



Peer Exploration:

Clarifying the purpose, practice, and skills of effective knowledge work in philanthropy

Welcome



Dr. Angela Frusciante (she/her)

**Founder & Principal
Knowledge Designs to Change**

Today's Speakers



Tara Gonzales Hacker (she/her)

**Director, Impact Learning &
Evaluation
Health Forward Foundation**



Ari Kramer (he/him)

**Director, Knowledge Management
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**



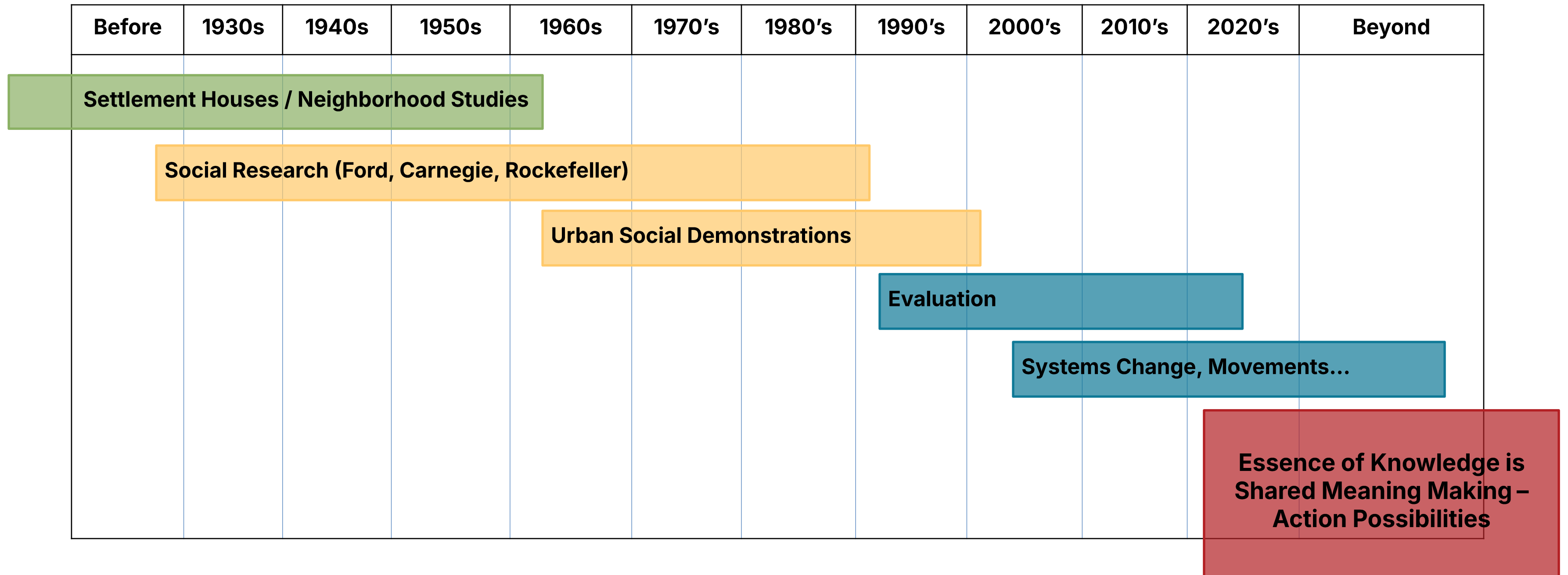
Sherella Williams (she/her)

**Grant & Operations Manager
People's Media Fund**

Meeting Angela

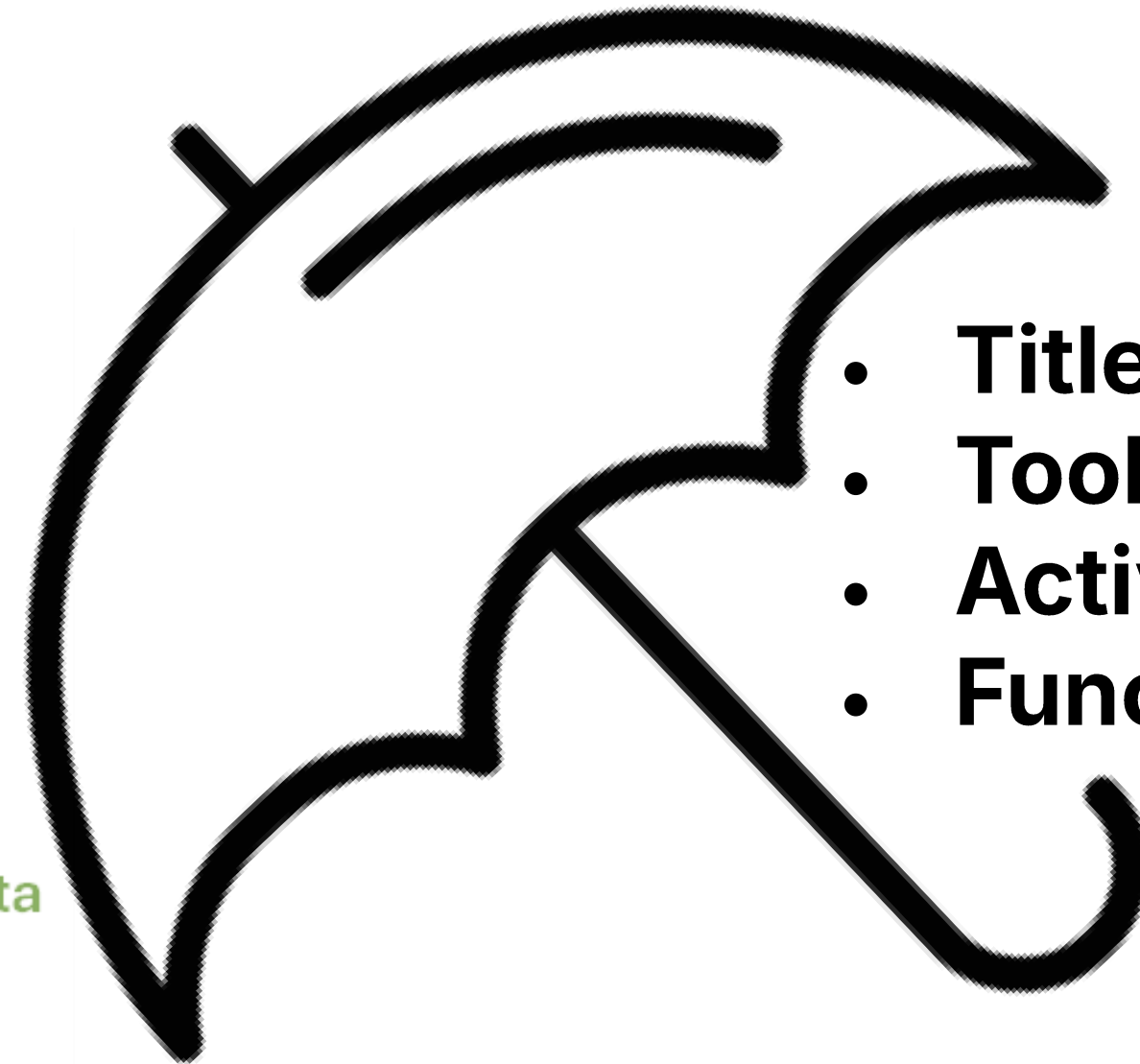
- Independent Scholar – vetted Member of NCIS
- Research focus on knowledge construction in foundation efforts
- Started in community evaluation, moved to community/university/foundation partnerships, philanthropy
- One of the first philanthropy professionals with “knowledge” title
- Knowledge Strategy Partner

Knowledge Work Past to Present



Knowledge Work as Shared Meaning Making

scientific affairs, analytics, research, community research, education and research, research services, research and development, relations analysis, capacity building analytics, advocacy evaluation, measurement and evaluation, evaluation and learning, success measure partnerships, program effectiveness, strategic learning, learning and engagement, grants and learning, evidence and learning, assessment and learning, learning and reporting, data management, data systems, data visualization, data discovery, database operations, data standards, information, information systems, information technology, content management, innovation, social impact, knowledge management, knowledge insights



- **Titles**
- **Tools**
- **Activities**
- **Functions**

Connections

- **Creating Alignment**
- **Culture & Collaboration**
- **Structure**
- **External Tensions**
- **Creating Containers**

Meeting Tara



- **Entry:** From national nonprofit focused on advancing health equity and leadership
- **Location:** Health care conversion / charitable foundation, ~35 staff, Kansas City - regionally focused in Kansas and Missouri (mix of urban, suburban, and rural)
- **Role:** Impact Learning and Evaluation (team of 3). Work across org and impact teams, with community partners, and symbiotically with internal learning and culture
- **Approach:** Partnership, Voice, Co-facilitation, Iterative, Sharing data/information
- **Additional Context:** Working in two red states, facing political challenges – continue to lead with racial equity and economic justice, supporting our partners through federal funding cuts and navigating anti-DEI and anti-Science pressures (state and federal); 20-years established; reorg and new purpose plan in 2022

Ecosystem Thinking with Community



Health Forward
FOUNDATION

Expanding Voice and Knowledge

Bring new perspectives and knowledge to community (redefine “expert,” peer-to-peer exchanges, data, research, transparency, their role in the ecosystem)

Redistributing Power

Acknowledge where power exists, center lived experience and most impacted, establish & reinforce community agreements, shift ways of resourcing



Holding the Tension

Get uncomfortable, grow learning/growth zones while minimizing “panic,” surface assumptions to change the narrative, hold patience

Building Trust & Alignment

Deepen relationships; trade control for engagement, guide conversations & collective thinking forward, invite and demonstrate honesty & candidness, share back insights from group quickly

Creating the Container for Shared Learning & Shifting Power

Fostering ecosystem thinking through a culture of vulnerability, collaboration, shared visioning, and collective solutions; iterating and adapting to move group forward over time.

Meeting Ari

- **Entry:** Worked for state-level philanthropy infrastructure organization from 2005-2009 - in hindsight likely first true step in direction of “knowledge work”
- **Location:** Large private foundation w/ national focus, based in NJ, ~ 325 staff, “paving the way to a future where health is no longer a privilege, but a right”
- **Role:** Lead foundation-wide Knowledge Management function, team of 2, anchored in Program unit as part of Grants Management department
- **Approach:** Constantly working to evolve KM approaches while also remaining strongly aligned with organizational vision, structure, and culture
- **Additional Context:** As KM becomes more strategically integrated, the work gets increasingly complicated, requiring us to always push ourselves to keep growing

More Alignment + More Collaboration = More Opportunity – which creates even greater need to keep learning & growing

The RWJF Taxonomy includes our **Strategic Framework** and other sets of categories which together help us capture the *What, Who, How, Where* and *Why* of RWJF's work.



Topics

What our funded work is generally about



Populations

Groups we work with and seek to benefit



Activities

Types of work aiming for desired change



Geo-Locations

Geographic areas that are a focus of our work



Demographics

Characteristics of populations that are central to our work

Meeting Sherella

- **Entry:** Unintentional; joined a new foundation with minimal infrastructure and my role was to build more.
- **Location:** Private Foundation serving the Greater Philadelphia region by investing in community-owned media and internet. Staff size of 8.
- **Role:** Grants and Operations Manager; Grants Management team is a team of two.
- **Approach:** Knowledge work needs a place to live, it needs to be organized, and it needs to be accessible to all staff.
- **Additional Context:** We are a young foundation that started as an all-hands-on-deck, build-as-we-do-the-work team which allowed the full staff to have a stronger voice/be “in the room”; which cultivated greater transparency, collaboration and respect amongst staff.

Building the Container: Culture + Accountability

- What makes a good container - your GMS!
 - Ideally has custom organization features for your data + looks nice.
- Accountability: it doesn't (always) need to be confrontational
 - Record what your team wants to know/measure/learn.
 - Make suggestions on how to collect the data. Refer back to tracking document as needed.
- Establish the culture around data collection
 - Create a **team guide** for your GMS that is clear around: system functionality, roles, and how (and when) the team contributes.

TEAM GUIDE CHAPTERS

- ★ [What Temelio Offers Us](#)
- ★ [Website Access](#)
- ★ [Orienting Yourself](#)
- ★ [Search Functionality](#)
- ★ [How We Contribute to Temelio \[Notes, \]](#)
- ★ [Data Housekeeping](#)
- ★ [Report Filters](#)
- ★ [Using Temelio: Team Responsibilities](#)
- ★ [Temelio Lingo](#)

Example from PMF's GMS Guide.

Peer Discussion

What has surprised you in your knowledge work...

Specifically, what skills did you think you needed and what did you realize you actually need to do knowledge work in philanthropy?

What is coming up for you?

What are you taking away?



**Share your takeaways
on our social wall!**

More Information:

#PEAK2026stl

- **Knowledge Resources**

<https://kd2change.com/resources/knowledge-and-grantmaking-series/>

- **Knowledge Incubation Report**

<https://kd2change.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Incubation-synthesis-final-3-10-26.pdf>

- **Knowledge Opportunities**

<https://kd2change.com/current-opportunities/>



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