



Summer 2026 Newsletter

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear partners,

My hope is that the summer months are providing you with rest and rejuvenation, a time of transition between seasons. In this summer newsletter, we are highlighting the range of ways that the CT Collaborative is building on momentum to move in new directions. For this issue, I asked each of the pillar leads and the CTC program manager to share their reflections on the past year and what they envision for the year ahead. In their contributions, you will see the range of progress made, relationships built, tensions surfaced, and insights gained. My sincere gratitude to the CTC leadership team - an incredible group of colleagues who inspire and delight at every turn!

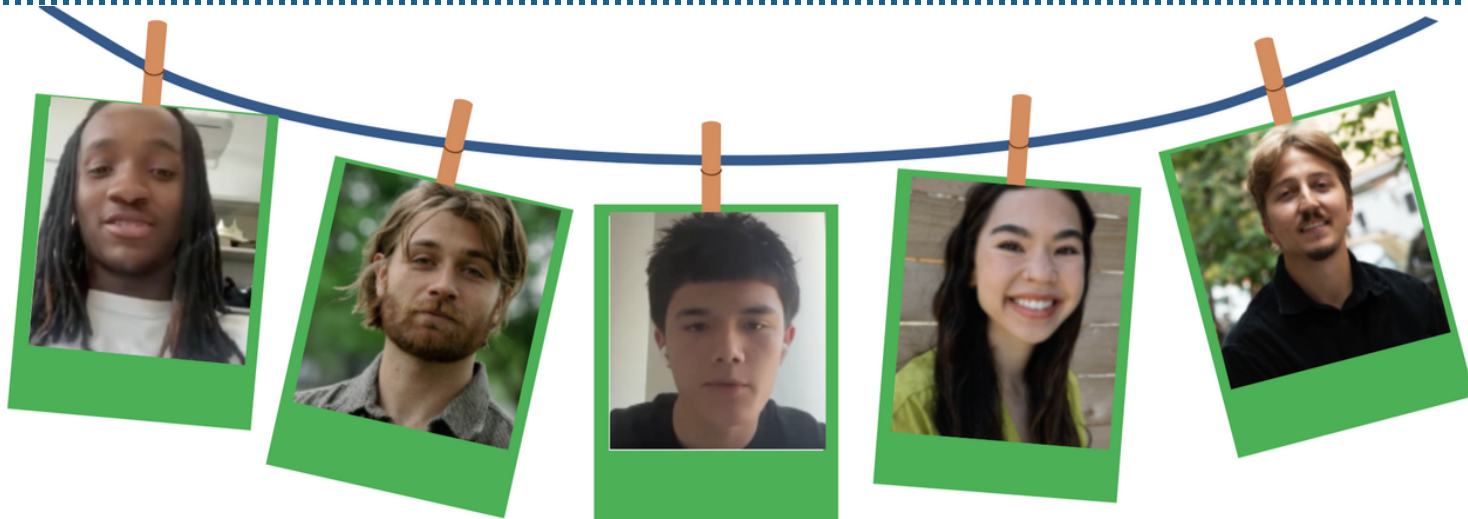
During our June CT Collaborative Leadership retreat at the Middlebury in DC office, we had the opportunity to share novel approaches to conflict transformation education, engage deeply with our External Advisory Board, further explore the nexus of internal capacity building and external partnership engagement, and discuss the range of ways to assess our ongoing [impact](#). This summer, multiple cohorts of undergraduate students are working with community partners on issues of poverty, housing insecurity, language access, and conflict in the workplace. Bread Loaf School of English Change faculty are engaging with K-12 teachers around documentary filmmaking, photovoice, teaching literacies across differences, and theater as pedagogical methods for conflict transformation. Graduate Practicum Fellows are working around the world on issues including nutrition financing, food security, and intercultural education. CT educators have convened at Vassar College and in Prague to deepen their relationships and critical approaches to conflict transformation education. More information about these recent convenings is included in the newsletter.

This coming academic year, we will continue our range of curricular, experiential, and programmatic engagement with CT education across contexts. We will engage more deeply with external partners including the National Issues Forum Institute, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, National Council on Dialogue and Deliberation, and AAC&U. We will build out our resources and case studies repository (highlighted this summer via our [Instagram](#) feed). We will continue assessing institutional and culture change. Keep an eye out for our upcoming webinar series, as well as compelling speakers and events on the Middlebury campus.

I also want to say a fond farewell to the CT Collaborative's Program Coordinator Shannon Bohler. It has been a sincere pleasure to learn from and work with her. We will miss her, and wish her all the best as she begins her next exciting chapter.

We look forward to engaging with all of you as we move from summer into fall. Please reach out anytime to discuss ideas and collaborations. Wishing you a wonderful August!

Reflecting on the Work



Left to right: BLTN participants Demarion Spann (student), Ian McKechnie (teacher), Raphael Carpentier (student), Katie Cheng (teacher), Andy Marchesani (teacher).

Pillar One: High School Education

Composing Together

The Spring/Summer issue of the [BLTN Journal](#), under the theme “Composing Together,” brings together many strands of this year’s Pillar 1 Conflict Transformation work at Bread Loaf. By featuring pieces collaboratively composed by youth and teachers, the issue highlights the Bread Loaf Teacher Network’s commitment to deconstruct some of the traditional hierarchies of classroom learning. BLTN Director Beverly Moss writes “In our journey to turning a classroom into a community, we compose together; we co-author spaces where cultures interact, where languages mix, where ideas emerge, blend, clash, get revised, and where respect for difference grows. We recognize and value how these co-authored communities are essential for the social justice work and activism that is necessary to combat the divisiveness that currently engulfs us.”

A few samples from the *Journal* illustrate reciprocity in learning among teachers and students. Philadelphia teacher Kurt Ostrow (MA `22) and students Olivia Kang, Halimah Fasasi and Calla Sieber narrate how their search for cohesion in their BLTN Next Generation Leadership Network site work has led them to a [laser focus on using the written word to effect change](#). Newton, MA teacher and [What’s the Story?](#) fellow Lia Bonfatti engages students Aria Chalfin, Laina Howes, and Katrina Tran in [together describing how the documentary interview process helps to build both empathy and confidence in the filmmakers](#). BLTN teachers Katie Cheng, Ian McKechnie, Andy Marchesani (MA `25), and students Raphael Cartier, and Damarion Spann [discuss how a project investigating accents and stereotypes leads to high engagement and sophisticated reflection on language, identity, and representation](#). We encourage the Middlebury community and beyond to read, view, and comment on our ongoing work.

~ Tom McKenna, Bread Loaf Teacher Network Communications

Pillar Two: Undergraduate Campus Life

Deep Interpersonal Work on Campus



Left: Pillar Lead Lida Winfield and Spring ELP participants. Right: Peer Conflict Coaches at their end-of-year dinner.

The 2025–2026 academic year marked a period of growth for Conflict Transformation in Pillar 2 at Middlebury, continuing to embed restorative and dialogue practices across the Middlebury College campus.

In August 2025, we officially launched the [Peer Conflict Coaches](#) (PCC) program, training 11 student leaders to coach peers through low-level conflicts and facilitate community building circles. The [Restorative Practices](#) (RP) team trained 85 Resident Assistants and 130 Orientation Leaders to support incoming students. We led many Community Building Circles with groups of faculty, staff, students and alumni. Our Academic Cluster continued to thrive, celebrating 8 certificate recipients and enrolling 60 students in the Winter Term CT skills course. PCC member Charlie Fisch '26 was honored with the 2026 Laurie L. Patton Leadership Award in Conflict Transformation, for exceptional community advocacy.

The [Engaged Listening Project](#) (ELP) brought together 44 Fellows across four cohorts, spanning diverse departments and programs. A new comprehensive ELP Toolkit developed by CT leadership supported ELP Fellows actively piloting new skills and dispositions in dialogue and community-building in classrooms, student groups, and advising/mentoring sessions. Additionally, we shared our work with PCC's with the [Vermont Restorative Approaches Collaborative](#) network and led an open campus Community Conversation utilizing structured dialogue to help community members explore how to balance day-to-day academic and operational responsibilities while absorbing the weight of global conflicts.

Rooted in empathy, curiosity, and complexity, these collective efforts are driving long-term, sustainable change. We look forward to expanding our footprint in this upcoming academic year.

~ Lida Winfield, Pillar Two Lead

Pillar Three: Undergraduate Experiential Learning

Expanding Experiential Learning Cohorts

Within the Undergraduate Experiential Learning Pillar this year, I appreciate how we embraced our role as a convener. It's been a journey! Early in the life of the CT Collaborative, we started with what we knew: the power of bringing together students and community partners for learning about how conflict and change shape our world. We expanded access to collaborative, community-based experiences by increasing the size of existing programs (e.g., [Privilege & Poverty Academic Cluster](#)). We focused on programs with cohort models (e.g., [Middlebury Social Impact Corps](#), [Middlebury Alternative Break Programs](#)), as we found that deep, daily engagement with conflict transformation worked best when people had others to accompany them in making sense of the complexity of those environments.



Fall 2025 Convening participants, including Projects for Peace Director Betsy Vegso (middle row, far left), Program Coordinator Antonio Baker-Medard (top left), and Alumni Prize 2025 recipient Dr. April Edwell (bottom center).

With time, we were able to connect 10 different community-based learning cohorts *with each other* via a three-part educational series of training and reflection. The cross-institutional convenings we have hosted recently took these models to the next level. We have been able to build a community of practice across students and educators in 20+ institutions in the [Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty](#) (SHECP) and [Projects for Peace](#) networks. Based on the fruitfulness of those reflective, practice-sharing spaces, we are continuing to expand our invitees to future convenings. We plan to include community partners affiliated with those educators and students in a fall 2026 convening at Oberlin, in addition to bringing in the diiVe network. We are looking forward to these expanding circles of knowledge-sharing and collaboration, and the quality of hands-on, complex learning experiences across social issues, geography, and approaches.

~ Kailee Brickner-McDonald, Pillar Three Lead

Pillar Four: Graduate Training and Research

Reflections on Guiding Practice with Fellows

My first year as lead of the CT Collaborative Graduate Pillar has been rewarding, working with interdisciplinary fellows, a new Practicum Fellowship program, and support for global learning experiences around the world. It has been a time of learning for me too. Through all my experiences, one tension has been most significant: guiding folks to stay in a place of curiosity as they explore conflicts with the compass and lens of CT.

I noticed that graduate students tended to have practice identifying problems, proposing solutions, and producing something to share what they determined. These approaches may not acknowledge varied perspectives and interpersonal and intercultural dimensions. At times, they may approach conflicts as problems to solve. So, I have been working a lot on helping them to stay in a place of curiosity where they can practice perspective taking, apply varied analytical approaches, and explore varied format options for communicating ideas in their final work.



25-26 Graduate Cohort Fellows

I have found some good tools for supporting fellows in this way. Working in communities of practice to ideate, provide review, and add new impressions helps complicate their thinking and presents new possibilities. For the year-long fellows' program we began with UNESCO Story Circles to create a sense of community and provide practice with intercultural engagement tools. From there we practiced exploring and sharing CT project ideas in small and large groups. These approaches worked for some fellows. Others still used a more traditional problem-solution approach for their projects.

I shared this conundrum recently with the Collaborative's External Advisory Board during a collaborative discussion including the CTC leadership group. In that discussion, Board Member Nancy Thomas recommended the RPR approach as a way of articulating collective goals, highlighting results, process, and relationships. During our recent Conflict Transformation Collaborative leadership retreat, CTC Executive Director Dr. Avineri encouraged us to explore this approach more deeply in relation to our pillar's programming and initiatives. I am excited to integrate this for next year. It suggests that Results is just one aspect of change, and guides us to look at Process and Relationship changes too. These concepts align nicely with CT approaches. Distinguishing R-P-R will be a good exercise for fellows, helping them to see the dynamic possibilities for change that conflict can offer us.

~ Dr. David Wick, Pillar Four Lead

Pillar Five: Global Engagement

Expanding Reach



This year has been a turning point in Conflict Transformation engagement for Pillar Five. As our collective understanding of CT – what it is, its potential, and how to integrate it into programming – has grown, we have both refined existing programming and invested more in external partnerships. In particular, our Schools Abroad directors, faculty, and staff have expanded and deepened global and regional networks, sharing CT knowledge and skills with partners around the world. In the United States, we hosted our first convening in Vermont, where Schools Abroad directors and 25 partner universities came together to share CT perspectives and learn more about local best practice. Following this conference, our School in Cameroon director was invited to present on CT to about 70 students, staff, and faculty at Grinnell College's [Institute for Global Engagement](#) (IGE) and its Office of DEI. At the [Arabic Language Institute in Fez](#) (ALIF) symposium and at The [Forum's Regional Seminar in Tangier](#), School in Morocco staff presented CT-funded student projects, highlighting how experiential learning and community engagement can foster dialogue, address local challenges, and promote sustainable change.

After these engagements, a local group of Moroccan study abroad programs created a CT-focused network where they trade ideas and approaches. In France and Spain, Pillar Five brought together 80 international education leaders from two professional organizations – the [Association of American University Programs in France](#) (APUAF) and [Study Abroad Programs in Spain](#) (APUNE) – to develop their dialogue skills and explore their own conflict styles. It has been inspiring to see a CT Community of Practice emerge from these endeavors, created and nourished by in-person gatherings, thoughtful partner-development, and resource sharing.

~ Phyllis Stinson, Pillar Five Co-Lead

Pillar Six: Research Grants

Integrating students into the Research Process



Works by CT grant recipients

During our most recent application cycle for the [Conflict Transformation Research Grants](#), we undertook a conscious shift in how we articulated grant purposes and priorities. In several ways, we have been strengthening our view of research grants as educational and pedagogical resources. This approach begins with designing the selection process itself: for the first time in Fall 2025, our RFP announcement identified that projects with student involvement in research would be prioritized. Both undergraduate and graduate students have long been active participants in many of these projects—as Research Assistants, publication co-authors, human subjects, and beyond—but now student inclusion is more explicitly factored into the CTC's grant selection processes. Bringing students into hands-on research can help foster the next generation of CT knowledge creators.

The CTC is further reinforcing grants' educational purposes through our reporting guidelines, which were also significantly updated this past year. We've broadened the types of materials that Principal Investigators can submit, to include CT-informed curricula; presentations; videos; and similar instructional content that has resulted from their sponsored research. We are enthusiastically building out our central repository of CT pedagogy resources, showcasing a wide range of ways that conflict transformation can infuse teaching practices across disciplines.

Be on the lookout for our next research grant RFP, which will be announced on our [website](#) early in the Fall 2026

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.

RECENT EVENTS



Projects for Peace Convening participants

June 10-12

Building an Ecosystem of Peace: The Projects for Peace Campus Liaison Convening

The June 2026 Campus Liaison Convening at Vassar College was the latest opportunity for Projects for Peace leaders to gather as we continue to cultivate an "Ecosystem of Peace" across participating institutions.

Campus liaisons, dedicated partners across the Projects for Peace national network of colleges and universities who recruit applicants, support student grantees, and navigate institutional policies, often manage this transformative work in isolation. Our annual convenings create an intentional space for these student-facing advisors to gather, break through administrative silos, share best practices, and strengthen a vital peer network. This summer's workshops focused on ethical storytelling, risk management, the use of artificial intelligence tools, and managing project pivots amidst global volatility.

Through three days of hands-on presentations and reflection activities, attendees addressed long-term project impact and sharpened their approach to guiding student-led initiatives.

By hosting collaborative forums like this and framing student projects through a lens of constructive dialogue and systemic change, the Projects for Peace team and campus partners work together to cultivate resilient, peace-centered communities across their home campuses. Our next event to continue this work is scheduled for November at Oberlin College



CT Collaborative leadership group

June 15-17

CT Collaborative Leadership Retreat

Across three days in mid-June, the CTC held its annual leadership retreat. Pillar Leads, External Advisory Board members, and CTC staff gathered at Middlebury's offices in Washington, DC for mutual learning and strategic visioning. The Executive Director and each Pillar Lead shared a skill-building tool or resource that has shaped their work. We also deliberated on priorities and challenges for the year ahead, with an emphasis on engagement with external and internal audiences, and meaningful approaches to assessing our impact.

July 7-10

The Forum on Education Abroad: Beyond Polarization

The Middlebury C.V. Starr Schools Abroad and the Middlebury Conflict Transformation Collaborative co-sponsored the Residency in Prague, which brought together more than fifty international educators to better understand the root causes of polarization and learn new tools for engaging with our students and each other.

Study abroad professionals gained insights into how the intercultural experiences we provide can fundamentally alter these dynamics in positive ways. Middlebury's own international work with students is predicated on the notion that building community, getting comfortable with being uncomfortable, and redefining interpersonal conflict as an unavoidable but potentially generative aspect of human interaction are all essential elements in preventing or reversing polarization.



Middlebury C.V. Starr Schools Abroad directors and International Programs and Off Campus Study staff gathered at the Residency

That's all... for now!

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