



Letter to Fellows

New Year, New Lingo!

January 2025

Dear Rowland Fellows,

Happy New Year! I hope your holidays have been joyful.

The arrival of a new year always gives us the chance to take stock before forging ahead, and so I'll take a moment to do that here. As you already know, the Rowland Foundation is coming through a period of rapid growth, with updates to our Fellowship model (e.g., now serving Grades 5-12; now offering \$125,000 as a single Rowland Fellowship award and \$150,000 for partners), as well as important new grant strategies (e.g., The Diversifying the Educator Workforce Grant; The New Teacher Fund).

Meanwhile, we continue to learn from our work with Rowland Fellows and strive to keep improving on our cohort model to better support their work. Some of this innovation has led to new terminology, so to keep our veteran Rowland Fellows abreast of these changes, I thought I'd share some of these new terms and strategies here.

Teacher on Special Assignment is how we now describe the status of Rowland Fellows during their first year. This change in language is intentional. When I was a Fellow back in 2009, we described the time when we were released from teaching duties to do Fellowship work as a *sabbatical*, but that's a bit of a misnomer. After all, the hard work of leading your school team to advance your Fellowship work is pretty different from a college professor

who spends a year writing in a tropical locale! Also, several school leaders have told me that they're worried about "optics" as they try to pass their school budget, so it's important for their community to know that Rowland Fellows are still working hard for their schools, just doing a different kind of work. We want people to know that Rowland Fellows are not "on leave", but serving their schools in a different capacity for a year, like a *teacher on special assignment*, which is a common practice for districts in some states.

The Creative Artifact is a new requirement for Fellowship applications. For several years now, we've invited applicants to add media to our text-heavy application, and several candidates have included wonderful videos. In the spirit of honoring creativity and different ways of knowing, we have now made this a required element of the application, but not necessarily video — prospective Rowland Fellows are invited to submit a slide deck, a podcast, a blog post, an infographic, photography, artwork, music, or any other media that helps illustrate the rationale for their proposal and/or the climate and culture of their school community. We believe that asking Fellowship candidates for a *creative artifact* conveys that we care about innovation, creativity, UDL, and strong communication skills.

The Fellowship Launch is a new daylong session that we host with new Rowland Fellows and their principals in the spring so that they can get the basics in place for the Fellowship to start successfully in the fall. It's time well spent, and an important opportunity for Fellows and principals to strategize ways to bring colleagues, students, and community members into the work. We also take the opportunity to introduce New Fellows and their principals to some collaborative practices that they can take back to their schools. *The Fellowship Launch*, which comes after New Fellows Orientation and the Annual Dinner, is an ideal time for Fellows and principals to do some early spring visioning and planning together, so they can get a jump on the work.

The Collaborative Work Group is the new version of what we used to call the "Steering Committee". Aside from the fact that steering committees are more common in the corporate sector, they also traditionally play an advisory role for an organization or project. With our emphasis on shared leadership, we want the focus to be on shared ownership of the work and for the *Collaborative Work Group* to operate more like a design team. In order to achieve this, our new 2025 Fellowship MOU requires Rowland Fellows to meet weekly with their Collaborative Work Group. Of course, collaborative work is also a key component of our cohort structure, which we hope can serve as a model for ways to collaborate in schools.

The Multitrack Agenda is a tool that Senior Associate Jeanie Phillips first introduced me to, and now it's a mainstay of our cohort meetings and Fellows' collaborative work groups. As

you can see in [this example](#), there is an extra column to explicitly state the intended purpose of each agenda item. In addition to providing clarity of purpose and transparency, this approach also forces the day's planners to make tough choices about how time will be spent...which is an expression of values, of course. We've found that operating with this level of intentionality seems simple, but is, in fact, a pretty rigorous practice that always raises new questions about how we want to convene, collaborate, and spend the most precious resource of all — time together. If you'd like to go deeper on this topic, or see how it connects to Freire's concept of *praxis*, you can geek out with the [article that Jeanie & I wrote together](#).

The Rowland Ripple is a simple enough idea, namely that we hope innovation will ripple out from each Rowland Fellowship, to the cohort, to the wider Rowland Network, to Vermont schools at large... and beyond! It's an idea that we've been discussing for several years now, but one that was given new life when Janis Boulbol (RF21) & Senior Associate Jean Berthiaume sparked a conversation at a recent All Fellows Retreat. We've been using this concept more openly lately, as a way to introduce our [Theory of Action](#) to a wider audience, and to emphasize that we intend to spread innovation by deprivatizing our practice and disseminating school change strategies. For more on this, you can hear [VTCLA Executive Director Jeff Evans discussing this with me here](#).

There you go — some new Rowland Foundation lingo for the new year! I hope that you've enjoyed this short glossary, and I want to clarify that we're not just trying to generate more jargon here. These new terms reflect new structures and strategies at the Rowland Foundation. Perhaps most importantly, we are trying to be intentional in our practices and our language.

I wish you a happy and safe 2025.

Take care and see you soon,

Mike

P.S. If you're thinking about your intentions for the year ahead, I love these [6 Practices for Cultivating Happiness as Taught by Thich Nhat Hanh](#).

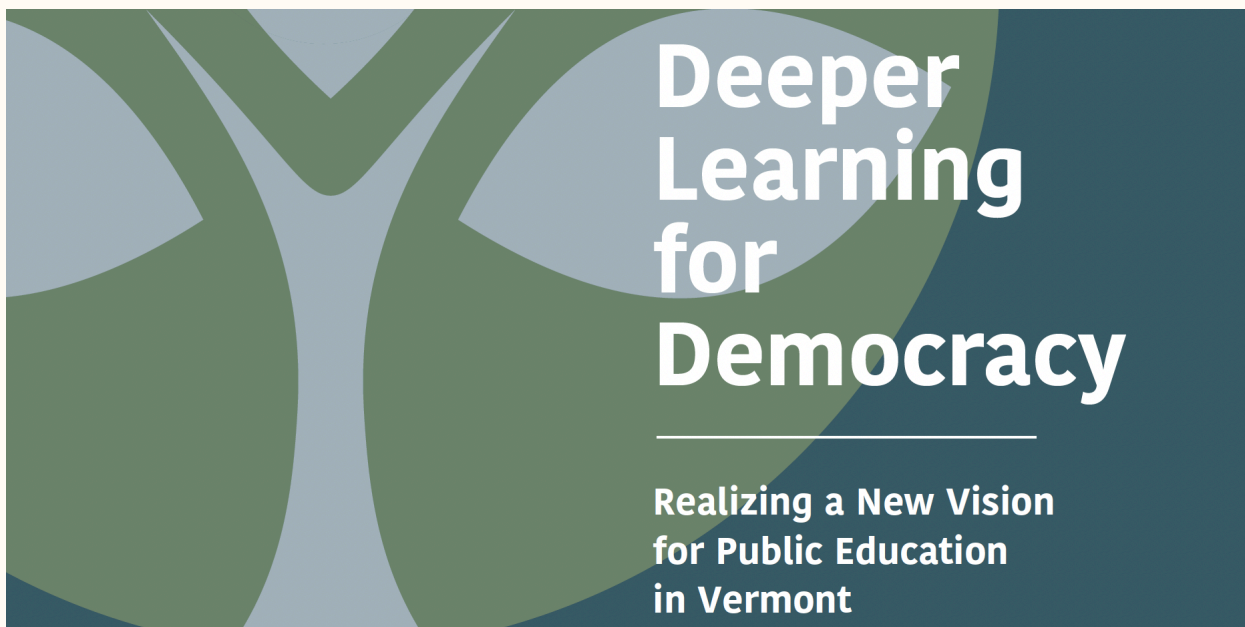
P.P.S. If you're interested in school as a public good and democratic institution, check out this recent article from [The Stanford Social Innovation Review, A Democratic Vision for Public Schools](#).

P.P.S. If you see “message clipped” at the bottom of this newsletter, please click through! Depending on how many photos we have, Gmail will sometimes truncate this newsletter.

Rowland Foundation Updates

Rowland Encore Grant

Deeper Learning White Paper



Congratulations to our 2023 Rowland Encore Grant Team! Jess DeCarolis (RF09), Gabe Hamilton (RF15), Andrew Jones (RF15) & Michael Ruppel (RF17) have just published [Deeper Learning for Democracy: Realizing a New Vision for Public Education in Vermont](#). At a time when so many educators suffer from “initiative fatigue” these Rowland Fellow authors make helpful connections between different education policies to strengthen the coherence of our school change work. Definitely check out this white paper, if you’re interested in improving how we teach transferable skills, cultivate inquiry-driven learning, foster community, or prepare students for citizenship & careers in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Catching Up

Meet with the Rowland Executive Director



John Painter (RF14) met with Executive Director Mike Martin recently in Burlington to catch up and talk shop. Mike is always available for meetings with Rowland Fellows—keep in touch!



Thanks to the 2016 Fellowship work of Bianca McKeen, Jen Wigmore & Sarah Hagge, Rutland's PLACE program is still thriving and was recently [featured in the Rutland Herald](#).
"Thank you Rowland Foundation. Growing and thriving 8 years later." –Bill Olsen

Celebrations



Congratulations to Sabrina Westdijk (RF17)! After serving as Interim Principal, she was recently named Principal of Burlington High School! You can [see the WCAX report here](#).



Congratulations to Tim O'Leary (RF20)! After serving as Assistant Principal last semester, he was recently [promoted to Lead Principal of Charlotte Central School](#).



Congratulations to Mike McRaith (RF13) for his recent interview on the [Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association \(VTCLA\) Podcast](#) with Executive Director Jeff Evans.

