Starting your Research: Inspiration to Destination

“I had to envision what I wanted my students to gain from my fellowship. I knew I wanted my fellowship to reflect STEAM ideology and get girls more involved in STEAM careers. First, I wrote the curriculum for my unit on bridges. I was then able to design the itinerary around my curriculum. Deciding where to go was difficult! 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: first, so I could brush up on my conversational skills and second, so I could potentially interview a civil engineer.”

Monica H.

“As a STEM teacher, I implement a unit that traces the water cycle in our town. I saw my students’ interest in the water cycle, and their enthusiasm inspired me to find ways to expand this unit and dig deeper, align it with NGSS Standards, and encourage my students to think more globally. Not only did I want to teach my students “where” the areas of greatest precipitation in our country are located, I want them to understand how water has formed various landscapes on the islands and how it impacts the plants, animals, ecosystems, and residents of Hawaii.”

Amy M.

“Because we already had a curriculum on Northern Ireland, we knew what more we needed. One area that we felt our course was lacking was the long background history of English colonialism/imperialism and Irish nationalism that predated the partition of Ireland. This is why we knew we needed to go to Dublin as well as Belfast and Derry. We wanted to be able to “read between the lines.” We are trying to become better historians of the place, so we wanted to experience it first-hand, through interviewing people, through studying at its most important museums, taking some of its tours, and in walking from here to there, literally, on its streets.”

Saul F.

Research Strategies & Contacting Experts

“While I was in the midst of the application process, a group of my students 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 Bilisyczuk, 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!”

Monica H.

“You can use the specialness of having this grant to make amazing connections. Because we were
visitors on a grant to a small country, many leaders were willing to meet with us when we
contacted them: a member of the Northern Irish parliament; a leading poet; the heads of three
trauma organizations in the North; an international human rights lawyer from Dublin; and an
international expert in NGO's from the Republic. We have had many invaluable experiences in
Ireland, but Kate (Healing Through Remembering) and Alan (WAVE Trauma Centre) may have the
most lasting effect of all on our teaching practice in the classroom. Both provided us with primary
documents of a greater intimacy and usefulness than we could have found anywhere else in the
world. From Alan, it was the volumes of short personal stories and children's art and remembrance.
From Kate, we received an entire curriculum binder based on her organization's remarkable
exhibition on everyday objects from the Troubles. The possibility for inquiry-based lessons and
empathy work was staggering.”

Saul F.

“I didn’t want to be a tourist. I didn’t just want to “see” different ecosystems; I wanted to learn
what threatened their survival, and I yearned to be part of ecological restoration efforts. It was
essential for me to dig deeper and have a true understanding of the unique complexities on Maui
and Kauai, so I contacted various conservation groups, joined numerous online communities, and
planned a volunteer-rich itinerary. I sought out reputable people and agencies to work with, like
the National Tropical Botanical Garden and the Kauai Marine Mammal Response Network, which is
a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration program. The Next Generation Science
Standards incorporate three-dimensional learning that relies on content, practices and cross-cutting
concepts. My time in Hawaii also focused on these three dimensions in my own learning. “

Amy M.

Advice from our Fellows

- Commit to the application process early enough that you can devote the time needed to
  research your trip. Realize the process could take 20+ hours, so start early.
- Plan well but have plan B as a backup. The more flexible and open you are to changes in
  your itinerary, the less stressed you will be.
• Talk to experts, they have insight that you won’t get from internet reviews.
• Be open minded to learning beyond the proposal. While we were in Savannah, we visited The Prohibition Museum which had just opened. It did not directly correlate to our objective of learning about enslavement in the colonial period, but we were able to make connections to our topic and get some ideas about how to potentially share and display information.
• Also, while you are at your destination, look for community events and celebrations to gain a more nuanced perspective on the culture.

Melissa & James P.

“I wouldn’t change anything about the way I conducted my research. I would, however, change the way I created my itinerary. I would not have planned multiple destinations on every day of my fellowship. On some days, I felt rushed. I equate that to a teacher “covering” material, not truly teaching it.”

Amy M.