

SYSTEMS ARTISTRY FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Positive Deviants

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OVERVIEW

FELLOWSHIP DETAILS

LEARNING LANDSCAPE

ARE YOU A POSITIVE DEVIANT?

ARC OF THE PROGRAM

"In any community there are people whose uncommon but successful behaviors or strategies enable them to find better solutions to a problem than their peers, despite facing similar challenges and having no extra resources or knowledge than their peers. These individuals are referred to as *positive deviants*."

Wikipedia



Overview

Welcome to the apocalypse!

The horsemen may be riding more slowly than we imagined. And its impact varies wildly depending how we are situated in the world. But here it is. We find ourselves at a threshold again. A place of peril and potential. Of risk and renewal. Established institutions, stories and systems of all kinds are unravelling before our eyes and our efforts to fix them seem to be causing a host of new and unanticipated challenges. At the same time, we sense powerful patterns emerging amidst the turbulence that offer new ways of being – with ourselves, with each other and with the natural world on which we depend.

In this moment, **we are convening a community of dangerous dreamers.**

Dangerous because their path of service involves daring acts of creation intended to impact whole systems in practical and meaningful ways.
Dreamers because they are attuned to the more mysterious voices of soul, of land and of possibility yet unseen. Perhaps **you** are such a dangerous dreamer.

Positive Deviants is an uncommon fellowship dedicated to *systems artistry*. It is designed to support fellows to cultivate both the inner capacities and outer skills required to work effectively in complex challenge domains. It is a **learning community** intent on exploring evolutionary change – within ourselves and across the systems that we inhabit. It is a **leadership development journey** to develop the skills and sensibilities needed to thrive in complexity. It is a **community of practitioners** who know that multiple ways of knowing, doing and being are necessary to guide

systems transition, and that social and self-awareness are required in equal measure. It is a **cadre of dedicated changemakers** who know that how we participate in this moment *matters*.

There are many ways to intervene skillfully in social ecosystems – to influence the course of events as they unfold. The pattern of tomorrow depends on what we do today. It holds the power to change the story.

Positive Deviants is a fellowship for people who **really** want to change the story.

What Is a Positive Deviant?

A positive deviant is an outlier – a person or group that succeeds despite the odds. Positive Deviance reminds us to:

- * Look for outliers – people and processes whose outcome deviates in a positive way from the norm
- * Seek patterns of emergence and possibility already alive within any system
- * Focus on what's working rather than what's missing or broken
- * Recognize that change comes from within
- * Remain perpetually curious, respectful and humble
- * Embrace difference and diversity as a vital community resource



"I often feel I am trapped
inside someone else's imagination,
and I must engage my own imagination
in order to break free."

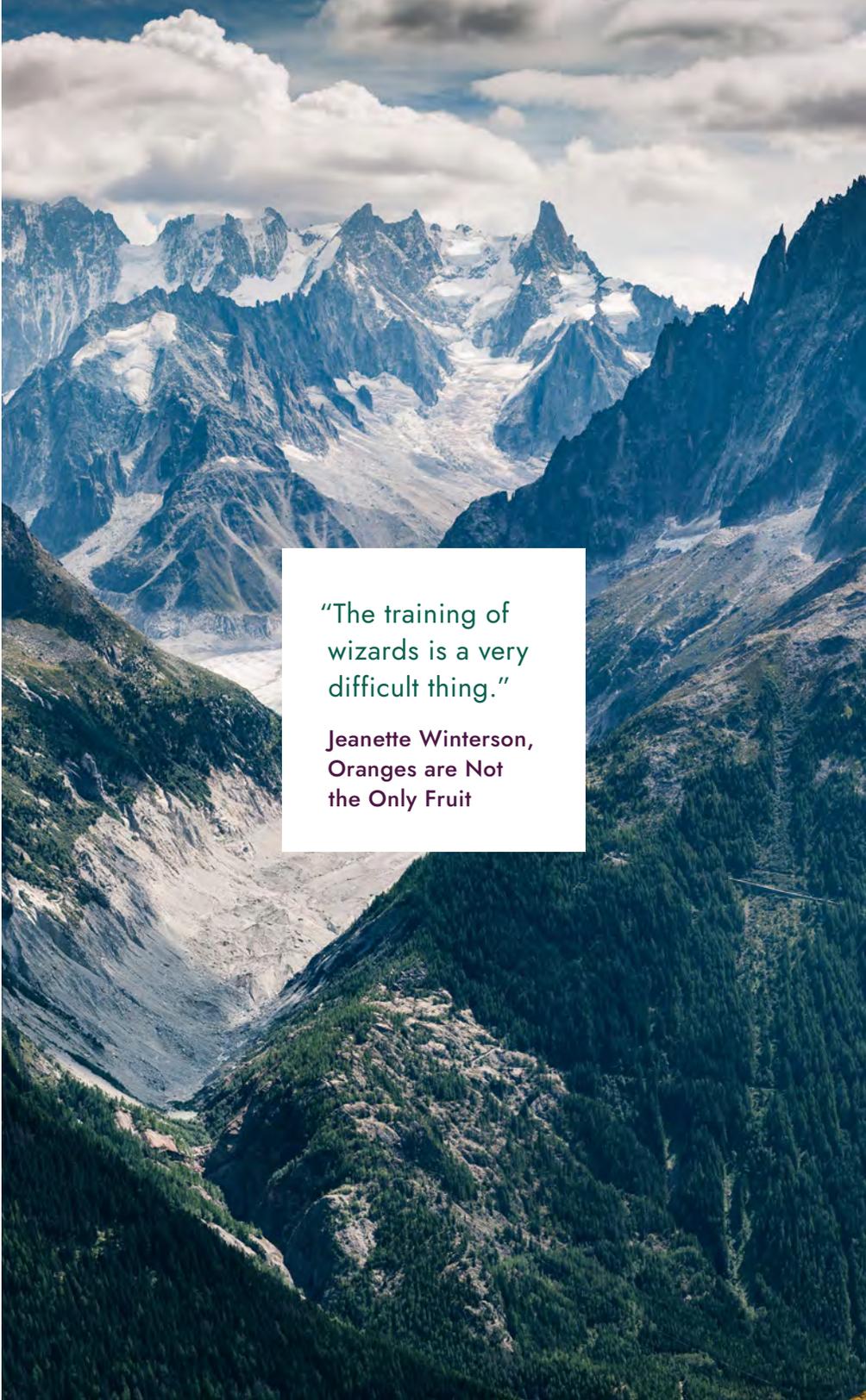
adrienne maree brown,
Emergent Strategy:
Shaping Change,
Changing Worlds

Fellowship Details

Positive Deviants is an extended developmental journey with a small cohort of fellow travellers. Over 9 months, fellows will participate in 4 learning modules; two in-person retreats and two online sessions. There is also the option to participate in two elective retreats. Between each module, there is a steady rhythm of personal coaching, systems mentoring, online content and ongoing practice. The program framework is rooted in Wolf Willow's approach to transformative learning for systems leaders.

Over the course of the fellowship, participants are invited to bring a heightened level of intentionality, experimentation and reflexivity to their lives and work, for it is here that the most significant learning and action will take place. Such intentionality requires significant commitment and invites full participation.

The Fellowship offers no degrees or certificates. It is not meant to be prestigious. It is intended to be a fierce and beautiful crucible that develops capacity for those committed to shaping and influencing whole systems.



“The training of wizards is a very difficult thing.”

Jeanette Winterson,
**Oranges are Not
the Only Fruit**

Learning Landscape

New Leadership for Systems Transition

Positive Deviants is intended to cultivate the skillful leadership required for guiding systems transition and fostering enduring change. We think of this as *systems artistry*...a dynamic blend of competencies and capacities embodied by transformative social innovators, systems entrepreneurs and what renowned Canadian community organizer Al Etmanski calls *wise travelers*. These are people who are not only deeply committed to evolutionary change but equally committed to finding the most skillful and effective way to bring about such change – even if it requires significant personal change within themselves.

The Fellowship learning landscape and program design have been influenced by recent research¹ that identified 8 common factors shared by profoundly transformative social innovators across a broad range of impactful systems change initiatives. These are:

1. The capacity to **articulate** a powerful and appealing “counter-**truth**” that presents a compelling alternative vision to the current reality
2. A powerful and often courageous **tenacity** in moving the desired change forward –even if that requires compromise
3. The skill, **agility** and risk tolerance to sense and seize opportunity when it opens up
4. A long-term **commitment** and perspective that results in deep ‘selflessness’ (“*it’s not about me*”)
5. The self-awareness and maturity necessary to tolerate **paradox** and ambiguity
6. The capacity to engage **conflict** and shadow generatively
7. Alignment with deep **purpose**
8. A systems orientation and **cross-scale** approach to change

What follows are four domains that make up the *Positive Deviants* Learning Landscape. These are not a set of learning outcomes or curriculum objectives but rather a description of the developmental terrain that we must all cultivate as practitioners.

¹ Westley, F., & McGowan, K. (Eds.). (2017). *The Evolution of Social Innovation: Building Resilience Through Transitions*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

1. SEEING SYSTEMS:

Becoming a Systems Seer

As *systems seers*, we cultivate our capacity to:

Track Patterns & Possibilities

Become increasingly sensitive to patterns, dynamics and possibilities alive within a system.

Expand Perspective

Bring a consistent 'systems mindset' and relational perspective to all our work.

Develop Systems Awareness

Develop practical and applied fluency with the language and core concepts of complexity, resilience, social innovation and systems change

Make System Dynamics Visible

Become more skillful in mapping complex social systems in ways that build shared understanding and identifies opportunities for intervention, influence, leverage and cross-scale action.

Ask Powerful Questions

Ignite our curiosity and learn to ask increasingly potent questions that can destabilize and enrich habitual ways of seeing and acting

2. GUIDING TRANSITION:

The Art of Skillful Systems Shaping

As *systems transition guides*, we cultivate our capacity to:

Design for Impact

Interact skillfully with systems in order to design cross-scale strategies using tools, and tactics drawn from a wide range of systems traditions.

Engage with Agility

Bring an adaptive mindset, creative imagination and an action-learning orientation to our work

Draw upon Multiple Traditions

Understand the power of artistic, aesthetic, poetic, symbolic and ritual processes in shaping culture and creating the conditions for systems change

Thrive in Uncertainty

Become more comfortable with uncertainty, liminality, paradox, confusion and risk as inevitable fellow-travelers and potential allies.

Harness the Power of Language

Arouse a 'mythic' sensibility and communicate powerfully using empowering stories to build shared vision and invite others into greater possibility.

3. MOVING WITH AWARENESS:

Awakening the Conscious Practitioner

As *conscious practitioners*, we cultivate our capacity to:

Deepen Inner Clarity

Perceive our own tacit assumptions, socio-cultural worldviews, biases and conceptual scaffolding and the ways these impact our capacity to act skillfully.

Respond, Not React

Understand and shift our own habitual patterns of reactive thinking and feeling, conditioned tendencies, limiting stories, maladaptive mindsets, and protective strategies.

Adapt a Growth Mindset

Engage in sustained practices that enable us to 'be still' and move with centered presence in the midst of hyper-complex, confusing and high stress situations. Be able to transmute difficulty into potential for growth.

Know Your Unique Potential

Maintain a conscious conversation with our own deep sense of purpose and calling, particular gifts, and the emergent edge of our calling.

Practice with Intention

Sustain ongoing practices that cultivate complexity 'metaskills', engage the whole person and promote a felt sense of well-being.

4. CONNECTING CONSCIOUSLY:

Tending the Web of Relatedness

As *conscious connectors*, we cultivate our capacity to:

Engage Power

Maintain empathy, open-heartedness, listen deeply and relate with greater intimacy and dignity across barriers of difference, power, privilege, position and perspective

Engage Conflict Generatively

Work creatively and courageously with conflict and resistance

Experience Wholism

Embody an eco-centric experience of relatedness, connection, interdependence and reciprocity with both the human and other-than-human worlds.

Think and Act Like a Movement

Work with a collaborative mindset that seeks to build partnership, alliance, inclusion, ethical shared space, engagement, commonality and collective purpose across diverse networks of stakeholders

Convene Wisely

Use a range of process skills and tools to facilitate deep listening, collaborative inquiry, generative dialogue, shared reflection, analysis and meaning-making.



Are You a Positive Deviant?

"You walking,
your footprints
are the road,
and nothing else."

Antonio Machado,
Proverbs and Tiny Songs

Who This Is For

Are you serious about changing the story related to an issue of critical concern in Canada? *Positive Deviants* is designed for dedicated changemakers from any sector who want to deepen their capacity for influencing whole systems and whose work holds the potential for significant impact.

Applicants will have a long-term commitment to cultivating the skills and personal qualities needed in complex change processes. The program offers a limited number of places, each with a full scholarship, for changemakers who are likely to have learned some of their most important lessons outside formal education - whether it be on the streets or on the land, in combat, caring for another, through lived experience of marginalization, as an entrepreneur making waves, or as an intrapreneur working quietly behind the scenes in their organization. It's not important whether you identify as a social innovator, a complexity leader, an activist, or any other label but that one way or another you've been working for change most of your life. If you look through the qualities described here and recognize important parts of yourself, then we'd love to hear from you.

We particularly welcome applications from those trusted by and innovating within/across diverse contexts, especially within BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) communities and others working towards an inclusive future.

Personal Qualities

Calling. You have a strong inner calling – a clear sense of your part to play in these times. Following that calling is very important to you – even if it has left you feeling like a misfit at times.

Commitment. It doesn't have to be a single issue. But your commitment to creative change is bone-deep, long-term and very real. We're looking for people who are disciplined and tenacious in pursuit of that commitment. Relentless. Driven. Maybe even a bit obsessive.

Accountability. You are genuinely accountable to the community or cause that you serve. It's a long-standing – even life-time – commitment. When asked, those community members will attest to your commitment and integrity. And you embody the kind of leadership accountability that comes up with possibilities and next steps rather than looking for excuses.

Curiosity. You have an insatiable drive to learn, to question, to probe and to expand your understanding and awareness. And you're just as willing to ask questions that challenge your own assumptions and certainties as those of others. By itself, formal education is not enough. We are looking for people who are smart, reflective, who can think critically and who understand the value of a good theoretical model.

Visionary action. At your core, you are a practitioner — a creative ‘doer’. Your past is likely littered with projects, organizations, programs, platforms, movements, campaigns, processes or artworks that you have founded, built, initiated, tried. These initiatives may be very visible to others, but they could also be executed quietly in the margins. There will undoubtedly be juicy failures in there too.

Audacity. You are willing to risk impact. You might have been terrified in the moment, but you’ve taken big risks or made meaningful sacrifices to speak up, step in or take action in service of your truth or cause. When the right door opens just a crack, you go for it.

Honouring the invisible. You know there are many ways of knowing and you are wide open to exploring them. The body’s wisdom. The visionary imagination. The open heart. The deep mind. The vitality of spirit and soul. The teachings of wild landscapes. You have a longing to bring the full spectrum of your intelligence online.

Self-aware. We are looking for mature, grounded people who move with mindfulness. You have begun to understand how your own vulnerabilities, reactivity, unresolved wounds, personal biases and overall state of consciousness impact relationships and systems and you’re already committed to evolutionary inner work.



“A social innovation is any initiative (product, process, program, project, or platform) that challenges and, over time, contributes to changing the defining routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of the broader social system in which it is introduced. Successful social innovations have durability, scale and transformative impact.”

Frances Westley, 2014

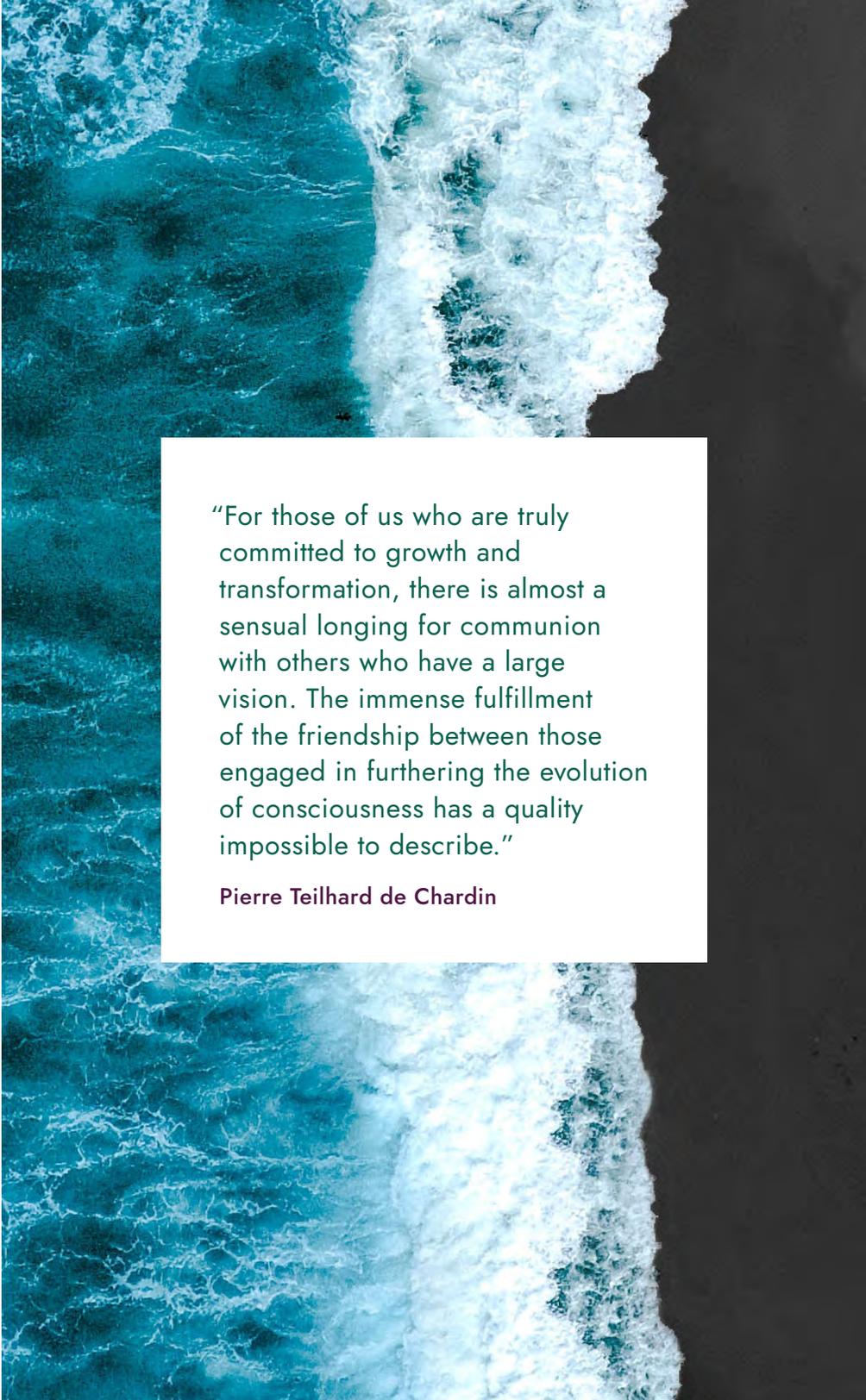
Capacity for Impact

Transformative. Your work has the potential to make a meaningful impact. Following Frances Westley's definition above, we are looking for people who are intent on *'changing the defining routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of the broader social system'*. You may be working at a local level. But your work holds the very real possibility of transformative impact at the scale of whole socio-cultural and eco-systems.

Systemic. You already have a lived systems orientation. The language of complexity and the tools of systems intervention are familiar and you are actively looking to put those insights into practice at a new level.

Connected. You're already in the system. You have existing relationships and viable entry points into the parts of the system you want to shift. Working in – or on – that system is part of your daily reality. You already have some degree of skills, tools, relationships, placement and experience. It's possible you have recently hit the wall or experienced some form of shattering realization that what you are doing is not working and something fundamental in your way of working needs to shift.

Creativity. We're particularly interested in ideas and approaches that are genuinely fresh and innovative. It might be something utterly new that has never been seen before. It might be an act of bricolage – the creative recombination of familiar forms. Or it might involve the rediscovery of original teachings to address contemporary challenges.



"For those of us who are truly committed to growth and transformation, there is almost a sensual longing for communion with others who have a large vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendship between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality impossible to describe."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Arc of the Program

IMMERSIONS I & II: Ignition & Integration

The opening and closing immersions are 5 day in-person retreats that explore self and system. They are highly experiential, somewhat emergent and invite co-creation. The Ignition Immersion builds a foundation for the Fellowship where we get to know one another and learn about each other's stories, work, practices, dreams, challenges and systems. Participants get clear about the type of change – personal, relational and systemic – that they are working towards over the coming months and what it will really take to foster. The Integration Immersion closes our time together and involves harvesting insights, renewing commitments and taking creative action. Throughout both immersions we'll explore the systems we are working in through new lenses and experiment with a range of practices that can build our capacity for engaging complexity.

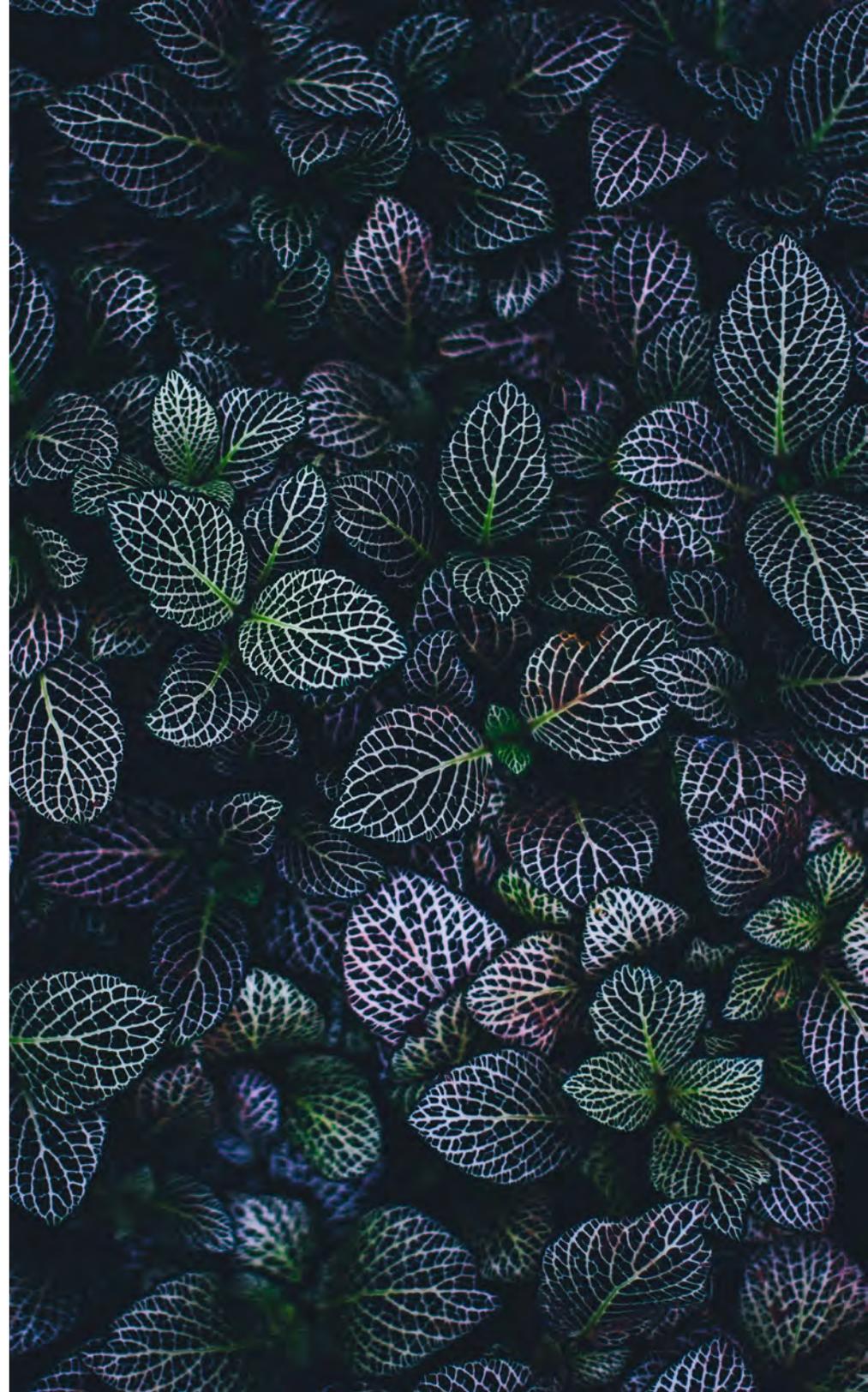
ELECTIVE: Deep Practice

Deep Practice is a time of renewal and reconnection. It is something like a meditation retreat that offers a full spectrum of practices to cultivate complexity capabilities. It will offer participants new tools to explore conditioned tendencies and limiting stories. We will engage in a range of practices that can help us access our most creative and compassionate 'intelligence' that is invariably required if we are to meet conflict and resistance generatively. We'll use a range of creative, somatic and reflective practices to deepen a conversation with our depth, complexity and the emergent edge of our 'becoming'. Participants will be introduced to practices from the contemplative traditions, from dance and conscious movement, and from the martial arts. The intent here is become more comfortable with uncertainty, liminality, paradox, confusion and risk as inevitable fellow-travellers and potential allies in the work of systems shaping.

ELECTIVE:

Listening To The Land

Natural eco-systems offer a beautiful living model to understand the dynamics and principles of complex socio-cultural systems. In Listening to the Land, participants develop a greater understanding of complex living systems and undergo an extended period of reflective solitude in a wild landscape. We'll explore the ecology of worldview, purpose, mindset and connection and cultivate profound new capabilities for pattern tracking, and deep listening. We'll learn to articulate, align with and act from with a deep sense of purpose, calling, commitment and motivation; and will be encouraged to embody the unique systems 'niche' that we're each called to inhabit in this time - and from which we can make our distinctive contribution.



Distance Learning & Integration

The Fellowship is designed to ensure that practitioner's personal and professional lived experiences are the primary domains for learning and experimentation. Integration, application and ongoing learning between residential modules are central features of the Fellowship program. In service of this view, we include the following distance learning elements:

Coaching & Mentoring (approximately 3–4 hrs/month)

There will be several opportunities available:

- * Personal coaching and group coaching: each participant will have regular one-on-one calls with a personal coach focused around their 'inner work' and personal journey.
- * Systems coaching: participants will have regular opportunities – both individually and collectively - to access coaching around their systems intervention work.
- * Mentoring: where appropriate, we will draw on our collective networks to help participants build relationships with potential mentors, allies and supporters.

Online Sessions (2 x 8 weeks)

There are two 8 week online 'semesters' during Positive Deviants. Each week includes a two hour virtual gathering with live sessions from leading systems practitioners. There will be group discussion and check-in sessions and participants will receive access to a dedicated social niche networking platform where they will remain connected with each other and with faculty, be able to engage, ask questions, post insights and deepen connections and learning.

Personal Practice (approximately 20 min/day)

Practice is central. We become what we consistently practice. Participants will be supported to develop and undertake a personalized practice routine. This is likely to include general practices (things that all participants do such as self-awareness, meditation and mindfulness training) as well as specific practices (activities that are intended to help individual participants address particular issues and cultivate particular capacities). Where appropriate, baseline metrics will be established and tracked over the course of the program.

Total required time investment/week: approximately 2.5 hours

INTERESTED IN APPLYING?

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