One focus of our work in the **first phase (years 1 and 2) of the KSTF Teaching Fellowship** is building a strong cohort community where the members are able to bring celebrations as well as dilemmas of practice, where they are able to open themselves to feedback, and where they are able to thoughtfully hear someone else's dilemma and provide a new perspective.

Since the Fellowship Program began in 2002, we have learned a great deal about supporting beginning teachers. We recognize that the cohort community belongs to the Fellows, and as such, they should have agency over developing the community. We also know that creating a strong cohort community takes time and skill, so we work with our Fellows to develop those skills. We see the building of community as well as the development of agency over the community as important parts of developing leadership. We recognize the level of trust and vulnerability required for teachers to work together to come to new understandings about their own teaching practice. We also believe that coming together as a community to engage in this work is necessary both for individual and broader change. We have come to better understand the **power of the collective in facilitating change** and have spent a lot of time thinking about ways to develop relationships with a group of **early-career teachers**, specifically within a cohort, as a first step toward developing **leading teachers**.

Through examining our own work with Fellows and following their lead, we have come to see a trajectory emerge in how we support Fellows in developing their community and the skills needed to be a member of that community: 1) offering structure, 2) inviting feedback, and 3) supporting agency.

Offering Structure

First, we focus on welcoming Fellows into the community and work with them, through structures we provide, to begin building and shaping their community. Beginning at orientation, Fellows work in a variety of group structures. One group that we have found to be particularly meaningful for building community is what we refer to as their home group. A home group is comprised of five to six Fellows who teach various science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in various contexts. This group serves as a primary group for discussions, check-ins and general support. We see this as an important way to begin to develop vulnerability in small group sharing as well as to have multiple perspectives in conversations. Within these groups as well as the whole cohort, we provide some basic working agreements that Fellows work under as a way to begin to reflect on their participation. Over the next few months, Fellows begin to think about how those agreements are being enacted and are supporting/inhibiting their learning. Once Fellows have worked together more closely and have a better understanding of how individually and collectively they work as a cohort, they then develop their own cohort group norms. We see the knitting together of the cohort as a precursor to being vulnerable in both sharing their own stories and pushing each other to think critically about their own practices, both of which are aspects of leadership. We also hope to support Fellows to understand the importance of developing norms and model ways Fellows might interact with colleagues in their schools.

Inviting Feedback

Over the course of the first year, we invite the Fellows in to give us feedback on their experiences in the Fellowship, both during and in between meetings. It's important to both develop ownership over the community as well as begin to develop the skills to give feedback to people. This feedback occurs in a variety of ways. For example, we ask for volunteers to participate in a focus group before and after meetings to provide feedback on our plans for and analysis of the meeting. We also invite the entire cohort to provide feedback in an asynchronous way on various planning documents. During meetings, we seek feedback on the enactment of activities through quick response surveys and use this information to be responsive to the needs of the cohort. This is our first step in helping them develop agency over their cohort. We see this also as a way for them to practice reflecting on the needs of the group and articulating feedback to others, both of which are important aspects of leadership.

Supporting Agency

By Year 2, Fellows exercise full agency in shaping and monitoring their community's norms and more broadly, how they are functioning as a community. We purposefully turn over some of the planning of community building activities to Fellows. We work with them at first to be co-planners of the activities that they will enact during their second summer meeting, then we transition to being thinking partners on their plans for fall and spring meetings. Over the past year, the second-year Fellows have planned and implemented activities to develop cohort norms, community building activities, and activities that focused on broader issues that were important to this particular cohort at that particular moment.

We see all of these opportunities as ways for Fellows to build and have ownership over their community. Additionally, these are all important skills for our Fellows to learn, practice and reflect on in a safe space as they begin to move to implementing these ideas in their own schools. We hope that through this work in the cohort, Fellows recognize the need for building community to create a space to be vulnerable—in asking for, giving and receiving feedback—as a way to continually improve teaching. During the first phase of the Fellowship, we've given them a safe space to learn and begin to practice these basic leadership skills.