



The
ROWLAND
Foundation

Investing in
Vermont's Teachers

Letter to Fellows

In-Human Meetings

November 2025

Dear Rowland Fellows,

It was wonderful to see so many of you last week at the [Annual Conference](#) and [All Fellows Retreat & Social](#). Thank you for coming out and showing up!

Isn't it funny to think that we never used to say "in-person meetings"? I mean, it used to be obvious that any meeting would be in person, otherwise you would say conference call or *online meeting*. It was only once online meetings became so prevalent that we had to say *in-person*, just to be clear.

This shift in language is a good bellwether of technological or societal change. For example, we used to say *automatic* to describe cars when most transmissions weren't yet auto-shifting, but now that most cars change gears without us, we say *manual* for a car that doesn't. Just like we used to say *cell phone* when they were rarer, but now say *landline*. We used to say *e-mail*, but now say *snail mail* for correspondence with paper and postage. And of course, calling a recording *vinyl* only became necessary when albums took on new forms. We currently say *AI-generated* to note its presence in articles or videos, but sometime soon we'll probably name anything not made by AI with a term like *human-crafted*. In the same way, we used to say *virtual* to identify the digital zones of our daily lives, but as more and more of our attention is sucked into those spaces, we increasingly say *IRL* for "In Real Life" . .

. an ever shrinking part of our existence, just like landlines, manual transmissions, and analog products made by humans.

This why I keep saying *in-human* to refer to in-person meetings — not because I’m keen to coin goofy new terms, but rather because **I want to draw attention to the unique qualities of people coming together in person**, and not just “jumping on zoom” or “phoning it in”. After all, as technology improves, why would we meet in person anymore? That’s the question I’m driving at with my new term “in-human”, which is just awkward and clunky enough, I hope, to get people to reexamine our meeting routines.

Meeting in person is expensive! In order to join one of these meetings, you may need to get sub coverage, or child care, or find parking, or set aside something you were working on — or all of the above! No turning off the video and vaguely following along while you conveniently multitask and get a snack in the kitchen. So, when you think about it, why would we meet in person at all?

What’s more, even though you would think that any meeting of humans would be, well, *humane*, it’s not always so. For many of us teachers, an in-person meeting means a cramped, windowless room with fluorescent lights, stale air, and lots of sugar-doping with Jolly Ranchers and Hershey Kisses so that people can just sort of power through. Your seating may be arranged so that you can’t make eye contact with others and can’t move your body for extended periods of time. Your sense of sound and touch will probably be offended, too, with hard surfaces all around, from laminated particle board tables, to linoleum floors, to cinderblock walls. Bad acoustics, harsh light, constricted movement . . . No wonder everyone wants to get out of meetings!

But wait a minute, remember when everything was virtual during the pandemic and everyone felt miserable, isolated, alienated, adrift, and cut off? So humans evidently do get something out of coming together in person. Well, **what if we actually designed for it with intention, instead of the crappy way we usually do meetings?**

That’s what we try to do in our Rowland Foundation work. We try to design for in-human meetings that play to community, connection, and creativity. And to do any of those things well, it’s good to remember that our bodies are not just transportation for our brains. Our bodies are finely tuned social interaction machines. Our bodies learn in ways that AI cannot. Our bodies will interfere with our cognitive and collaborative processes if we disregard them. To connect back to our Rowland Foundation mission, we believe that [*the way we work*](#) in **intentional learning communities** — and not just big ideas — will change the culture and climate of schools.

This is why I kept saying “in-human” at the Rowland Conference last week, to draw everyone’s attention to how special the moment was, to appreciate that great gathering as an opportunity for connection, learning, laughter, and joy — all things that lead to solidarity, which is something that scares the hell out of would-be dictators. In this way, in-human meetings can honor our humanity and also serve as acts of resistance. The fact that our digital lives are addled with anxiety, fear, distrust, and cynicism plays into the hands of the tech lords and aspiring oligarchs. It’s strange to say it, but coming together with generosity, curiosity, and hopefulness is actually subversive in this moment. Maybe that’s why the first amendment of our country’s Constitution protects the right to assembly, including the right to association. There is power in numbers!

Take good care of yourself, my fellow humans.

See you soon,

Mike

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.

P.P.S. I mentioned the idea of solidarity above. There’s a particularly beautiful definition of **transformative solidarity** in the [Vermont IRIS Framework](#) (pp. 4-5). Big idea: all freedom struggles are intertwined.

P.P.P.S. Do you ever wonder, *how did we get here?* Are you worried about the intersection of Big Tech & Democracy? Were you intrigued by the *technofeudalism* authors I mentioned in the [October newsletter](#)? If so, [check out this interview](#) with the brilliant and funny Cory Doctorow, whose [books *Content and Little Brother*](#) greatly influenced me as a Rowland Fellow back in ‘09.

Rowland Foundation Updates

Do You Know a Future Rowland Fellow?

New Fellows Application Window Open!



As a teacher can you think of anything better than a Rowland Fellowship, when it comes to career opportunities? A Rowland Fellowship is a sort of magical combination of validation, collaboration, innovation, connection, reflection, freedom, challenges, and creativity! Wouldn't you love this opportunity for the teachers at your school? Or your kid's school? Or your friend's school? Well please spread the word and tell the teachers you know to apply. **We are now accepting 2026 Rowland Fellowship applications through December 31, 2025.** For more information, [check out our website](#) or contact us at info@therowlandfoundation.org.

The 14th Annual Rowland Conference Baratunde Connects!



It was another great Rowland Conference this year. **Baratunde Thurston's** brilliant ideas and stand-up talents had over 400 teachers, students, administrators, and legislators laughing, reflecting, and imagining a better country together. Sincere thanks to our Rowland Foundation Staff and registration table volunteers for their hard work—and to our Board of Trustees for ardently supporting this annual tradition. Special thanks to Abby Paige for her powerful [land acknowledgement](#). Warm thanks to UVM Events for being so responsive in their work with us again this year, from providing accommodations to running this [new Rowland Foundation slidedeck](#) of [our guiding principles](#) for conference-goers. Stay tuned for the keynote address and conference materials which will soon be shared on our website! In the meantime you can see these [photos from our 14th Annual Conference](#) (*photo credit: Lori Lisai*) and this [keynote preview](#) with the password: 2025Rowland.

Rowland DEW Scholars at the Annual Conference

Diversifying the Educator Workforce



Special thanks to our [Rowland DEW Scholars](#) who made time to present or participate in this year's conference! Seen here, **Esther Charlestin** (*above left*) introducing keynote speaker Baratunde Thurston; **Infinite Culcleasure**, who presented a workshop for the second year in a row, with **Ali Beddoe** (*above center*); and **Safia Haji** (*above right*).

All Fellows Retreat & Social

Braiding the Curriculum



Thanks again to all of the Rowland Fellows and Rowland DEW Scholars who made time to come together at this year's All Fellows Retreat & Social. Special thanks to **Emily Gilmore (RF17)** & **Jeanie Phillips (RF14)** to **Rowland DEW Scholar & VT State Board of Education Member Mohamed Diop** for his [opening remarks on culturally responsive teaching](#), to **Tara Cariano (RF18)** for her loving-kindness meditation, and to **Erica Wallstrom (RF14)** for her

excellent [land acknowledgement](#). Their contributions made this our best retreat ever! Here are some [fun photos from the day](#) (photo credit: Lori Lisai).

2025 Rowland Fellows Meet Cohort Work in Charlotte



The 2025 Cohort met at Charlotte Central School for a full day of work together to positively change their schools' culture and climate. Superintendent Adam Bunting and **Principal Tim O'Leary (RF20)** (above left) joined the group for lunch and a lively discussion about leading school change in Vermont.

Project-Based Learning Website Dissemination of New Learning

The screenshot shows a website header with the name 'Julia Beerworth' on the left and navigation links for 'Home', 'Collaborative Work Group', 'Student Voice & Leadership', and 'Projects' on the right. The main title 'COLLABORATIVE WORK GROUP' is centered over a background image of people working together. Below the title are four content cards:

- Developing Community Agreements with the Collaborative Work Group**: A card with handwritten notes on a whiteboard titled 'Take Care of Yourself', 'Take Care of Each Other', and 'Take Care of This Place'.
- Shared Leadership Retreat at The Hotel Champlain 9/25/25**: A card with a photograph of four people standing together.
- Dreaming and visioning Project-Based Learning at CCS in 2027/2028**: A card with handwritten notes on a whiteboard titled 'Imagine 2027-2028' and 'What do you see?'. It includes bullet points about 'Shared leadership', 'Community', and 'How does it look?'.
- Bringing back the work to our CWG for feedback & Developing a more concise version using a small group protocol**: A card with a photograph of a whiteboard titled 'Our team commits to collaboratively planning' with several sticky notes.

Julia Beerworth (RF25) has created a school website where she shares out insights, resources, and updates from her Rowland Fellowship work, including from her Collaborative Work Group and Student Leadership Group. Julia's website exemplifies transparency and

community engagement in a way that truly reflects the Rowland Foundation's approach to leading school change.

2025 Rowland Fellows Recognized by the Community

Current Fellowship Work Featured in the Press



Congratulations to 2025 Rowland Fellows Anne Koplinka-Loehr, Jana Fabri-Sbardellati & Julia Beerworth! Their Rowland Fellowships were recently celebrated in the local media. Anne (*above left*), who is leading work with restorative practices, had this [nice article](#) in the Brattleboro Reformer. Jana (*above right*), who is leading work on financial literacy across the curriculum, was featured in [this article](#) in the Burlington Free Press and also got [this mention](#) in VermontBiz along with her cohortmates! Julia Beerworth's work received [this thoughtful coverage](#) on her school district's website. It's great to see our Rowland Fellows garnering the recognition they deserve in the wider community.

Rowland Leadership & Encore Grants

If you are a veteran Rowland Fellow with a great idea, consider applying for a **Rowland Leadership Grant**. Applications accepted on a rolling basis for as long as funds remain. [More information & application form can be found here.](#)

If you are a veteran Rowland Fellow interested in teaming up with a few other Fellows to make something that will have a positive regional impact on Vermont education, consider applying for a **Rowland Encore Grant**. The 2026 application deadline is Dec. 31, 2025. [More information & application can be found here.](#)

Celebrations



Congratulations to Kathy Cadwell (RF16)! This week, she will be inducted into the [Harwood Hall of Fame](#) for her important contributions to Harwood Union High School and Vermont education at large. Kathy continues to consult with schools to advance Harkness Pedagogy and student-led dialogue. She also serves as the Co-Chair of Braver Angels, a nonprofit working to bridge the political divide. Kathy is seen here at the All Fellows Retreat with **Principal Lisa Manning Floyd (RF15)**.



Congratulations to Marsha Cassel (RF14)! She will be serving as [Implementation Coordinator](#) for the [Vermont Declaration of Inclusion Initiative](#). The Mountain Times reported that Marsha is “a longtime Vermont educator and family mediator, who brings decades of experience in teaching, civic engagement, and conflict resolution”. Marsha is seen here at the All Fellows Retreat with 2014 cohortmate **John Painter.**

Courtesy Posts



Integrated
Curriculum for
Vermont
Educators

There are still some spots available in the [ICVE Workshop Series](#)! Join us as we braid together Content Standards, the IRIS Ethnic Studies Standards, and Transferable Skills into meaningful curriculum for our students. Deepen your understanding of the updated Vermont Education Quality Standards as we weave together Universal Design for Learning, Social and Emotional Learning, Culturally Responsive Practices, Proficiency-Based Learning, Trauma-Informed Approaches, and Restorative Practices. Come alone or bring a team! Educators in their first four years of teaching are free! [Register here!](#) **Registration closes next Friday, November 11th.**

