expeditions) that offered detailed maps, directions, and support. Finally I researched international science conferences and there was the "International Science and Technology Conference" taking place in Vienna, Austria. This fellowship project became my ideal triage of professional development, personal experience, and exciting curriculum based content.

**Susan Kopecki and Maria Avery:** We read books, travel guides, searched the web and emailed many organizations and individuals affiliated with this journey to put together the details of our fellowship. We met regularly on Facetime and collaborated on Google Docs to flesh out our ideas and write our project description. With each bit of research we conducted, a new avenue of discovery opened.



“Choose an idea that will foster your growth and development as an educator, one that you truly feel passionate about and will bring a new rich excitement to your students as you journey. Use multiple resources to plan your fellowship, make contacts with the professional community affiliated with your proposal and be open to the fact that your idea will grow and expand, be ready to embrace it wholeheartedly!”

-Susan Kopecki and Maria Avery

(L) At the Temple Teotihuacan, Mexico City, Mexico

### ***How did you find and contact experts?***

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**Monica Harned:** While I was in the midst of the application process, I informed my students of what I was proposing. A group of them began researching "cool bridges" and the Redzin Bridge came up on a Google search. As I researched further, I learned that it was an award winning bridge designed by Chief Civil Engineer, Jan Biliszczyk, who also was a professor at the Wroclaw University of Science and Technology. Since this part of Poland was on my itinerary, I simply emailed him introducing myself and my proposal and requesting an interview with him. He responded and agreed to the dates. It was THAT EASY! This was a bit harder to do in other locations however, not all of the modern bridges were designed by local engineers and some of the universities were harder to contact. One thing I did learn was to just ask! Most people want to share their knowledge and expertise and this proved true during my experience.

**JoAnn Dixon:** This was the most challenging for me at the time, although I do not view it as an obstacle now. As I researched global collaboration, I found an international organization called iEARN (with a slogan “learn with the world, not just about it”) I joined this organization and then had access to the emails of other members. I sent an email blast out to ALL like-minded Australian educators that belonged to iEARN, requesting to visit their classrooms and develop a collaborative relationship, if the opportunity developed.

### ***Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently or advice you would give?***

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**Monica Harned:** The one thing I wish I did differently during the planning phase was to inform Jan Biliszczyk of the other countries I was traveling to. During our interview, he informed me about the engineers he worked with in Prague and Amsterdam and how he could have connected us if he knew I was traveling to these places. Hence the advice, "Just ask!"

Prior to my departure, I had a different idea of how I was going to log my adventure. I wanted it to be interesting and educational so I struggled with the format. Ultimately, I used Facebook and Instagram to

log the journey in an informational way. Looking back, I wish I posted candid photos of where I was and what I was doing even if I was eating! Kids love this stuff! I also wish I took more pictures of myself in each of the locations. I know my students' would have loved to see me in more pictures. There's another piece of advice, include yourself in as many pictures as possible!

**JoAnn Dixon:** I wish that I had contacted experts earlier, and asked for more networking assistance during the planning process. I would recommend professional organizations and professional social networking as amazing ways to ask questions, make contacts, and expand your personal learning network (PLN). My PLN has increased substantially and is a helpful way to make connections and request information. If I had utilized this resource during the planning process, I would have made more connections prior to the conference.

**Susan Kopecki and Maria Avery:** Your fellowship proposal should come from an idea or a question that has been buzzing in your mind for a long time. Choose an idea that will foster your growth and development as an educator, one that you truly feel passionate about and will bring a new rich excitement to your students as you journey.



**Rebecca McVey:** Tackle your professional aspirations by focusing on the interests of your students and listening to your travel heart. If you truly love the fellowship you designed then the students will love experiencing the lessons through you.

Rebecca, hiking in the Alps, Switzerland.