



**CFAR**  
CENTER FOR APPLIED  
RATIONALITY

# Essential Background

**Organization:** Center for Applied Rationality (CFAR)

**Mission:** “Developing clear thinking for the sake of humanity’s future”

**Key Personnel:** Timothy Telleen-Lawton (Executive Director)  
Anna Salamon (President, Chair of the Board, Cofounder)

**Our Research:** CFAR exists to try to make headway in the domain of understanding how human cognition already works, in practice, such that we can then start the process of making useful changes which will better position us to solve the problems that really matter. We are neither about pure research nor pure execution, but about applied rationality—the middle ground where the rubber hits the road, where one’s models meet reality, and where one’s ideas and plans either pay off (or they don’t).

By looking in-depth at individual case studies, advances in cogsci research, and the data and insights from our thousand-plus workshop alumni, we’re slowly building a robust set of tools for truth-seeking, introspection, self-improvement, and navigating intellectual disagreement—and we’re turning that toolkit on itself with each iteration, to try to catch our own flawed assumptions and uncover our own blindspots and mistakes. In short, actually trying to figure things out, such that we can achieve the good and avoid the bad—especially in arenas where we have to get it right on the first try.

Most of our day-to-day work consists of finding or making cognitive tools, finding or developing high-promise individuals, delivering those tools to those individuals, and connecting those individuals with one another and with important projects. We’ve also developed a number of smaller, more targeted programs for things like developing the skill of doing pre-paradigmatic research; wrestling with grief and other deep, powerful emotions; solving coordination problems within companies and social groups; and bringing together both emotional and practical tools to tackle large, daunting, open-ended problems.

Many of our alumni and staff have come to believe that existential risks (x-risks), such as AI safety, present one of the greatest opportunities for clearer thinking to make an important difference on humanity's future. As such, understanding the strategic landscape and making progress in this domain have become priorities for the organization. Many of our coaching hours are now geared toward finding and integrating promising mathematicians and programmers into existing organizations working to address x-risk, and much of our spare effort goes into developing longer, targeted workshops.

That said, our tools, techniques, and mainline workshops are open to everyone—our alumni include students, academics, professionals, and industry experts alike, Americans and internationals, liberals and conservatives, men and women, “arts” people and “STEM” people, and adults of all ages. Our introductory workshops continue to serve a broad population, and to receive high approval ratings largely independent of demographics.

When we're not doing curricular research or running workshops, our instructors might be found providing applied rationality lectures to student groups at universities such as Stanford, Harvard, Yale, MIT, Cambridge, and U.C. Berkeley, or running training sessions for other organizations and for gatherings such as the annual Effective Altruism Global conferences in San Francisco and Oxford. Finally, we run coaching and mentorship programs for our alumni network, helping individuals improve themselves and find their way toward fulfilling, high-impact work.

# Key Personnel



**Timothy Telleen-Lawton**

*Executive Director*

Timothy spent 4 years in research, operations, and management at GiveWell. Previously, he lobbied for Environment America, wrote policy reports for Frontier Group, and ran political campaign offices. He holds a B.S. and M.S. in Earth Systems from Stanford.



**Anna Salamon**

*President, Chair of the Board, and Cofounder*

Anna has previously done machine learning research for NASA and applied mathematics research on the statistics of phage metagenomics. She holds a degree in mathematics from UC Santa Barbara.



**Dan Keys**

*Research Associate*

Dan has conducted research on the psychology of judgment and decision making and published a paper on the science of human rationality. He holds a master's degree in social psychology from Cornell University and a BA in mathematics and statistics from Swarthmore College.



**Jack Carroll**

*Director of Operations*

Jack studied psychology and gender and has previously worked as an event planner, data researcher, and legal assistant. They enjoy gaming, spreadsheets, and deep discussions on the intersection of culture and identity.



**Elizabeth Garrett**

*Community Manager & Instructor*

Elizabeth is an aspiring dicentenarian, former unschooler, and the current Chief of the awesome Event Horizon house in Berkeley.



**Adam Scholl**

*Instructor & Special Projects*

Adam has previously worked in politics, journalism and startups. He aspires to live in Star Wars and loves slime mold, ctenophores, weird timbres, metaethics, working memory optimization, David Attenborough, logical empiricism, swarms, sensible incentive structures and weddell seals..



**Luke Raskopf**

*Instructor & Operations*

After studying Political Science at Duke, Luke spent a year teaching English in Spain on a Fulbright scholarship. He recently joined CFAR to become an instructor, run workshop operations, and manage miscellaneous projects. He can be found exploring methods of communication and introspection, climbing trees, and making music.

# Overview of Media Coverage

**FAST COMPANY**

**lifehacker** **MAIN ST**



CLEARER  
THINKING



**Skepticity**<sup>TM</sup>  
The Official Podcast of Skeptic Magazine and the Skeptics Society -

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

[TheHumanist.com](http://TheHumanist.com)

**The New York Times**



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# Our Clients



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