

# The May 13 Group PODCAST

Episode 2.1: Quarterly Compost (Spring 2025)

Recorded April 29, 2025; Published May 13, 2025

**ANNOTATIONS COMING SOON!**

## **Vidhya**

Hello and welcome to The May 13 Group Podcast. The May 13 Group is an emerging ecosystem, a solidarity economy oriented toward and energized by epistemic healing and wholeness in, through, and around evaluation through structurally-focused collective action, including direct action organizing and mutual aid. This podcast is a space where we share our experience building an alternative knowledge economy, connecting the material governance and financial structure with the philosophical and political ideas that guide our work.

The May 13 Group intentionally engages with a broad range of people, source materials, and traditions that deepen and stretch and challenge our individual and collective thinking in an effort to practice and model critical praxis—reflection, dialogue, theory, and action—as we raise our own and our listeners’ consciousness. We are grateful for the counter-political education this offers and do not necessarily share all the views that are expressed in each episode, whether through the hosts, guests, or works cited.

## **Carolina**

This is a Quarterly Compost episode, which started as a way to transparently share some of the building work and thinking that is happening in real time. It differs from our other episodes in that the Quarterly Compost episodes are a bit more holistic, looking at the connections and intersections among episodes, topics, ideas, praxis, and what’s happening in the world around us. It’s a place for us to turn over and compost the work we’ve been doing to create fertile soil to plant new ideas and grow.

In this episode, we reflect on the anniversary of The May 13th Group Podcast and what we’ve learned throughout the process. We also explore the connections among recent episodes and the broader themes of evaluation, accountability, and community-driven resourcing, while acknowledging the socio-political context in which we operate. We hope you enjoy.

## **Vidhya**

Hello, I am Vidhya Shanker. I am an evaluation scholar, practitioner, organizer, and activist based on the unceded homelands of the Dakota near the Ojibwe and very near the headquarters of the American Indian Movement.

## **Carolina**

And hello again, my name is Carolina and I am an evaluator based in the United States. And today we have a very special episode. It’s our Quarterly Compost, but it’s special because it is

the one-year anniversary of the date that we released our first podcast episode back in 2024 on May 13, and it's releasing on May 13, which is awesome.

And it's funny that it's kind of worked out that way because in theory it wouldn't. But just to give you some insight behind the curtain, when we originally decided to do this podcast, we had decided to release our episodes on Monday, which was May 13 in that case. And then through, as we were kind of going through this learning journey, we figured out that that wasn't working for us. So we shifted it to Tuesday.

And turns out that May 13 is also on a Tuesday this year. So yay us for getting that right. But yeah, really exciting to be here after a year. I can't believe it's been this long. And for today, we just wanted to talk to you all a little bit about, like, how we got here, how the—kind of the origins of the podcast and kind of some of the journey with, we've been on during this past year. But before we get into that, Vidhya, anything you want to say about our first year being out there in public?

### **Vidhya**

Yeah, just, you know, as you were talking, I was thinking about the—I believe it's Maya Angelou—famous saying, you know, “you do your best until you know better. And when you know better, you do better,” which I think is a great mantram actually for evaluators. But yeah, we, I learned so much over this year, which, you we'll unpack that in a second. But one of the things we did learn was that we really benefited from a day in the week before we released and so we're using our Mondays that way and releasing on Tuesdays and it was so serendipitous this year that it was on May 13<sup>th</sup>. So, and five years to the day after we first kind of hatched this whole idea, also May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020 was the day that with CEI's Roundtable that we even thought of this. So....

### **Carolina**

Right.

### **Carolina**

Yeah, so lots to celebrate. But yeah, I want to kind of start off by sharing a little bit about the history. I think we talked a little bit about it in the very first episode that we released where we did our introduction. So we won't go into too much detail, but I think it's worth kind of calling out the fact that even though our first episode released on May 13, 2024, we had actually been working on this even before that, right? Maybe six to eight months before, maybe a year, I don't remember exactly when we started, but there was a lot of pre-work that happened before the actual episode release and kind of how things started: So we mentioned in episode one, as well as when Nayantara joined us for an episode, we talked about how we knew each other and how we came together. So Vidhya and Nayantara knew each other separately. I had known Vidhya for a couple of years separately and then the three of us eventually came together. But I had been sort of floating the idea of a podcast around for a while. I think even as far back as when we were doing the stuff with the Minnesota IBPOC in Evaluation Community of Praxis.

Just because I've always just felt really inspired by Vidhya's work and I wanted to think about how we could creatively get some of that information out there in a way that wasn't just, you know, like an article or a blog post, beyond the written format or even a webinar, which all are valuable and interesting, but I don't know, sometimes my eyes glaze over if I have to read things too much. So just thinking about some other ways to engage people, that was a little bit different. And as many of you probably know, things like podcasts have really taken off in the past 10 years or so. And what really kind of re-inspired this idea was the Power of Perspective, interactive display that came along in 2022.

### **Carolina**

We have a whole episode on that, I encourage you to listen to that if you haven't had the opportunity already to hear about that journey. But that felt like the perfect type of content to transition into a podcast format because unless you were at the AEA conference that year, where it was kind of first debuted, or unless you knew about the online version, which there were online opportunities for engagement, there wasn't really a good way to interact with the Power of Perspective journey or learn about it. That was kind of concise and in one place. So I can't remember if we mentioned this before, but originally when I raised the possibility of doing a podcast, it was actually with the Power of Perspective in mind. And at the same time, and I was new to the May 13 group at that time. Again, this was back in 2022, I believe. I understood that I didn't fully understand what The May 13 group was yet. So I also wanted it to be a space, that it could evolve into whatever it made sense. And it has. And I'm really happy about that. So even though the focus has been different, think ultimately it's its transition into what it ultimately needed to be, because my my my view at the time was a bit more narrow about what The May 13 Group was about. So, that's just a little bit of background on that.

### **Vidhya**

Yeah, and I remember also being actually very excited about the possibility of what the Power of Perspective may look like as a podcast. I think we brainstormed even, you know, we could do like five year increments and really deep dive into those. And I actually still would love to do that.

### **Carolina**

Yeah, yeah.

### **Vidhya**

And, what we realized though was—and we talked about this in a way in the What is an Economy episode that we just recorded and released previously—that without the larger context, sometimes the counter narrative that the Power of Perspective is offering can get lost and starts you know, reinforcing some of the ideas that we are actually challenging. And so, so we felt like we needed to also attend to a larger context about what The May 13 Group is or could be, which, again, to be fair, I mean, was very, very, I mean, it's still kind of nebulous, but it was like super duper nebulous in 2022, because it is, you know, by definition being co created. And so, so I think that's why we've been experimenting and trying to figure out what is the point of entry for different kinds of people in the nonprofit industrial complex and outside the nonprofit

industrial complex, too, so that we don't get too, kind of, inside baseball, which most of us who have done research degrees unfortunately are—we spend so many years just doing **inside baseball** and talking about something that nobody else in the world is talking about and writing, you know, hundreds of pages about it and assuming that it's common knowledge because it has become so everyday for us. And so, so, the podcast has actually really helped me understand, first of all, I think other kinds of labor. Like I, you know, was not actively antagonistic, obviously, to, you know, media and communications and, and, and, you know, as another field. But I did not fully appreciate—in the actual original meaning of the word “appreciate,”—I did not fully appreciate what all goes into a podcast. And it was very clear that I really don't know what I'm doing. And thank goodness for Caro and Nayantara. But aside from the medium, there is also the idea of like, where do you begin talking about topics that are not part of our training—by design, they're not part of our training as evaluators. And they're definitely not part of our schooling in this country. And so we are still figuring out how to match content and format.

Like I said, we'll get into more specific details about like specific tweaks in the format and then that kind of thing and the content. But I just wanted to leave it there that I, a whole new world has opened up for me and it just makes me eager to think about all the other worlds that we, you know, that I don't know about and that we could be engaging with. So....

### **Carolina**

Yeah, no, I, I, that resonates with me a lot too, just in terms of opening up a whole new world. I mean, I had a little bit of podcasting experience before going into this, but it was a lot lower stakes. It was something I was doing just for fun. And so, to do this in a more quote unquote professional capacity has just required thinking about details that just didn't apply to my previous experience, whether it was around the logistics and certainly around the content. So that's been, yeah, you know, there's definitely been some bumps in the road, but I think the three of us have also learned to communicate better as a result. And as we try to, I guess, create a unified vision of what this podcast would, could be because I think going into it, we had different wants and perspectives and, but with time we've kind of aligned a bit more, which I think it's really great. And just another way this has affected me too is just through the discussions, I'm just learning a lot along the way because of the breadth of knowledge that Vidhya brings, that our guests have brought and will bring in the future—because we hope to have some guests in the future as well. So that has been pretty neat too, because as Vidhya, you mentioned, you know, a lot of this isn't a part of our evaluation training. For me, I mean, my evaluation training is minimal. It's more, been more in the field because my background is in public health. So that's, yeah, that's just been really cool.

### **Vidhya**

Yeah, I'm so glad you said that because I think that it actually syncs up really nicely with something that we're trying to do with The May 13 Group actually is challenge the idea that, you know, knowledge can be produced individually, right? And so part of what is, you know, and I always say this at home too, like we, I think are kind of scared in, I don't know, in this country, maybe, and maybe in this field also about what looks like conflict and, or dissent. And you know, one of the things that I talk about, didn't, I definitely didn't come up with this myself, but it's, it

comes from transformative justice and, you know, Aisha Rios and I have talked about it publicly a few times too, but, the idea of generative conflict, right? Like what is produced through, you know, the process of actually grappling with, differing ideas and perspectives and, and, and priorities and interests. And so, I think that the podcast is a better product for the tensions. And I think that the field can be a better product if we relationally, collaboratively produce it. And so that's what I was thinking when you were sharing that, Caro.

### **Carolina**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. But yeah, with that, I mean, it's been a year or a year since we published our first episode and we've kind of talked about how this is—the process and how this has impacted us personally. But I think it would be a missed opportunity to not say thank you to everyone who has been listening to us so far, whether you've just listened to one episode or all of them.

We wouldn't be doing this if we didn't have anyone to listen to it—we might still do it anyway, actually, I'm not sure. But this is not something that we can do alone. And the feedback that we've gotten has challenged us and make us think about things that we haven't thought about before. So just really appreciating everyone that's taken the time to listen. And if this podcast so far has impacted you or has made you think about something and you haven't shared, we invite you to let us know. Let us know what your favorite episode or talking point or whatever it is has been so far. You're able to do that on Spotify. Spotify has a comments feature now or on LinkedIn. That's kind of the primary place where we announce in our episodes.

And it's a great place for engagement if you're not connected to us on LinkedIn. So we invite you to do that. And of course, our email, which is in the episode description. You're welcome to reach out to us there. But anything else on your end regarding that Vidhya?

### **Vidhya**

No, just that we are hoping to get The May 13 Group-specific social media handles.

### **Vidhya**

Okay, yeah, I just wanted to share your gratitude for the engagement around the podcast. So we have gotten a couple comments on Spotify and we now have the ability to acknowledge those comments that wasn't actually originally available to us. So we also have a poll on Spotify that people fill out sometimes about who you are, just so we know who's listening. And...you know, a lot of people have told me that they're, you know, either including it in their class or, you know, listening to it on a long drive or whatever. And so we desperately appreciate—I don't know if desperate—we sincerely appreciate the engagement, but also the feedback because that is how we know, you know, how we sound and what the, you know, framing, you know, how the framing hits different kinds of people. And so, and how the language hits different kinds of people and how the format hits different kinds of people. And so we have, you know, started to experiment with the format, like I said, that—we've learned that, for one thing, that we need to digest the podcast first before we can, you know, provide an adequate introduction and call to action at the end. So that's one thing that we added. At our last quarterly compost, we shared

how we were going to try to summarize what would be one prompt or one call to action that we could leave folks with. But it through experience, we realized that we really needed ourselves to kind of digest the content of the podcast and the experience before we could do that justice and before we could frame the entire conversation, especially if we have a guest. And so those are some changes that you'll see if you have been listening for a while or if you choose to start from the beginning, you'll definitely see some change there.

We are also changing the way we develop the podcasts themselves. And that we talked about a bit, I want to say, in one of the previous episodes. Rather than necessarily starting from literature or video or another podcast super directly, or even starting with the topic in a, in a kind of like grad-schoolish way is how I referred to it among ourselves, where we, you know, research a specific topic, we have tried to think about the topics from multiple angles, I guess, like personal, professional, political, and really, you know, engage listeners as well, you know, in our process of learning and unlearning, right? In a kind of more, I hope, accessible way that is inspired by critical pedagogy and popular education where we think that most of the topics that we're talking about everybody knows something about and nobody knows everything about. And so we don't want to create spaces where people feel like they're not, they can't be part of the conversation. And that's the last thing we want to do because we think that many of our fields do that and it reinforces this idea that knowledge is only for certain kinds of people. And so, to your point about Spotify: We have, you know, we're aware of Spotify—and it's not unique—but, of the ethical concerns, I suppose, with it and to be frank with many of the other services and products that we use. And we are actively researching alternatives. And we will be sharing our alternatives when we have more to say about them. We are eager, if people already know about things that we don't, and I'm sure you do, that you feel free to share with us. Overall, between the technical aspects and the format and the content, which is kind of almost like a, emergent curriculum that's unfolding, we really wanted the process to be iterative and to model you know, this idea—like I said about Maya Angelou, actually—that nobody has it all figured out in advance. It's not prefabbed and it comes into being, you know, collectively in community over time through experience, which is what we're trying to get back to in terms of knowledge production and thinking about the way that knowledge has been produced historically, always tied to, you know, daily life and material production. It wasn't just a thing in the sky, you know, or in an ivory tower. And so...we will have some discussion in a bit about how we're gonna proceed with some of the future episodes. So I'll just transition there, Caro, if there's anything that you wanted to share.

### **Carolina**

Yeah, all I'll add is that I think the changes that we've made have been for the better. And I hope that as people have been listening, you've noticed some of those changes and have appreciated them. So back to Vidhya's point before about feedback: Definitely let us know what's working. And not just because we work in evaluation, we care about that. But it's important because we want this to be engaging and for it to be as accessible as possible.

And then the only thing I'll add that I mentioned briefly before is that we do plan to bring some more guests into the episodes in the future, just so that you all get to hear a diversity of

perspectives that aren't just Vidhya and mine. So hopefully you've enjoyed the episodes that we've had so far where we've had guests. And if there's been an episode that resonates with you and you want to be a part of a future discussion, definitely don't hesitate to reach out to us and we can explore how you can be involved in a future episode. And that's actually what happened with one of our upcoming guests. So, we are very open to that.

But I guess kind of where I would like to go next is to talk a little bit about the episodes that we've had since our last Quarterly Compost, which was back in September. So we've had three episodes so far since then. One called What is the Power of Perspective?, in which our producer Nayanara joined us on air, vocally. She's always on air, just quietly.

We had another episode called What is Individualism? And then, What is an Economy? which featured Justin Laing as a guest. So I'll just kind of quickly remind us of what those episodes were about. And then we invite you to think about what you think some of the connections are between these episodes, but we'll also share what we think some of the connections are. So...

### **Carolina**

With the Power of Perspective, just to remind you, in that episode, we talked about the Power of Perspective. I feel like I've been saying that a lot this episode, which was an interactive journey map that debuted at the 2022 AEA conference. We kind of talked about how the journey map came to be from development to actual in-person implementation, because it was a physical display at the conference, and then how it was received.

For the individualism episode, Vidhya and I talked about the concept of individualism, both from a somewhat academic perspective, but also a personal perspective and how it's impacted us and how it could impact the work of The May 13 Group. And then most recently, if you've been listening, you know, chronologically, we had an episode with Justin discussing the concept of an economy, not necessarily...the economy, where we unpack that concept and how knowledge is produced and kind of the relationship between the two. So that's at a super high level what those have been about. So we definitely want you to think about how these are connected, but we can also share how we think some of these are connected or how we hope you see the connection between them. Vidhya, would you like to start?

### **Vidhya**

Yeah, I mean, I would love to do, you know, something that we have been doing increasingly is just to pause for a second and ask folks, "What do you see as a connection among those three?" And, you know, take a minute again to think about it or write about it or draw about it or talk about it if you're with somebody—or even if you're not with somebody and you're like me and you talk to yourself. And then we'll come back with how we see the three episodes connected.

### **Vidhya**

Okay, so the way I see them connected to each other and to evaluation and to The May 13 Group actually—which I don't know that I made clear before the little moment to ourselves— but

the Power of Perspective's purpose was largely to allow people to see themselves as part of a larger lineage and a historical context, a socio-historical context actually, and to be able to connect political, economic, social—like I said—cultural forces with what was happening in evaluation and seeing those two as inseparable, inherently connected, inevitably connected, kind of like what I was saying earlier about knowledge not being divorced from daily life for most of human existence, it has always been connected to daily life. And so I see that as very, very related to and connected to, obviously, evaluation and considering that evaluation has gone through great pains to make itself feel inaccessible. So much so, you know, I mean, now we're, you know, folks are doing evaluation capacity-building, but that's still the idea that we have something to teach people who don't know how to produce knowledge as opposed to necessarily honoring, you know, the knowledge production that is already happening—which again, some people are doing, but the field as a whole, you know, is not necessarily doing and is threatened by people doing it. And we can see that actually in this present moment. So, I think that that connects, you know, really cleanly to me, I mean, really tightly to the idea of individualism, the ideology of individualism, which I think, you know as I reflect, I'm not sure that that came fully through, that it is not just an academic concept, but it is a political ideology that has been developed and that is distinct from ideas about bodily autonomy, for example, or it is a, almost like a religion really, I mean, to promote. And so that idea of, that ideology—I'm gonna keep saying ideology instead of idea—of individualism to me is, you know, again, connected in many of the ways that we said in the episode to evaluation and The May 13 Group's work, but also to, the economy that we live in right now of racial and gendered capitalism, but also of the idea of an economy and how an economy is organized. Is it organized around us as supposedly individuated beings that are in this, you know, artificially, like, constructed dog-eat-dog world where we, know—"survival of the fittest," which is what, you know, again, the ideology is, or do we want to create, do we want to, you know, resurrect and preserve and, you know, advance an economy that is inherently interconnected and interdependent and collective, right? Where there are not winners and losers, and winners don't win at the expense of losers who are presumably unfit, right? And so, to me, that is all, like I said, very directly related to how we evaluate, but also why we evaluate. Why do we need evaluation to separate, like I said—people are still talking about this right now and trying to retain their jobs—to separate the good charities from the bad ones, and the good charities are separating the good program participants from the bad ones. And the economy in general is functioning because the nonprofit industrial complex sort of manages everyone who doesn't fit into or benefit from racial and gendered capitalism. And so, that's kind of how I see the three of them connected with each other and connected to evaluation and to our work. And one of the big points about the Power of Perspective is that there were people who were saying this—again, not using my exact same words, but these ideas, bringing them up—in the early, early stages of evaluation, even before—you know, our exhibition started in the 70s because that's when the field formalized—but there were people saying this way before that in the 30s and 40s and 50s and 60s, when people were practicing and challenging. But we don't hear about them. They're not in our curricula. They're not in our award ceremonies. They're not in the Evaluation Theory Tree. And so it kind of comes full circle. It's not a linear trajectory.

I am curious to know if you have anything to add, Caro, and if not, we can transition.



**Carolina**

Yeah, yeah. No, I appreciate you saying the fact that the Power of Perspective kind of allowed people to see themselves a part of a larger lineage in historical context, because that's kind of how I felt thinking about not just the Power of Perspective, but also the economy episode. I feel like while we—as I was preparing, preparing for What is an Economy? episode and during it, there were just kind of some revelations for myself about, like, what role I play in how I engage with the world, which kind of sounds silly to say out loud, like, “oh, obviously we're all interconnected”. But to be able to step back and really think about how we contribute, whether it's to the knowledge economy or whatever it is, was really eye-opening for me. So, I appreciate that framing because I think for me it did apply beyond the Power of Perspective. But I mean, some of the other connections that were coming to mind for me as I was thinking about how these three episodes are interconnected. So, kind of thinking about some of the concepts we talked about in the individualism episode: Innovation was something that kind of came up briefly based on some of the readings that I had done. That innovation can sometimes be a product of individualism and it can be a driver of how an economy functions. So that's kind of how I see those two pieces. For our field and evaluation, knowledge production and the results that come out of it do impact resource allocation. That's kind of what we've been talking about, whether it be from the government, philanthropy, or honestly, even at an individual household level. So, not to, like, get too into reality, but as I was thinking about this, I thought about, you know, the price of eggs, which everyone's been talking about for like the past four months. The price of eggs is a data point and that impacts whether you choose to allocate your resources, so the money you have, to purchase those eggs. So knowledge and how a person might participate in an economy, whether it's the household level, which is, as we talked about, kind of the original definition of an economy or even beyond that. And then the last thing I'll mention is that all of these topics, of course, are things that we're grappling with as we build The May 13 Group. This is why we bring these topics forward for discussion. So who produces knowledge and gets credit for it? What does it mean to work collectively in an individualistic society? And the benefits and harms of individualism, because I do believe there are both, and understanding what an economy is so that we might begin to build a solidarity economy. So those are the things that came to mind for me.

**Vidhya**

Yeah, great. And so we thought we would spend the remaining time before we close on just some updates. We have been expanding, I guess, and deepening our connections outside evaluation, including—Well, I'll start actually with the CREA conference, which I have not been to in years. And we—thanks to Zach Tilton for inviting me to co-present on many of these ideas, actually, on whether the revolution could be evaluated after all. And that is a direct reference to myself and Rodney Hopson's critiques of the field of evaluation and nonprofit industrial complex. And a reference to The Revolution Will Not Be Funded by INCITE. And of course, The Revolution Will Not Be Televised by Gil Scott Heron. So we had a round table and it was lovely to engage with people there and also at the receptions to see so many old friends and folks who are really challenging evaluation on the ground and who, you know, similar to the folks in Power of Perspective—although all those folks had actually been published and were still ignored—but

a lot of people are doing great work in evaluation and yet the field, you know, has not necessarily recognized this. And so, we want to do more of those kinds of one-on-one meetings with people and that is part of The May 13 Groups organizing strategy because it is rooted in an organizing kind of framework, which is built on one-on-one relationships. So, we also sent out proposals—this is what I was starting to say earlier about broadening and deepening outside evaluation—to, like, the Socialism Conference. We actually just got word that we did not get our proposal accepted into that conference, but we may still attend. And our question was whether it's possible to organize members of the professional managerial class, like evaluators, into socialist movement organizing. And so, I guess we won't find out this year from a conference session, but we may find out informally by participating in the conference. And we also submitted to the **oral history conference** and the **folklore conference** because we see, you know, we have a seed of an idea that we've put on hold until we build more infrastructure, but for an oral history process that really challenges AEA's Oral History Project that has been in the *American Journal of Evaluation* that had been entirely White subjects of the oral histories until very recently. And in the meanwhile, separate from **the two oral histories that are published in AJE**, The May 13 Group had been trying to develop a more democratic process for collecting and documenting and sharing oral histories.

But we see that as related to folklore, so we submitted to the folklore **exhibition** because it's about the cultural transmission of knowledge, like the Power of Perspective was an attempt at. And the American Anthropology Association also has a conference, and the theme is ghosts. And we thought about ghosts of evaluation's past, so to speak.

And so we have no idea what'll shake out, but this is just to give you an idea of where our mind is going and how we're thinking about knowledge production. We did want to take a moment also to transparently and—what should I say—appreciatively note: We did an episode earlier with Sarah Stachowiak of ORS Impact and—about what is solidarity. Sarah was one of our first supporters and we are eternally grateful for that. Since then, the Barr Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation have contributed support that is allowing us to continue doing this work and devote the amount of time that we think it needs—well, not entirely all the amount of time that we think it needs, but more of the amount of time that we think it needs. And we mentioned in our last Quarterly Compost that we were working through figuring out a fiscal sponsor, which is now settled. I mean, we are being fiscally sponsored by Possibility Labs, and that is what allowed us to receive this additional funding and all of those relationships were very organic, often through Albertina Lopez who works at the Center for Evaluation and Innovation. Many of them were initiated there, many of them were initiated through, you know, the beginnings of our work in the field and people who had, you know, their ears perked up and they kind of expressed interest and we have gotten to know them, like I was saying, about the one-on-ones. And so we do have, as we've been public about it, we do have deep concerns about feeding the nonprofit industrial complex and accepting too much money, quote unquote, too much money from...any single source and any single type, but particularly philanthropy, which we do see as part of the problem. And we've talked about it and we probably will talk about it again and unpack it in a way that may be more clear if it's not already. And on that note, one of our, kind of, aspirations is to be more member-funded in a way that is reciprocal, like so

that we can actually serve members' needs and be, you know, co-created, right? Developed by the people that we hope, anyway, that we are speaking with and on behalf of and about. And that is people who are, you know, materially engaged in the nonprofit industrial complex as program evaluators, as program staff, and as program participants, right? Like what would knowledge production actually look like if it served program participants first? And so we, you know, we're thinking about eventually maybe, you know, membership structure or something like that. But for now, what we do have is a platform called Raisely, where folks can, you know, donate any amount that you like. We have this "Compost, Plant, and Grow" framework that's on our website and on the Raisley page if you want to take a look at how we're thinking about transformative justice and reparations and where your positionality is and what might feel right for you to contribute.

Anything I left out, Caro, or that you would like to add?

### **Carolina**

The only thing I would add just kind of to the last point about, you know, community, more community driven fundraising or, you know, membership-driven fundraising. That's definitely a learning journey that we're on. So if you're not able to contribute financially at this time, but if you are knowledgeable around alternative ways of fundraising that are sustainable and not philanthropic- or government-focused, we definitely want to hear them because we're learning along the way, too. And we know there's a lot of wisdom and knowledge out there. So definitely reach out to us if you happen to be an expert on this topic because we want to hear from you.

### **Vidhya**

Yeah, and I'll—totally agree with you and add that, you know, no amount is too small. I mean, we would much rather have thousands of people give us a dollar than one person give us thousands of dollars because it lets us know that we are accountable and we are relevant and, you know, meaningful to the people, like I said, that we, we hope to be. so it's actually to our credit if we were able to get lots of small donations. So I think that, that reminds me of this current moment, speaking about accountability and who we serve. I think we'd be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that, you know, like Caro said, we started thinking about this in a very different time, the podcast, and as much as we had critiques of, you know, the field and the, you know, the economic structure and political structure of this country even at that time, we definitely did not exactly know how things would shake out in 2024 and 2025. And we did not know that we would be living through a genocide, multiple genocides, in fact.<sup>1</sup>

And we were talking among ourselves about like, so what has evaluation, you know, what stance, if any, has it taken in the past and what can we say that will not sound, you know, trite and cliché? Because saying nothing, because we don't know what to say, you know, is still saying something, right? And so, I'm kind of reminded by the, you know, when I see all of the posts on LinkedIn and stuff like that, I see a lot of expressions of concern about loss of work, you know, through USAID and other programs. And I don't want to dismiss the loss of work, considering that I have lost work multiple times, actually. And, and in some cases it was

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, we should have known this considering history

because of loss of funding. Not usually, though. But I can't help being reminded again of the field's failure to acknowledge the effect of the changes on the people that we, you know, again claim to be serving in evaluated programs: the underclass, poor people, working class people, people who are working in grassroots nonprofits, people who depend on public benefits.

And that is often many of us. I mean, that kind of clean line between "us" and "them" is artificial, right? And so, in evaluation, we've seen this before. It was a kind of a very sloshy, like well-funded field in its formal inception in the late 1960s. And then, you know, over time through the process of neoliberalization and the devolution of government, evaluation lost a lot of government contracts and roles because there weren't publicly-funded programs to evaluate. So instead of, again, instead of aligning itself with other victims of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, evaluators very explicitly courted philanthropy, you know, and that is, you know, we can see that with Nick Smith's article in 1985. And we will probably dedicate another episode to the details of this whole kind of history repeating itself because it did do so several times. But I think the gist that, you know, I wanted to just call attention to is that we would not have work if there was not a need for programs that serve the underclass. And so if there was not a nonprofit industrial complex, and if there was not an economy that exploits and excludes people, evaluators would not have work. That is not to say, of course, that there wouldn't always be a need to reflect on work and make decisions and have feedback and reflection. But that's not what evaluation is. Evaluation, as we're always taught, is a client-centered role and we're taught very clearly who the client is. And the client is not the program participant.

And so I think that if we are gonna be honest about how we're making our living, we need to remember that the victims—who is being victimized, who all is being victimized in this moment? And it's frankly really not about us. And so...I guess that's the best thing I can say to acknowledge the time that we're in and the moment that we're in. And I don't know—I wonder sometimes, if we look back at World War II now, we can very clearly see who said what and who did what and who provided the computers for the Nazi regime, which—that is all well-documented. And I do wonder, years from now, what will people say about evaluation? Unlike perhaps some other fields who have put themselves on the line, although I can't say I know too many professional managerial class fields that have. Most of what I know about are working class, you know, labor unions and worker movements—kind of—that have actually put their lives and income on the line in protest. So that's my two cents. I don't know, Caro, if you have anything to add or question or...

### **Carolina**

I guess the question that I have and not necessarily for you to answer, but that's coming to mind is, you know, whether evaluation in some form would still exist. You know, even if, you know, income inequality, racial inequality, et cetera, didn't exist, would some form of evaluation, maybe it's called something different, would still exist. Cause we're always going to live in a resource-limited world or a world in which decisions have to be made around resource allocation. It doesn't necessarily have to be, like, at a philanthropic level or anything like that. Yeah, mean, don't know, but that's just kind of the question that's coming to mind. And if you have a response to it, great, but I'm not necessarily asking you to put you on the spot.

**Vidhya**

Yeah, I think this would be a great episode to have actually, because it did come up, it always comes up. It came up at CREA and it came up a little bit even on the episode with Justin. I think, I mean, I don't actually disagree with you to some extent in that, I mean, I will say there are actually sufficient resources for everybody on the planet right now.

The problem is that there aren't sufficient resources if one person has \$10 billion. That is the issue. It's the income inequality. And so, now that's not to say, like you said, our ancestors were always judicious about where they allocated resources and not being wasteful because it came at the expense of the Earth, for one thing. And yet, I think you kind of answered, I mean, I agree with your answer, is that I wouldn't probably call it evaluation because evaluation is a recent term that was coined to serve a very specific purpose and it is to extract value. That's, like, what Justin was saying. actually means e-evaluate. That doesn't mean, you know, again, that communities did not try to make wise decisions. And so that's not to say that they didn't think about and learn about and reflect on, you know, where would it make sense to commit our time and money and knowledge, right? And so I think that, you know, this—we'll have probably several episodes in here because I think it gets into the idea of positivism and, you know, technocratic and, you know, scientific management and a lot of those kinds of ideas about how we think that we can predict and control results and manage risk and diminish uncertainty. And a lot of those are ideas that come very directly out of colonial economics and plantation economics and capitalism, really. They're not indigenous concepts. Making wise decisions about how to allocate resources and plan, those are indigenous concepts. But I don't know that that's really what evaluation is. And I don't know that that's how we're taught to do it. And so I do think it's going to take at least one episode and probably several to unpack in full. And I would, you know, we would love to hear from others about this because it's often, yes, thrown back, you know, that we've always evaluated and my response back is that we have not always e-evaluated. We've always, you know, made judgments and kind of weighed options and, you know, reflected. But evaluation, you know, it's kind of like, it's kind of like, it's kind of like the difference between, you know, territorial wars and expansion. Like, people have, you know, groups have always conflicted and had war and it has always been violent. You know, the raping and pillaging of people and the land has always been a part of that. And I, we can't pretend that that's not true. And yet that is not, you know, quantitatively or qualitatively the same as some of the, you know, military expansionism and imperialism and genocidal wars that we see today, right? Like on a scale, it is totally different. And in terms of the motivation and purpose, it's totally different. And so, that's kind of how I feel about, about these nuances here.

**Carolina**

Yeah, no, that makes a lot of sense. Yeah, I think it's a question that, I mean, honestly, we could do a whole podcast series probably just on that question. I don't think an episode will do it justice, but probably just an episode is what we'll have time for. But yeah, just something to also prompt listeners to think about too as they listen to our discussion. But yeah, I think with that, I just want to express one more time gratitude: Thanks to everyone that's been listening with us and just been on this journey for this past year with The May 13 Group, whether as a listener or

whether you're one of the members that has been more active with us behind the scenes—there's, you know who you are. You've been convening with us over Zoom, have been doing group and self study with us to think about how we might organize ourselves differently and work towards a solidarity economy. Our funders of course, thank you for believing in the work and being allies. And of course, thank you to Vidhya and Nayantara and thank you to myself too, I guess, for, you know, bringing us all together and continuing to do this work. So we have a lot more to share. We'll have plenty more again in the next Quarterly Compost in the next couple of months. But as you've been listening, if you have questions, definitely let us know and continue engaging with us over the next couple of months.

### **Vidhya**

As we said during our discussion, we invite you to think about what connections you see in the topics of the recent episodes: the links among the Power of Perspective, the ideology of individualism, the concept of an economy. What ideas come up for you when you reflect on these episodes? How are these ideas related to evaluation? To a solidarity economy?

And as you continue to listen to the podcast, please share what you're thinking about with us and any other folx you may be working with or know. We would love to learn from and with you.

### **Carolina**

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