



REGENERATIVE EVALUATION

INFLUENCES, PATHWAYS & PRACTICES

**By The Regenerative Evaluation
Community of Practice**

Hosted by Unity Effect

Table of contents

Acknowledgements & Transparency.....	3
1. Welcome to Regenerative Evaluation.....	7
1.1 The Tension of Our Time.....	7
1.2 Perspectives on Regenerative Evaluation.....	10
2. The Roots of Regenerative Evaluation.....	16
2.1 Theoretical Foundations.....	17
2.2 Interconnectedness with other evaluation approaches.....	19
3. Principles & Practices of Regenerative Evaluation.....	24
3.1 Guiding principles.....	25
3.2 The Seven Core Practices of Regenerative Inquiry.....	36
4. Frameworks & Methods for Regenerative Evaluation.....	46
4.1 Frameworks – Mapping the Terrain.....	47
4.2 The Methods Mosaic.....	63
5. Applying Regenerative Evaluation: Entry Points to Transformative Impact.....	67
6. Case Studies: Regenerative Evaluation in Practice.....	73
6.1 Inclusive social entrepreneurship with SEND e.V.....	74
6.2 Transition Together.....	76
7. Looking Ahead: The Future of Regenerative Evaluation.....	79
Literature overview.....	84

Acknowledgements & Transparency

This Living Paper is the harvest of a collective inquiry. It grew out of the deep dialogues, case clinics, and shared experiences of the Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice over the past two and a half years. Because knowledge is never neutral, and because regenerative practice asks of us to locate ourselves within the systems we seek to change, each of our core contributors has offered a brief statement on their positionality and contribution to this work:

Katie Boone, Ph.D.: Brings to this work a woven lineage of regenerative, story and reconciliation work rooted in applied practices that have utilized patterns of life and living systems to support systems change and reconciliation efforts. Her work has been applied across community-led, nonprofit, social entrepreneurial and government sectors. She has contributed to the frameworks section and had shared early on about the theory development process for Regenerative Evaluation when it was in the very early stages, contributing to the thought partnership of what is now the Regenerative Evaluation community of practice.

Kirsten Bording Collins: Brings to this work a deep regard for nature and living systems. She has a background in evaluation and systems practice and is founder of AdaptivePurpose, a consulting practice focused on building capacity in systemic practices. Kirsten contributed to several sections of this paper including the roots, principles and practices.

Jannik Kaiser: Approaching this work from a background in systems change, social entrepreneurship, and evaluation, Jannik serves as the host for the Community of Practice. He acted as the primary weaver and editor of this paper, synthesizing the community's dialogues and facilitating the writing process.

Laila Martins: With a background in international relations, sustainability, and conventional data analytics, Laila serves as the program support for activities that cascade out of the Community of Practice such as this paper. She has supported the revision and designing of this work and its supporting documentation.

Matteah Spencer Reppart: Brings to this work a deep orientation toward inquiry around the mindsets and worldviews that shape what we see, know, and value. With a background in strategic learning, evaluation, and systems change, her contributions have been informed in part by her involvement with the Equitable

Evaluation Initiative, which invites a shift in the evaluation paradigm. For this work, she offered guiding questions and thought partnership.

Dr. Tim Strasser: brings to this work his experience as a practitioner, researcher and consultant for impact-driven social innovation networks, which allowed him to perceive recurring patterns of how transformative innovation emerges and evolves across a variety of contexts, and how evaluation can be both a supportive and limiting aspect of this process. He helped to shape the principles and practices described in this paper and is the author of the SCALE 3D model.

Geetha Van den Daele: Geetha brings to this work her deep belief in the wisdom within individuals and communities, and the power of questions. She participated in reflections and dialogue within the Community of Practice sessions and contributed her personal perspectives and experiences.

The questions we hold dear

Throughout the drafting process, we intentionally tried not to position ourselves as "objective experts" defining a new standard. Instead, we let a set of living questions guide our inquiry. We invite you to hold them with us as you read:

- How might this paper be written from a place of exploration, wondering, and "not knowing"?
- How do we properly acknowledge and honor the lineages, wisdom traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems that underpin these concepts?
- Whose voices are being centered, and whose might be missing?
- How do we address the historical paradigms of evaluation without dismissing the value they created?
- Is it even our place to "define" regenerative evaluation, or simply to invite others into the inquiry?

The shoulders we stand on

We recognize that the core tenets of regeneration such as interconnectedness, reciprocity, and viewing the world as a living system, are not new discoveries but ancient truths that have been held, lived, and protected by Indigenous cultures and wisdom traditions worldwide long before they were formalized into professional frameworks. We humbly bow to these original systems thinkers and regenerative practitioners.

We also stand on the shoulders of the decolonial, feminist, and critical scholars who laid the groundwork for epistemic justice, teaching us to ask whose knowledge counts. We are indebted to the pioneers of complexity science, developmental evaluation, and systems thinking who gave us the vocabulary to navigate emergence and non-linearity.

Finally, we honor the traditional monitoring and evaluation practitioners who built this field. We seek to build on and contribute to the development of it. The rigor, discipline, and deep desire for accountability embedded in traditional frameworks provided the necessary foundation and stepping stones that made this regenerative inquiry possible.

Open source & intellectual property

In the spirit of regeneration, this knowledge is meant to be shared, adapted, and evolved. This document is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-SA 4.0).

You are warmly invited to use, remix, and apply all ideas and resources of the Living Paper in your own work (including commercial settings), provided you credit the Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice (hosted by Unity Effect) and share your adaptations under the exact same open terms.

On the use of Artificial Intelligence

We want to be transparent about the role Artificial Intelligence (specifically Large Language Models) played in the creation of this paper. We used LLMs extensively as a sounding board and writing companion to help translate our complex, multi-voiced community dialogues into structured text, and to generate some of the visual diagrams included in these pages.

We actively grapple with the tension this creates. This paper represents countless hours of unpaid, voluntary labor by practitioners who felt this work was simply too important not to share. AI gave us the capacity to actually bring this offering into the world. However, we acknowledge the paradox of using a tool embedded in extractive paradigms (from massive energy consumption in data centers to the complex social implications) within a framework dedicated to regeneration.

We do not claim to have found the perfect balance. However, we strove to use these tools with care and strict boundaries, ensuring that human relationships, lived experiences, and the authentic voice of our community remained the true source and soul of this work.

The Role of Unity Effect: Stewarding the Community

Every healthy ecosystem requires a resilient container in which to grow. Unity Effect serves as the initial steward and backbone organization for the Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice. Unity Effect's core role is to create the conditions for this collective wisdom to emerge by:

- **Holding the Container:** Providing the digital infrastructure, facilitation, and dedicated team capacity required to keep this global community connected, organized, and thriving.
- **Nurturing Intentional Growth:** Steering the development of this network at the speed of trust, ensuring the ecosystem remains healthy, inclusive, and deeply rooted as it scales.
- **Co-Learning as Partners:** Unity Effect is one actor among many in this ecosystem, showing up as a dedicated partner to co-learn, experiment, and evolve alongside the wider community.

Supported by the DATipilot Program

The development of this Living Paper was significantly informed by insights gathered during the [IMANI project](#), an Innovation Sprint funded by the DATipilot program under Germany's Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space. Through the IMANI initiative, Unity Effect focused on advancing participatory and regenerative impact measurement within startup ecosystems. The research, resources, and continuous learning made possible by this funding provided vital groundwork that helped shape and refine the frameworks presented in this document. (For more information, visit: www.bmbf.de/datipilot)

1. Welcome to Regenerative Evaluation

1.1 The Tension of Our Time

To foster social or environmental change today is to navigate the tension between two diverging paradigms. On one side are the institutional demands of reporting: the necessary drive for accountability, data-driven decision-making, and proof of impact. On the other side is the complex truth of the living systems we inhabit: a call for regeneration, deep interconnectedness, and continuous learning and adaptation.

For too long, evaluation has forced a choice between the two. It has often functioned as an extractive exercise: mining data to feed upward reporting structures, counting the "fruits" of a project while ignoring the health of the "soil" that sustains them.

Evaluation in Service of Life

Evaluation can be much more than a retrospective measure of past performance. Rather than extracting data solely to look backward, it can be a living practice that helps a system sense its own health and navigate uncertainty. Regenerative Evaluation is evaluation in service of life.

It is designed not just to assess impact, but to enhance the vitality of the systems we depend on. It bridges the gap between compliance and systemic health by holding two guiding questions simultaneously:

- **The System's Question:** "How can measurement contribute to better decision-making, learning, adaptability, and rigorous evidence?"
- **The Regenerative Question:** "How can the process of evaluation itself contribute to our mutual flourishing?"

Weaving Three Strands

This tension is not new. We stand on the shoulders of many who have challenged conventional paradigms. Regenerative Evaluation does not seek to replace these

approaches but to weave them together into a coherent practice for the polycrisis. It integrates three essential strands of evaluation:

- **Systemic & Complexity-Aware:** Moving beyond linear logic to honor emergence and interdependencies.
- **Power-Conscious & Justice-Oriented:** Centering equity, lived experience, and the shifting of power dynamics.
- **Planetary & Ecological:** Placing biological health and ecological thriving at the center of how we define success.

A Living Paper from a Living Community

This is a "Living Paper" – a snapshot of an evolving practice, which emerged from the dialogues and collective inquiry of the Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice.

Our ambition is not to define what Regenerative Evaluation is, but to illuminate what it can be and become. We offer this as an open invitation to explore, adapt, and evolve the practice together.

Why We Start with the Personal

Finally, this approach acknowledges a simple truth: we cannot take ourselves out of the equation. Evaluation is an intervention. Whether we intend to or not, the act of asking questions leaves marks on a system. We are not objective observers looking in from the outside; we are active participants in a web of relationships.

Because of this, the quality of our data depends on the quality of our trust. Regenerative Evaluation invites us to show up with both our analytical minds and our full humanity.

Therefore, we begin this paper with Personal Perspectives. Before diving into the "How" of the methodology, we invite you to read the reflections of practitioners who are grappling with the "Why." We place these voices at the very beginning to honor the fact that systemic change always starts with the inner condition of the change-maker.

How to Navigate This Paper

Following the Personal Perspectives, we have structured the paper to move from the roots to the practical application:

- **The Roots (Chapter 2):** A brief acknowledgment of the lineages and theories that ground this work.
- **The Principles (Chapter 3):** Seven one-page guides to the core mindsets of Regenerative Evaluation.
- **Frameworks & Methods (Chapter 4):** A curated look at specific tools (like the Impact Garden) and a matrix of methods.
- **Applying Regenerative Evaluation (Chapter 5):** Tailored entry points for Foundations, NGOs, and Policymakers.
- **Case Studies (Chapter 6):** Real-world narratives focusing on the process and relational shifts.
- **Looking Ahead: The Future of Regenerative Evaluation (Chapter 7):** Strategic pathways for institutionalizing the practice, scaling its applications, and growing the community.

Choose your pathway

- **For those shaping strategy and culture:** If you are looking to shift the mindset of your organization, spend your time in the Three Essential Strands and the Nine Guiding Principles. These sections provide the vocabulary needed to advocate for a new paradigm.
- **For those designing and implementing evaluation:** If you need tangible tools for your next project, you may want to jump straight to the Seven Core Practices and the Case Studies. Here you will find the operational mechanics of doing this work on the ground.
- **For those resourcing and funding change:** If you are a grantmaker or commissioner, focus on the Introduction (to understand the systemic bottlenecks we are solving) and the Future Pathways (to see how you can actively resource the regenerative infrastructure of the future).

Finally, we invite you to treat this as a working companion. Scribble in the margins. Highlight the tensions that make you uncomfortable. Take the practices that serve your current context and leave the ones that don't. This paper is meant to be a compass for your own ongoing inquiry.

1.2 Perspectives on Regenerative Evaluation

Evaluation is a human practice. Systems change is about both structural shifts and the very human connections and experiences that make those shifts possible. The way we measure and define success is deeply connected to who we are, the contexts we operate in, and the lived experiences that have shaped us. To change how we evaluate, we have to acknowledge the lenses we look through, rather than pretending to be objective, detached observers.

Because this is a Living Paper, we invited practitioners from our Community of Practice to share their personal relationship with evaluation. We asked them what drives them, what tensions they hold, and what they are striving for.

We believe that to transform the field of evaluation, we must first locate ourselves within it.

The following pages are personal reflections. They capture the everyday frustrations with traditional reporting, the defining moments that sparked a shift in perspective, and the evolving visions of the people actually doing this work on the ground.

We invite you to read these perspectives not as definitive answers, but as practitioners sharing their ongoing inquiry into what evaluation can become.

What futures could we enable if evaluation helped us notice the signals and patterns of regeneration already taking shape? (Laila Martins)

I imagine a future where evaluation feels less like a checkpoint and more like a living ecosystem, something that grows, adapts, and nourishes the work it touches.

To enable this future, our evaluation systems can listen for signals: the early cues that something new is taking root, the subtle indicators of emerging capacity, connection, or possibility. Coming from Brazil, I've learned that knowledge, wisdom, and impact have always been multidimensional. They are felt in the body, seen in relationships, and carried forward in community

Across corporate teams, start-ups, governments and NGOs, people want to understand not just **what they're doing but why it matters**. If evaluation helped us attune to these signals more intentionally, I believe we could enable futures rooted in reciprocity rather than extraction. Instead of asking whether an intervention "worked," we might ask how it contributed to the conditions for continued flourishing. Instead of reporting outcomes in isolation, we could trace the patterns that connect them.

These can then become legitimate forms of evidence.

Evidence is necessary to stay honest with ourselves and have awareness of the reality ahead of us. In this light, metrics evolve from policing impact into instruments of learning and collective alignment.

Regenerative evaluation, to me, is about creating systems that uplift rather than constrain. It envisions impact not as a static outcome but as a living ripple that continues beyond any single intervention. It helps us make sense of our choices, learn from them, and evolve with intention.

I believe we're moving toward a world in which evaluation functions as an act of stewardship: of emergent potential and of the collective futures we aspire to create. I want to be part of designing the tools that make that future possible. I am super thankful for the experiences, insights and many ways of knowing that have gone into this living paper. In the ongoing process of becoming regenerative beings, I hope this work offers insight and orientation as you move toward enabling the more beautiful world we all know is possible.

How can evaluation give more energy than it takes? (Jannik Kaiser)

For years, I have carried a question that challenges the traditional logic of our sector: How can the process of evaluation give more energy than it takes – for the people we work with, the causes we care about, and ourselves?

Too often, evaluation is experienced as a "tax" on doing good: an extractive exercise where we mine data from communities to feed upward reporting structures. It reinforces a power dynamic where the funder holds the yardstick and the community bears the burden of proof. We count the fruits while depleting the soil. But I believe – and have witnessed first hand – that evaluation can be a source of vitality and justice, not just accountability.

For the people we work with, regenerative evaluation shifts the dynamic from extraction to empowerment. It asks the fundamental question: Who owns the story? When we design inquiries that foster reflection rather than just extraction, we hand the power of narrative back to the community. A survey becomes a tool for self-advocacy; an interview becomes a space to define value on their own terms. We don't just capture agency; the process itself builds it.

For the causes we care about, this approach allows us to stop obsessing over linear attribution and start tending to the conditions of change. By making the "invisible" visible—trust, resilience, relationships—we validate the true drivers of systemic impact. This shifts the definition of success from what is easily counted by external actors to what is deeply felt by the ecosystem itself.

And finally, for ourselves. When we view evaluation as a practice of care rather than judgment, we change how we show up. We move from being auditors of impact to witnesses of transformation. This requires us to relinquish the power of the "objective expert" and embrace the vulnerability of a partner. This shift heals the fragmentation between our professional roles and our human need for connection.

Regenerative Evaluation for me is a fundamental shift in intention. It is the commitment to leave every system we touch – including the human spirit – more alive than we found it.

What brought me in, and what is keeping me here... (Geetha Van den Daele)

At a time when I was feeling depleted, a question appeared on my screen — Jannik's question — one that brought me back to evaluation with renewed energy:

How can evaluation give more energy than it takes?

I felt an actual release when I read it. *This* question. It held the tension I had been carrying – between care and compliance, context and assumptions, learning and proof, and energy and exhaustion.

This question let me pause and exhale, and re-enter the field with curiosity and confidence rather than fatigue. It didn't introduce something new; rather, it brought to life what I felt and believed inside all along. And I think it goes back much further than my work as an evaluator.

My understanding of – and love for – asking questions and understanding complexity I believe originates from being born in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, and growing up in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada. It is not a linear story and it resists simple explanation.

So understanding context was never abstract to me; it was lived. Meaning was always shaped by where I was, who I was with, and what was happening around me. It expanded my curiosity, how I think, the kinds of questions I ask, and my ability to connect with others whose experiences differ from my own.

It also taught me that simple answers rarely hold, and that the most important insights often emerge when we make space for context and multiple truths to coexist. **For me, honoring context and complexity isn't a methodological preference as an evaluator — it's an ethical stance shaped by experience.** I've learned, again and again, that wisdom already exists within people and spaces. When evaluation creates and holds the conditions for reflection, relationship, and curiosity, insights can surface and deepen.

While our work is often commissioned by organizations, my deepest responsibility is to the people and communities those organizations serve. A regenerative stance asks me to stay attentive to power, care, and context. And I continue to reflect with myself and others – and act upon – how evaluation can give more energy than it takes.

How do evaluators work with Place? (Katie Boone, Ph. D.)

Evaluation is not neutral – as evaluators – our Place, perspective, worldview, culture and context can influence the validity of the results of our work.

Grounding into a Lineage of Developmental Learning

A developmental approach is what best nourishes a regenerative field of practice. My roots are deep within the [Art of Hosting Global Community of Practice](#), engaging with patterns of life and living systems in participatory approaches that honor these patterns. My practices are continuously shaped and transformed by the reconciliation and healing that Dakota Elders are leading here as we work in deep partnership in this Place. Together, through our partnership efforts towards [reconciliation](#) with [Dakota communities](#) and non-Indigenous communities here in Mni Sota (Minnesota) – we are learning a lot. My regenerative practices continue developing through learning communities within [Regenesis Institute for Regenerative Practice](#) and the [Change Agent Development](#) program. I want to name and honor both [Pamela Mang](#) and [Carol Sanford](#) who have deeply nourished and evolved the field of regenerative practice over the last 30+ years.

Regenerative Evaluation: A place-sourced practice that is done in partnership

Place-sourced practices are not place-based. Place-sourced practices require evaluators to acknowledge the role that Place has in evaluation work. *Place is an active participant in our evaluations* when we take a place-sourced approach to evaluation. Throughout my contributions here, Place is capitalized intentionally. “*Place as a participant*” means that Place is agentialized, it has a memory, a voice, and stories to offer the field. Place is a relative in the work I do in partnership with Dakota people here in Mni Sota. Regenerative Evaluation requires an integration of Place as a participant in our work. We, as evaluators, have a role and responsibility to be good relatives in partnership with our Aboriginal Indigenous communities who have been stewarding Place since time immemorial.

Co-evolving Forward

When regenerative evaluators work with “*Place as a participant*,” we can generate value-adding effects that contribute to mutually evolving our Places, benefiting both people and planet. “*Partnership as praxis*” means we are learning by doing in partnership with the Aboriginal stewards of the land. When we practice this work in a good way – evaluation has the potential to contribute to reconciling and regenerating thriving ecosystems for all life here on this planet we call home.

The Being & the Doing of Regenerative Evaluation (Matteah Spencer Reppart)

I'm not quite sure what regenerative evaluation is, or how to practice it. But I have a growing sense that regenerative evaluation is less about what I do, and more about who I am and where I come from.

I was born into – and continue to participate in – a society that often feels quite degenerative. The social systems around me have not created conditions for mutual flourishing, for humans or for the more-than-human world. As a result we're living through the decline of our democracy, loss of biodiversity, political instability and polarization, persistent inequality, climate instability, state violence, and exponential technological growth at unknown costs.

This is our reckoning. The way my society has structured itself has not been 'life affirming.' Instead, it often extracts, overconsumes, degrades, and emphasizes power-over, productivity and growth at all costs. I come from a culture that often values my doing over my being. A culture that values my worth by what I contribute to the marketplace, rather than what I contribute to my community.

I find myself wondering what it means to live a regenerative life. What it means to be a regenerative parent and leader. What regenerative families, organizations, and societies might look like. And yes, I'm also curious what evaluation could be like if it were regenerative, because it, too, often feels extractive, exhausting, degrading and punitive. I have so much to learn and unlearn.

The Earth itself, if left to its own, is inherently regenerative. It creates, supports, and nourishes life. This Earth, this ecological system in which we exist, is a living system that can show us how to live and relate and exist (and even evaluate) regeneratively. And those who come from cultures that understand the Land as teacher, who know how to live in right relationship with it, can guide us too.

So while I haven't figured everything out, I'm simply an explorer – asking questions, holding curiosity, offering what I'm noticing, and committing to practicing something different.

And while I'm not quite sure what regenerative evaluation is, or how to practice it, I don't think I'll know how to do it until I learn how to live it.

2. The Roots of Regenerative Evaluation

Every thriving ecosystem relies on what happens beneath the soil. The canopy of a forest is only possible because of the intricate root systems that stabilize the earth, exchange nutrients, and connect trees in a vast web of reciprocity. In the same way, Regenerative Evaluation is a practice deeply rooted in history, theory, and interconnected fields of knowledge.

To understand where we are going, we must understand where we have come from.

Measurement is, at its core, an evolutionary function. For millennia, humans measured through direct relationships: tracking the seasons, reading the health of a landscape, and sensing the social dynamics of a community. Measurement was a practice of attunement.

As societies industrialized, this relational knowing was largely replaced by a drive for standardization and control. The lens of evaluation narrowed, prioritizing objectivity over connection and efficiency over complexity. We became experts at counting the "fruits" (outputs) while ignoring the health of the "soil" (systemic conditions). Today, facing intersecting ecological and social crises, the limitations of this extractive approach are clear. We are called to reclaim measurement not as a tool for control, but as a practice of care.

Regenerative Evaluation does not stand alone. It is a synthesis of diverse lineages that have long challenged the dominant paradigm. In this chapter, we explore the two main "root systems" that nourish this work:

1. **Theoretical Foundations:** Fields that help us see the world as alive and interconnected—including Systems Thinking, Indigenous Wisdom, Phenomenology, and Ecology. These are lived ways of engaging with complexity.
2. **Interconnected Lineages:** The evaluation pioneers who paved the way. We build on Systemic, Power-Conscious, and Ecological evaluation approaches, standing on the shoulders of those who have fought to center equity, complexity, and the planet in our evidence.

By grounding our practice in this wisdom, we ensure our evaluation work actively nourishes the systems we serve.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Regenerative Evaluation is a lens: a way of seeing, making sense of, and engaging with evaluation as a living process. It draws from diverse fields of knowledge that move beyond mechanistic, linear approaches toward ways of measuring that honor complexity, interconnectedness, and potential.

At its core, Regenerative Evaluation is rooted in these six foundational fields:

1. Systems Thinking & Complexity Science

Change is emergent, nonlinear, and shaped by interdependent relationships. Systems thinking helps us move beyond static indicators to see evaluation as a process of continuous feedback and adaptation. It provides the tools to explore perspectives, boundaries, and the dynamic interrelationships that define complex problems.

2. Ecology & Regenerative Design

Ecology provides the foundational metaphor, offering insights into how living systems sustain themselves and evolve through resilience, reciprocity, and cycles of growth and decay. Regenerative Design applies these principles to human systems, shifting the goal of evaluation from "minimizing harm" to "strengthening the conditions for life to flourish".

3. Indigenous Knowledge & Wisdom Traditions

Indigenous worldviews emphasize relational accountability, reciprocity, and intergenerational stewardship. They challenge extractive knowledge practices by positioning evaluation as a practice of care. This root anchors Regenerative Evaluation in the understanding that we are interconnected with the land and the more-than-human world.

4. Phenomenology & Embodied Cognition

Our perception of change is not just rational but embodied and intuitive. Phenomenology validates lived experience as a primary source of knowledge, while modern neuroscience confirms that emotion and intuition are central to how humans make sense of the world. Together, they invite us to include somatic signals and subjective meaning in our evidence.

5. Futures Studies & Strategic Foresight

Traditional evaluation looks back at what has happened; Regenerative Evaluation also looks forward to what wants to happen. Drawing on Futures Studies, this approach seeks to identify "weak signals" of change and work with the latent potential in a system. It moves evaluation from a retrospective audit to a prospective tool for shaping desirable, life-affirming futures.

6. Developmental & Transformational Learning

Evaluation is not just a measurement exercise; it is a learning journey. Theories of double-loop and experiential learning emphasize that deep adaptation requires us to question our underlying assumptions, not just our actions. This root ensures that evaluation is integrated into cycles of reflection that allow individuals and systems to evolve over time.

How This Shapes Regenerative Evaluation

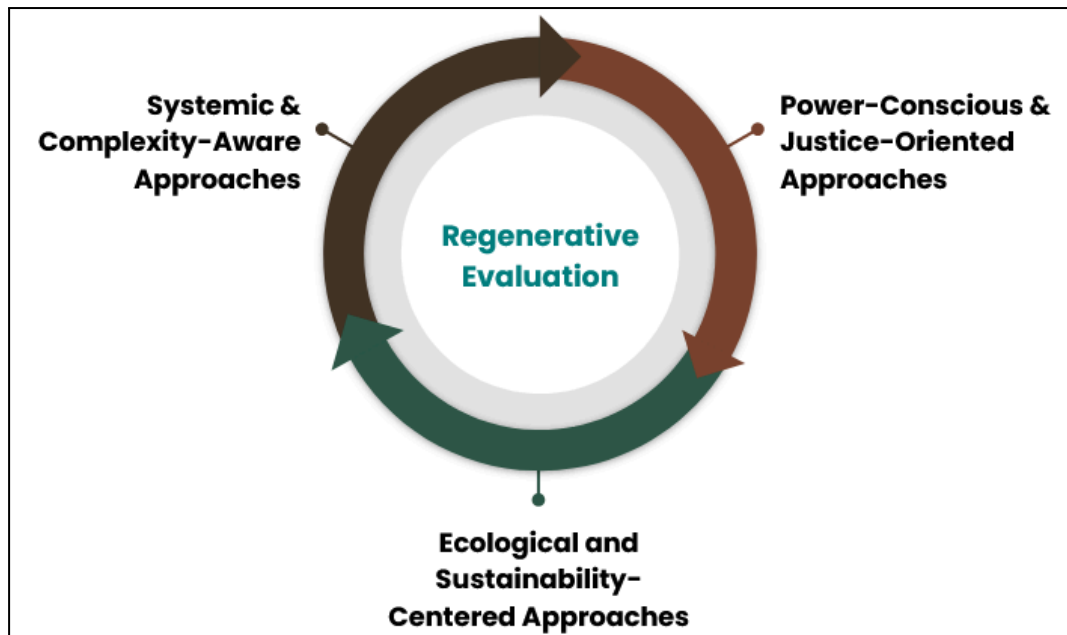
These theoretical foundations challenge the assumption that impact can be fully captured through predefined indicators. Instead, Regenerative Evaluation:

- Embraces multiple ways of knowing, including quantitative, qualitative, relational, and embodied insights.
- Prioritizes learning and adaptation over rigid accountability structures.
- Views impact as co-created, shifting power dynamics to include those closest to the system being evaluated.
- Aims to nourish rather than extract, ensuring that evaluation contributes to the vitality of the people and systems it engages with.
- Transforms the role of the evaluator by moving practitioners away from the illusion of being detached observers, inviting them instead to show up as self-aware, active participants who practice relational accountability.
- Expands the temporal horizon by shifting evaluation from a retrospective audit to a prospective tool for sensing emergent potential and shaping desirable, life-affirming futures.
- Rejects universal, "copy-paste" solutions in favor of place-sourced wisdom, recognizing that success must be defined by the unique history, culture, and ecology of the specific context.

For those interested in deeper exploration, the annex provides a detailed literature overview with references to key thinkers, frameworks, and methodologies.

2.2 Interconnectedness with other evaluation approaches

Regenerative Evaluation does not stand alone; it is deeply connected to and builds upon the evolution of the evaluation field. Over the past decades, a growing number of approaches have sought to challenge conventional, extractive paradigms of evaluation, moving beyond rigid, quantitative measurement toward more systemic, participatory, and equity-driven approaches.



Through this evolution, we can identify three major strands of evaluation approaches that have challenged conventional evaluation and established relevant alternatives:

1. Systemic & Complexity-Aware Approaches

These approaches challenge linear cause-effect thinking and recognize that change is emergent, relational, and shaped by dynamic interactions. They focus on whole systems, adaptive learning, and feedback loops rather than predefined outcomes. By valuing the "space between" actors as much as the actors themselves, these methods help practitioners navigate uncertainty. They shift the goal of measurement from proving past attribution to improving future adaptability.

Examples: Developmental Evaluation, Principles-focused Evaluation, Complexity-Aware Monitoring, Blue Marble Evaluation, Living Systems Evaluation.

2. Power-Conscious & Justice-Oriented Approaches

These approaches focus on who holds power in evaluation, whose voices are heard, and how evaluation can serve social transformation. They challenge extractive knowledge practices and emphasize participatory, equity-driven, and culturally responsive methodologies. They demand epistemic justice by insisting that lived experience is treated as highly rigorous data. In doing so, they redefine the evaluator's role from an objective judge to an engaged facilitator of community agency.

Examples: Indigenous Evaluation, Equitable Evaluation, Feminist Evaluation, Transformative Evaluation, Empowerment Evaluation.

3. Ecological and Earth-Centered Approaches

This strand centers ecological well-being, planetary health, and the interdependence of human and natural systems. These approaches move beyond simply measuring "environmental impact" as an externality to viewing the Earth as a primary stakeholder. This requires expanding our temporal horizon to consider intergenerational impacts and the natural cycles of regeneration and decay. It challenges the anthropocentric bias of traditional metrics by evaluating human activity strictly within planetary boundaries.

Examples: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk), Planetary Health Evaluation, Biocultural & Place-Based Evaluation

The following tables provide an overview of transformative evaluation approaches—from complexity-aware to power-conscious and ecological methods. Regenerative Evaluation learns from and collaborates with these approaches, recognizing the unique value each brings—whether in navigating uncertainty, promoting equity, or engaging with living systems. In integrating these strengths, Regenerative Evaluation enriches existing practices and sets the stage for a deeper exploration of its distinct contributions in the next chapter.

Table 1: Systemic & Complexity-Aware Approaches

Evaluation Approach	Essence / Unique Contribution	How Regenerative Evaluation relates
Developmental Evaluation (DE)	Supports innovation in complex, dynamic environments by embedding learning within the development process. It thrives in uncertainty, helping initiatives adapt and evolve.	Regenerative Evaluation and Developmental Evaluation share a commitment to continuous learning and adaptive change. Both approaches embed reflective processes within initiatives to uncover deeper conditions that drive transformation.
Principles-focussed evaluation	Focuses on evaluating whether guiding principles are meaningful, adhered to, and effective in navigating complex, dynamic environments, rather than tracking rigid, pre-defined rules or targets.	Regenerative Evaluation heavily relies on this approach by structuring its own core framework around 9 Guiding Principles. Both recognize that in unpredictable living systems, a shared internal compass is far more effective for aligned action than a static roadmap.
Blue Marble Evaluation (BME)	Takes a planetary perspective, recognizing the interconnectedness of systems at local, regional, and global scales. It focuses on systemic transformation and sustainability.	Blue Marble Evaluation and Regenerative Evaluation converge on a global, interconnected view of impact. They promote shared learning by bridging local strengths with broader planetary considerations.
Complexity-Aware Monitoring (CAM)	Recognizes that change is nonlinear and shaped by emergent patterns and interdependencies. CAM uses adaptive learning instead of fixed indicators.	Both Complexity-Aware Monitoring and Regenerative Evaluation recognize that change is nonlinear and emergent. They share the goal of exploring underlying dynamics and developing adaptive, responsive evaluation practices.
Living Systems Evaluation (LSE)	Views organizations and initiatives as living, evolving systems rather than mechanistic structures. It prioritizes relational health, resilience, and co-evolution.	Regenerative Evaluation and Living Systems Evaluation both value the interdependence of all actors within a system. They pursue a shared learning quest to capture relational patterns and emergent qualities that support long-term well-being.

Table 2: Power-Conscious & Justice-Oriented Approaches

Evaluation Approach	Essence / Unique Contribution	How Regenerative Evaluation relates
Indigenous Evaluation	Grounded in relationality, reciprocity, storytelling, and holistic well-being. It challenges Western objectivity and values interdependence, lived experience, and intergenerational wisdom.	Indigenous Evaluation and Regenerative Evaluation honor diverse ways of knowing and relational ethics. They commit to centering community voices and cultural wisdom to nurture sustainable change.
Equitable Evaluation (EE)	Calls for evaluation to advance equity, disrupt power dynamics, and center the voices of those most impacted by systemic injustice. It shifts evaluation from extractive knowledge-gathering to justice-driven inquiry.	Both Equitable Evaluation and Regenerative Evaluation focus on fairness and inclusive participation. They share the objective of shifting power dynamics by ensuring that evaluation processes reflect the lived experiences of all stakeholders through mutual inquiry and learning.
Feminist Evaluation (FE)	Critiques power imbalances in evaluation and emphasizes intersectionality, lived experience, and relational ways of knowing. It centers gender, identity, and social justice in measuring impact.	Feminist Evaluation and Regenerative Evaluation approach change from a relational perspective, emphasizing intersectionality and mutual empowerment. Their shared learning quest is rooted in social justice and the promotion of diverse voices.
Transformative Evaluation (TE)	Integrates social justice, human rights, and cultural responsiveness into evaluation. It challenges dominant paradigms and seeks to make evaluation an active force for systemic change.	Transformative Evaluation and Regenerative Evaluation both aim for systemic transformation. They share learning goals around reflexivity, cultural responsiveness, and the creation of conditions that enable enduring, meaningful change.
Empowerment Evaluation	Shifts the evaluator from an external judge to a coach, equipping communities with tools to foster self-determination and internal capacity building.	Both reject extractive models and treat evaluation as capacity building. They center agency, ensuring communities own their sense-making and continuous adaptation.

Table 3: Ecological and Earth-Centered Approaches

Evaluation Approach	Essence / Unique Contribution	How Regenerative Evaluation relates
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Historically rooted in policy and planning, these approaches systematically assess the potential environmental consequences of projects (EIA) or policies (SEA) <i>before</i> they occur. They focus on mitigation, compliance, and "doing no harm."	Regenerative Evaluation builds on the rigor of EIA/SEA but flips the goal from " minimizing harm " to " maximizing vitality ." While EIA asks, "How do we reduce damage?", Regenerative Evaluation asks, "How does this project actively restore the health of the ecosystem?"
Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk)	Originating from Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, this approach weaves together the strengths of Indigenous knowledge (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) and Western scientific methods. It views nature as a relation to be respected.	Regenerative Evaluation shares the commitment to pluralistic knowing . It adopts the "Two-Eyed" stance by validating both quantitative data (e.g., biodiversity metrics) and relational wisdom (e.g., stories of the land) to create a holistic picture.
Planetary Health Evaluation	Emerging from the public health sector, this approach evaluates the inextricable link between human health and the natural systems on which it depends. It assesses interventions by asking: "Does this support human flourishing <i>within</i> planetary boundaries?"	Both approaches recognize that human and ecological health are one . Regenerative Evaluation applies this lens to organizational health, understanding that a thriving organization cannot exist in a dying ecosystem. It scales this interdependence from the planetary down to the project level.
Biocultural & Place-Based Evaluation	This approach recognizes that biological diversity and cultural diversity are deeply linked ("biocultural diversity"). It evaluates impact by looking at specific landscapes and the unique cultural practices that sustain them.	This aligns perfectly with the regenerative principle of " Honoring Place ." Both approaches reject universal abstractions in favor of context-specific indicators that reflect the unique story, culture, and ecology of the specific territory being evaluated.

3. Principles & Practices of Regenerative Evaluation

From Theory to Embodiment: Navigating New Territory

We have explored the roots of Regenerative Evaluation—the histories and theories that ground us. Now, we turn to the "how." To bring this work to life, we must translate deep understanding into daily action, bridging the gap between philosophy and fieldwork.

Conventional evaluation has provided us with robust tools for measuring the tangible and the linear. We honor this lineage of rigor. Yet, as we face increasing complexity, we find that static maps no longer capture the shifting terrain of our work. We cannot rely on rigid, pre-defined paths to navigate dynamic, living systems.

Instead, we need a new set of navigational aids that allow us to sense and respond to the reality of the moment. This chapter outlines the living framework that guides this inquiry:

- **The 9 Principles** (Internal Orientation): These are the values and mindsets that guide our judgment. They help us orient ourselves amidst uncertainty, ensuring that our decisions—from design to reporting—remain aligned with the logic of life.
- **The 7 Core Practices** (External Application): These are the "movements" we make in the world. They are the specific methods and habits that allow us to translate the principles into tangible evidence and action.

A Living Framework

We offer these as an open invitation to evolve your practice. Whether you are building on established evaluation methods or seeking entirely new ways of seeing, these principles and practices provide the tools to chart a course that is rigorous, relational, and deeply in service of life.

3.1 Guiding principles

At the heart of Regenerative Evaluation lies a set of guiding principles that help shape both the intention and the practice of evaluation as a life-affirming endeavor. These principles do not prescribe a fixed methodology, but rather offer a compass for engaging with complexity, nurturing relationships, and cultivating systemic vitality.



Rooted in ecological thinking, embodied wisdom, and deep listening, they invite evaluators to show up differently—more attuned, more reflexive, and more aligned with the systems they seek to serve. The following nine principles provide foundational orientations that can be adapted and embodied across diverse contexts and evaluation purposes.

How to Engage with the Principle Pages

To bridge the gap between abstract philosophy and daily fieldwork, we have structured the exploration of these nine principles with a consistent, practical rhythm. Each of the following pages serves as a standalone guide, designed to move you from understanding to action:

- **The Core Intention:** We begin with a concise summary of the principle's purpose and the fundamental "why" behind it.
- **Embodying the Principle:** A principle is only as useful as the action it inspires. This section outlines three to four concrete postures or actions you can take to actively live this principle in your evaluation work.
- **Supportive Methods:** To show how these concepts ground into reality, we highlight specific, established evaluation tools and methods that naturally facilitate and strengthen this principle.
- **The Shadow Side:** Finally, we offer a crucial warning. This section explores what happens when a principle is misunderstood, faked, or taken to an unhealthy extreme. Acknowledging these shadows helps us maintain integrity and avoid the trap of "regenerative washing."

1. Align with the cyclical rhythms of life



To synchronize our evaluation practices with the natural ebbs and flows of the systems we serve. This principle challenges the linear, "always-on" growth mindset of industrial evaluation. It invites us to honor the necessity of "wintering"—periods of rest and reflection—and to recognize that for the new to emerge, we must actively practice "composting" what no longer serves. It is about evaluating at the speed of life, not the speed of machines.

Embodying the Principle

- **Evaluate for "Exnovation" (Composting):** We don't just measure what to start or scale; we explicitly measure what needs to stop. We ask, "What practices, projects, or mindsets are dying, and how can we compost them to nourish the soil for what's next?"
- **Follow the Energy, Not Just the Plan:** Instead of rigidly tracking pre-defined milestones, we attune ourselves to where the vitality in the system is actually flowing. If the energy of a community shifts away from the original plan toward a new, emergent need, we adjust our inquiry to follow that life force.
- **Respect Seasonality:** We time our interventions and inquiries to match the rhythm of the community. We do not demand a "harvest" of data during a season of "planting" or "dormancy." We recognize that pauses and silence are not voids of impact, but essential phases of integration.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Developmental Evaluation, Longitudinal Tracking, Real-Time-Evaluation, Outcome Harvesting.

The Shadow Side

- **Stagnation masquerading as Rest:** Using "natural rhythms" or "wintering" as an excuse for avoidance, lack of accountability, or procrastination when urgent action is actually required.
- **Rot without Regeneration:** Letting a program or structure decompose without intentionally capturing the nutrients (lessons) to feed the next cycle, leading to cynicism and loss of institutional memory rather than renewal.

2. Cultivate self-awareness & reflexivity



To recognize that we are never neutral observers. This principle calls us to examine our own worldviews, values, and assumptions, and to understand how our presence influences the systems we engage with. It moves us from the illusion of objectivity to a practice of relational accountability, where we continuously examine

what we bring to the situation as nested participants within the context.

Embodying the Principle

- **The Self as a Source of Insight:** We treat our own internal reactions—confusion, defensiveness, joy—not as distractions, but as vital information. By attuning to somatic wisdom and signals, we use our felt sense to understand the deeper currents of the system.
- **Check Your Worldview:** We actively surface the invisible mental models and cultural assumptions that guide our judgment. We practice holding our own perspectives lightly, creating space for multiple forms of knowing to coexist.
- **Own Your Positionality:** We explicitly acknowledge our lineage, privilege, and power dynamics. We ask, "Who am I to ask these questions?" and "How does my identity shape what I see and what I miss?"
- **Practice Collective Reflexivity:** We extend awareness beyond the individual to the group. We ask, "What patterns are we enacting together?" and "How does our collective presence influence the context we are working in?"

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Reflexive Journaling, Positionality Statements, Critical Friend / Peer Intervention, Auto-ethnography.

The Shadow Side

- **Navel-Gazing:** Getting so lost in self-analysis that the focus shifts entirely to the evaluator, centering their internal process at the expense of the community's needs or the work at hand.
- **Performative Awareness:** Acknowledging privilege or bias as a "disclaimer" at the start of a project but failing to let that awareness actually change how decisions are made or how relationships are held.

3. Time as teacher: Learn from the past to shape life-affirming futures



Any point in time carries both a deep past and potential futures. This principle invites us to expand our temporal horizon beyond the rigid constraints of a project cycle. It challenges us to honor historical dynamics—including colonial or oppressive realities—while actively nurturing the narratives and scenarios that lead to life-affirming futures.

Embodying the Principle

- **Honor the Deep Past:** We refuse to treat a project as a "blank slate." Instead, we actively inquire into the history of the place and the people.
- **Become Future-Sensitive:** We shift evaluation from a retrospective audit ("what happened?") to a prospective tool ("what is emerging?"). We look for weak signals and "spores" of long-term change that may not yet be visible as fruit.
- **Work at the Speed of Trust:** We recognize that systemic change requires longer timelines than fiscal years allow. We resist the urgency of artificial deadlines, allowing relationships and processes to unfold at the pace necessary for genuine connection.

Supportive Methods: Timeline Mapping / River of Life, Three Horizons Framework, Transformative Scenario Planning

The Shadow Side

- **Ahistoricism:** Ignoring the historical context and trauma of a system, leading to interventions that unknowingly repeat past harms or trigger resistance.
- **Trauma Dwelling:** Getting stuck in "archaeology"—endlessly analyzing past harms without a container for healing or a bridge to future action, leaving the people in the system re-traumatized rather than informed.
- **Passive Waiting:** Using "deep time" or "natural rhythms" as an excuse for lack of accountability or procrastination, confusing patience with a lack of momentum.

4. Shift power and center marginalised voices – human and more-than-human



Evaluation is inherently an exercise of power. Those who decide what gets measured often determine what matters. This principle asks us to understand, address and shift hierarchies of knowledge and build the agency of those we work with. It ensures that the "voiceless" – including marginalized communities and the natural world – are not merely subjects of study, but active shapers of the narrative. The result is decentralised ownership where communities get to identify and determine what success is.

Embodying the Principle

Decentralise Ownership: We actively work to transition ownership of the evaluation process to key stakeholders, reducing dependency on external experts.

- **Decentralise Ownership:** Move from "consulting" stakeholders to transitioning ownership. Design processes where the community defines the indicators of success and interprets the findings themselves.
- **Relational Ethics:** Prioritize care and consent over data extraction. If a method feels extractive or retraumatizing, we change the method, not the participant.
- **Plan for Obsolescence:** Design the role of the external evaluator with an exit strategy in mind. The goal is to leave behind the skills, tools, and capacity for the community to evaluate themselves.

Supportive methods: Participatory Action Research (PAR), Most Significant Change (MSC), Photovoice, Indigenous Methodologies

The Shadow Side

- **Tokenism:** Inviting marginalized voices into the room without giving them decision-making power or fair compensation, creating the illusion of inclusion while maintaining the status quo.
- **Burdening the Vulnerable:** shifting "power" can sometimes mean shifting "work." Without proper resourcing and support, asking community members to lead evaluation can become an extractive burden rather than an empowering opportunity.

5. Honor place, story and lived experience



To recognize that context is everything. Each place and associated ecosystem is unique, holding its own story to tell and future to shape. This principle rejects the idea of universal, "copy-paste" solutions, acknowledging that because of the specific context of time and space, nothing can be truly repeated. It invites us to value multiple forms of knowing—intellectual, somatic, and ancestral—and to deeply listen to the essence of what matters to those involved.

Embodying the Principle

- **Move from Place-Based to Place-Sourced:** We distinguish between merely working in a location (place-based) and sourcing wisdom from it (place-sourced). This means looking beyond colonial maps and administrative boundaries to understand the deep, living history and ecological reality of the place.
- **Listen to Lived Experience:** We replace the urge to "uncover" or extract with a commitment to listen. We treat stories and lived reality not as anecdotes, but as high-quality evidence, creating space for diverse voices to shape the narrative of success.
- **Attune to Somatic Wisdom:** We recognize that knowledge is not just cognitive but felt. We pay attention to somatic signals—the energy, tension, or flow in a room—as vital data points that tell us about the health and truth of the system.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Most Significant Change (MSC), Photovoice, Ethnographic Research, Appreciative Inquiry, Biocultural Indicators.

The Shadow Side

- **The "Cookie-Cutter" Approach:** Treating context as background noise and applying standardized metrics or models without adapting to the local reality, leading to interventions that are irrelevant or even harmful.
- **Extraction masquerading as Storytelling:** Harvesting vulnerable stories from a community solely to "humanize" a report for donors, without the process giving agency, healing, or value back to the storytellers themselves.

6. Nurture system vitality



To recognize that a system is more than a collection of parts; it is a web of relationships. This principle invites us to shift our gaze from individual components to the health of the connections that bind them. It asks us to tend to the "connective tissue"—the relationships, feedback loops, and flows of information—that determine whether a system stagnates or thrives. It posits that true vitality is found not just in function, but in the flourishing of the whole.

Embodying the Principle

- **Work Across Nested Systems:** We view every element—individual, team, or organization—as part of a larger whole. We help each part understand its purpose within the ecosystem, recognizing that individual health is inseparable from systemic health.
- **Tend to Relationships and Patterns:** We focus as much on the quality of connections as the nodes themselves. We look for governing dynamics: where trust flows, where communication blocks, and what feedback loops reinforce current behaviors.
- **Support Emergence and Aliveness:** We look for where initiative naturally emerges—like spontaneous collaborations or grassroots momentum—and provide the space for it to grow. We treat joy and beauty not as decorative add-ons, but as essential diagnostic signals of a thriving system.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Systemic Constellations, Ripple Effect Mapping (REM), Causal Loop Diagrams (Systems Mapping).

The Shadow Side

- **The Complexity Trap:** Getting so lost in mapping the interconnectedness of everything that we fall into "analysis paralysis," becoming unable to take a simple, practical next step.
- **Toxic Positivity:** Misinterpreting "nurturing vitality" as a mandate for constant happiness. This ignores the necessary pain, conflict, or grief that often accompanies deep systemic change, bypassing the difficult work required for true health.

7. Unearth and amplify innate potential



To recognize that every living system already possesses the seeds of its own evolution. This principle rejects the "deficit mindset" that views programs or communities as problems to be fixed. Instead, it invites us to identify and activate the latent strengths, assets, and wisdom already present. It demands that evaluation becomes a generative act of reciprocity—ensuring that the process gives back to participants by deepening their self-knowledge and agency.

Embodying the Principle

- **From Extraction to Reciprocity:** We design every interaction to ensure the participants gain as much value as the evaluator. We ask, "Does this interview leave the person with new insights about their own work?" and "Does this workshop strengthen their connections?" The evaluation process itself becomes a capacity-building intervention.
- **Focus on Positive Deviance:** We actively look for what is working, even in broken systems. We seek out the "positive deviants"—the places where life is breaking through despite the odds—and shine a light on them so the rest of the system can learn from its own success.
- **Honor the Evolutionary Journey:** We view individuals and organizations not as static data points, but as beings in a state of becoming. We use evaluation to hold a mirror to their wholeness, helping them see not just where they are, but what they are capable of becoming.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Positive Deviance, Most Significant Change (MSC), Ripple Effect Mapping (REM).

The Shadow Side

- **Bypassing the Barriers:** Focusing so exclusively on "potential" and "strengths" that we ignore the systemic barriers, oppression, or resource gaps that are actively suppressing that potential. This can feel like gaslighting to those struggling with structural inequity.
- **The Burden of Potential:** Projecting a potential onto a community that they do not wish to embody, or pushing a system to "evolve" faster than it is ready to, violating the principle of respecting cyclical rhythms.

8. Embrace iterative learning and emergence



To recognize that in a complex world, the map is not the territory. This principle invites us to move from a "predict and control" mindset to one of "sense and respond." It challenges the static nature of traditional M&E, where indicators are frozen in time at the start of a project. Instead, it asks us to stay in a permanent state of inquiry, allowing our evaluation questions and methods to evolve alongside the system itself.

Embodying the Principle

- **Adapt the Inquiry:** We treat our evaluation framework as a living document, not a stone tablet. If the context shifts or the community's needs change, we have the courage to change indicators and questions mid-stream to remain relevant.
- **Welcome the Unintended:** We widen our gaze beyond pre-defined outcomes. We actively scan for "side effects"—both the emergent, magical surprises and the unintended negative consequences—treating them as data just as valuable as the intended results.
- **Shorten the Feedback Loops:** We do not wait for a "final report" to share learning. We create shorter cycles of reflection so that insights can be fed back into the system in a timely manner to inform action, turning evaluation into a real-time navigation aid.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Developmental Evaluation, Outcome Harvesting, Real-Time Evaluation (RTE), After Action Reviews / Retrospectives.

The Shadow Side

- **The "Goal-Post Moving" Trap:** Constantly changing the indicators to hide a lack of progress or avoid accountability, rather than genuinely adapting to a changing context.
- **Process over Purpose:** Getting so caught up in "emergent learning" and "reflection" that no concrete decisions are made, and the work becomes a never-ending discussion circle without tangible action.

9. Center love as a force for transformation



To recognize that at the root of all regeneration is the impulse to care for life. This principle breaks the taboo of the "neutral professional" and invites us to bring our full humanity into the room. It defines love not as sentimentality, but as a fierce commitment to the wholeness and flourishing of the systems we serve. It asks us to move from viewing evaluation as a transaction to viewing it as an act of deep care.

Embodying the Principle

- **Dissolve the Professional Armor:** We refuse to reduce people to data points. We allow ourselves to be moved by what we witness, bridging the distance between "evaluator" and "subject." We recognize that we cannot heal a system we keep at arm's length.
- **Practice Fierce Truth-Telling:** We understand that love is not just "being nice." It is the courage to speak hard truths because we care enough about the system to want it to heal. We offer feedback as a form of devotion to the project's highest potential.
- **Hold Space for Grief and Hope:** We create containers strong enough to hold the full emotional reality of the work—acknowledging the grief of what is broken while fiercely tending the seeds of what is possible.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Non-Violent Communication (NVC), Deep Listening Circles, Generative Dialogue.

The Shadow Side

- **Boundary Collapse:** Becoming so emotionally enmeshed that we lose the clarity needed to be a helpful mirror, or taking on the trauma of the system without the resources to sustain ourselves (leading to burnout).
- **Sentimentalism:** Confusing love with "politeness" or the avoidance of conflict. This leads to superficial harmony where necessary hard truths are buried to protect feelings, ultimately allowing dysfunction to persist.

3.2 The Seven Core Practices of Regenerative Inquiry

Regenerative Evaluation operates as a living cycle of inquiry. These seven practices function as interconnected movements that feed into one another, creating a rhythm of continuous learning and adaptation.

To bridge the natural seasons of growth with the practical stages of an evaluation lifecycle, we group these practices into three phases:



Phase 1: Grounding & Design (The Soil) – Evaluation Scoping & Setup

Before asking "Does it work?", we first seek to understand "Who are we?" and "What is the context?" This phase moves beyond isolated planning to integrate deep listening and intentional design, ensuring the evaluation is rooted in the reality of the ecosystem. Here, we map not just the intended intervention, but the historical and relational soil it is planted in. By taking time to align our intentions and build trust early on, we create a resilient container capable of holding the complexity that will inevitably emerge later in the (evaluation) journey.

1. Empathetic Understanding (Deep Listening & Situational Awareness)
2. Mapping Ecosystem Contribution (Past & Future)
3. Intentional Regenerative Design

Phase 2: Tending & Inquiry (The Growth) - Data Collection & Monitoring

We "tend" to the system by gathering insights through a blend of coaching, participatory methods, and engaging in intentional and meaningful data collection approaches. This approach maintains high standards of evidence while simultaneously building the capacity and agency of those we work with. In this phase, measurement becomes an act of care. We pay close attention to qualitative shifts in relationships, unexpected signals of change, and the ongoing vitality of the team and community, adjusting our approach as the living system evolves.

4. Evaluative Coaching (Embedding Learning & Reflection)
5. Meaningful Data Collection (Engaging Approaches)

Phase 3: Harvesting & Replanting (The Seeds) - Analysis, Reporting & Strategic Action

We engage in collective sense-making to digest the learning from our diverse data sources. Crucially, the final step is Replanting: turning stories, statistics, and insights into seeds for the next cycle of strategy and action. Rather than producing a static final report that sits on a shelf, this phase focuses on translating insights into usable wisdom, ensuring that the harvest directly nourishes the next iteration of the work.

6. Joint Sense-Making (Beyond Just Data Analysis)
7. Strategic Storytelling (Transforming Reporting into Future Action)

Navigating the Cycle in the Real World

As you explore the following seven practices, you will encounter a wide range of "Evaluator's Stances"—from Listener and Coach to Systemic Storyteller and Ethics Guardian. Seeing this diversity of roles can feel daunting. It may raise the question: "Do I have to be all of these things at once?"

The answer is no. Regenerative Evaluation is not about perfection; it is about expanding our repertoire. We offer these practices as a horizon of possibility. Furthermore, while these practices are grouped sequentially, real-world application is rarely a neat process. You might find yourself returning to Intentional Regenerative Design halfway through a project, or relying on Evaluative Coaching continuously.

We invite you to **use this chapter as a mirror and a map:**

- **To Acknowledge:** Recognize the regenerative work you are already doing, perhaps without having had the language for it until now, or using a different language to describe it.
- **To Stretch:** Identify one or two stances or practices that challenge you, and experiment with them in your next project.

How to Read the Practice Pages

To help you navigate the seven practices, each page follows a consistent structure designed to move from understanding to action:

- **The essence** of the practice. What is the central intention we are holding in this moment?
- **Guiding Questions:** Inquiries to spark reflection for you and your team. These are not boxes to tick, but questions to live with.
- **The Evaluator's Stance:** The "modes" or archetypes we embody to do this work. These describe how we show up—the quality of our presence and the nature of our relationship to the system.
- **Why is this Regenerative?** How this practice intentionally centers systemic health, moving beyond simply measuring a system to actively nourishing it.
- **Supportive Methods:** A curated selection of tools and frameworks (drawn from Chapter 4) that help bring this practice to life.
- **The Shadow Side:** A cautionary note on how this practice can be misunderstood or misused. This helps us maintain integrity and avoid "regenerative washing."

We invite you to read these pages with curiosity. Where do you see yourself? Where is your edge? And what is the next small step you can take to bring more life into your evaluation practice?

1. Empathic Understanding

Developing a deep, relational understanding of the system, its context, and the motivations of those involved. It moves the evaluator from detached analysis to relational intelligence, ensuring the process begins by understanding the system from within rather than as an external observer.

Guiding Questions

- How does the program define itself from the inside out?
- What histories, traumas, and boundaries shape this work?
- What existing assets and relationships can we build upon?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Listener: Tuning into what is said and unsaid; prioritizing silence over expert questioning.
- Systems Thinker: Seeing the connections between actors, not just the actors themselves.
- Facilitator of Reflection: Creating space for others to see and define themselves.

Why is this Regenerative?

Conventional evaluation often starts with a predefined framework applied to a subject. This practice starts with the subject, ensuring that any subsequent measurement is rooted in the reality and relationships of the people involved. It honors the principle of "Honor Place, Story and Lived Experience."

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Deep Listening Circles, Systemic Constellations, Ethnographic Observation, Context Analysis.

The Shadow Side

- Extraction: Listening only to extract data for a report, without building a relationship.
- Projection: Assuming you understand the context because you have "listened," without validating your understanding with the community.

2. Mapping Ecosystem Contribution

Situating the project within its broader ecological and social landscape to understand its unique contribution. This broadens the lens from a single project to an interconnected ecosystem, acknowledging that every initiative relies on and contributes to a larger whole.

Guiding Questions

- How does this initiative interact with the wider system?
- What enabling conditions already exist that we rely on?
- What is the long-term vision we are contributing to, beyond our specific project goals?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Connector: Identifying links between the project and the wider environment.
- Sense-Maker: Helping the team see their work within a larger complexity.
- Bridge-BUILDER: Highlighting dependencies and synergies with other actors.

Why is this Regenerative?

It moves beyond the illusion of isolated impact. By mapping the ecosystem, we recognize the interdependencies that sustain the work, ensuring evaluation values contribution to the whole rather than just attribution of specific results.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Systems Mapping (Causal Loop Diagrams), Social Network Analysis, Critical Systems Heuristics, Eco-Cycle Planning.

The Shadow Side

- Analysis Paralysis: Mapping the system in such detail that it becomes impossible to identify a practical starting point.
- Over-claiming: Mistaking the system's overall movement for the project's specific impact, losing the thread of accountability.

3. Intentional Regenerative Design

Co-creating an evaluation process that serves as a learning journey in itself, aligning strategic goals with regenerative ambitions. It treats the design phase as a capacity-building intervention, ensuring the evaluation framework strengthens the system rather than imposing external measures.

Guiding Questions

- What learning is most useful right now?
- How can this process strengthen long-term capacity for those involved?
- How do we integrate diverse and marginalized voices into the design of the indicators?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Co-Designer: Building the framework with stakeholders, not for them.
- Critical Friend: Challenging assumptions and ensuring alignment with values.
- Guide: Offering structure and expertise while allowing the content to emerge from the group.

Why is this Regenerative?

It shifts the power dynamic of evaluation. By co-designing the framework, stakeholders gain ownership over how success is defined, turning the evaluation from a compliance requirement into a strategic asset.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Theory of Change (Participatory), SCALE 3D, The Impact Garden Framework, Principles-Focused Evaluation Design, Blue Marble Evaluation.

The Shadow Side

- Design by Committee: Trying to include every possible metric to please everyone, resulting in a bloated and unusable framework.
- Rigid Flexibility: Designing a "regenerative" framework but refusing to adapt it once the project reality shifts.

4. Evaluative Coaching

Using evaluation as a coaching process to help teams reflect, adapt, and integrate learning in real-time. It creates a space for agency and empowerment, helping teams stay true to their deeper purpose while navigating the requirements of the work.

Guiding Questions

- What has shifted since we began?
- How can this reflection empower our agency to act?
- What adjustments serve our deeper purpose right now?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Coach: Asking powerful questions to unlock the team's own wisdom.
- Mirror: Reflecting back patterns and behaviors without judgment.
- Learning Facilitator: Holding the space for honest inquiry and adaptation.

Why is this Regenerative?

It integrates evaluation into the daily rhythm of work. Instead of being an external judgment event, evaluation becomes an internal support mechanism that builds the team's resilience and adaptive capacity.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Action Learning Sets, Reflective Practice Circles, Developmental Evaluation, After Action Reviews.

The Shadow Side

- Therapy Trap: Confusing professional coaching with therapy, losing focus on the strategic and evaluative purpose.
- Loss of Rigor: Focusing so much on the process and feelings that hard data and necessary performance feedback are avoided.

5. Meaningful Data Collection

Gathering rigorous quantitative and qualitative insights through methods that are engaging, participatory, and valuable to the participants. It transforms data collection from a passive extraction into an active inquiry, ensuring that the act of measuring creates value for those involved.

Guiding Questions

- How can data collection feel energizing rather than burdensome?
- Who is represented in the data, and who is missing?
- How do we balance rigor with relevance?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Facilitator: Making the data collection process accessible and engaging.
- Sense-Maker: Looking for the story behind the numbers.
- Ethics Guardian: Ensuring the process respects the dignity and consent of all participants.

Why is this Regenerative?

It respects the time and wisdom of participants. By using methods that trigger reflection or connection (like storytelling or peer interviews), the data collection process itself becomes an intervention that strengthens the community.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Most Significant Change (MSC), Photovoice, Appreciative Inquiry Interviews, Participatory Survey Design, Mobile Data Collection (used reflectively).

The Shadow Side

- Survey Fatigue: Overburdening participants with requests for data that they never see the results of.
- Data Extraction: Collecting vulnerable stories or personal data without giving back value, healing, or support to the source.

6. Joint Sense-Making

Creating accessible, participatory spaces to interpret data collectively and generate shared meaning. It moves analysis from a solitary expert task to a collective process, building relational accountability and ensuring insights are grounded in diverse perspectives.

Guiding Questions

- What patterns are emerging from the data?
- What are we overlooking or interpreting through our own bias?
- How do we honor multiple ways of knowing (data, intuition, story) in our interpretation?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Facilitator: guiding the group through the "groan zone" of complex data.
- Bridge: Connecting quantitative findings with qualitative nuance.
- Contextual Thinker: Helping the group situate the findings within the broader landscape.

Why is this Regenerative?

Data does not speak for itself; it is interpreted through power and worldview. Joint sense-making democratizes interpretation, reducing bias and ensuring that the findings are valid and useful to the people most affected by them.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Data Placemats / Data Walks, SenseMaker®, Collective Story Harvesting, World Cafe.

The Shadow Side

- Groupthink: The loudest voices in the room dominating the interpretation, while dissenting views are silenced to create a false consensus.
- Confirmation Bias: Cherry-picking data to support the pre-existing narrative or to please the donor.

7. Strategic Storytelling

Transforming reporting into forward-looking narratives that inspire action, influence strategy, and plant seeds for the next cycle. It ensures evaluation does not end with a retrospective report but evolves into living stories that nourish the future strategy and deepen systemic learning.

Guiding Questions

- Who needs to hear this story to create change?
- How do these insights inform our next steps?
- How does this narrative serve the long-term evolution of the system?

The Evaluator's Stance

- Narrative Weaver: connecting disparate data points into a coherent story.
- Communicator: Translating complexity into accessible language.
- Systemic Storyteller: Highlighting the interconnections and the "soil" conditions, not just the fruits.

Why is this Regenerative?

It completes the cycle of reciprocity. By returning the learnings to the system in a usable, inspiring form, the evaluation seeds the next phase of growth, ensuring that the energy expended in the process is renewed.

Supportive Methods & Approaches: Reporting as Storytelling, Data Visualization, Learning Histories, Future Search / Visioning Workshops.

The Shadow Side

- Propaganda: Polishing the narrative to hide failures or difficulties, creating a "success theatre" that prevents genuine learning.
- The Shelf Report: Creating a dense, academic document that is technically accurate but inaccessible, ensuring the insights are never used.

4. Frameworks & Methods for Regenerative Evaluation

Tools for Tending the System

If Principles are our internal compass and Practices are our movements, then Frameworks and Methods are the tangible instruments we carry in our hands. They are the means by which we translate intent into evidence.

In this chapter, we offer a curated selection of tools designed to measure what matters most in a living system. We do not aim to provide a comprehensive textbook or a rigid manual. Instead, we offer this chapter as a source of inspiration and expansion.

You will find frameworks like the Impact Garden, which helps visualize the invisible conditions of success, and the Methods Mosaic, a navigational tool for choosing the right approach for the right moment.

Expanding the Toolbox

Some methods listed here—like surveys or interviews—will be familiar, though we invite you to use them with a new "regenerative" mindset. Others—like Systemic Constellations or Micro-Narratives—may feel new or unconventional. We include these less familiar methods because conventional tools often struggle to capture the nuance of relationships, energy, and emergent change.

We invite you to treat this chapter as a menu of possibilities. You do not need to master every tool listed here. Rather, look for the methods that resonate with the specific context of your work, and consider how they might help you listen more deeply, measure more holistically, and tend to the vitality of the systems you serve.

4.1 Frameworks – Mapping the Terrain

Regenerative Evaluation is a way of engaging with measurement as a living process. Just as healthy ecosystems thrive through diversity, Regenerative Evaluation requires multiple perspectives, tools, and ways of knowing. Rather than seeking universal metrics or a single "gold standard," the key is choosing and adapting the frameworks that best support your specific context.

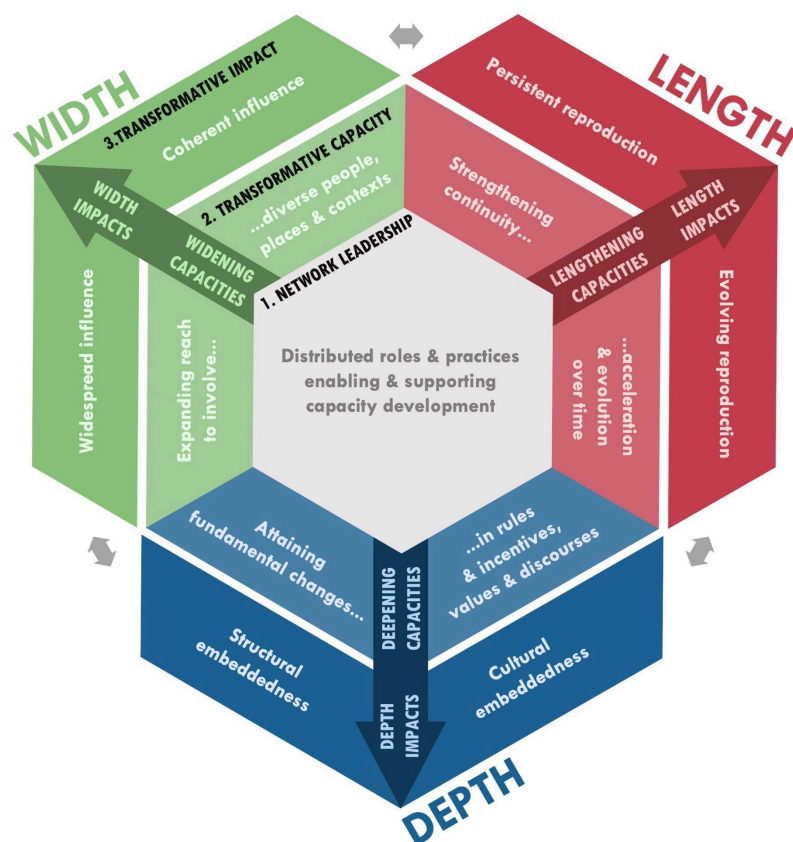
To help you navigate this terrain, this section introduces three distinct but deeply complementary frameworks developed by members of the Regenerative Evaluation community. Each offers a unique lens to disrupt traditional measurement and align your practice with living systems:

- **Scale 3D (Evaluating Systemic Change Beyond Growth):** For when you need to redefine "success." This framework moves beyond the traditional corporate obsession with size and replication, offering a holistic model to evaluate the depth, width, and length of systemic transformation. It also helps with adaptive learning and strategic sense-making in an intuitive manner.
- **The Impact Garden (A Living Theory of Change):** For when you need to map complex change. This framework replaces rigid, linear logframes with an ecological metaphor, helping you measure and nurture the "invisible" conditions (the soil, the roots, the relationships) that make visible outcomes possible.
- **A Framework for Regenerative Theory & Practice (Place-Sourced Evaluation):** For when you need to ground your work in context and relationality. Rooted in partnerships with Indigenous communities and decolonial practice, this framework introduces "Place" as an active participant in evaluation, ensuring our metrics honor the deep history, culture, and healing of the people we work with and the land we work upon.

Together, these frameworks shift how we grow (Scale 3D), how we plan (Impact Garden), and where we ground ourselves (Place-Sourced Evaluation). The following pages dive into the background, value, and first steps for applying each of these models in your own work.

1. SCALE 3D – Evaluating Systemic Change Beyond Growth (Tim Strasser)

Developed by Tim Strasser during his PhD (2025), SCALE 3D emerged from action research on scaling and network leadership in social innovation, building on the [Transformative Social Innovation Theory](#) research project that studied 50+ international networks of social innovation to find out how social movements can thrive and transform established institutions. It was designed to be an intuitive, practically useful and holistic model that moves beyond traditional scaling models that equate growth with success, instead focusing on deep and systemic impact.



The Architecture of the Model

The 3D framework, has **three layers**: (1) *network leadership*, supporting and enabling the development of (2) *transformative capacity*, which contributes to realizing (3) *transformative impact*, across **three dimensions** of:

- *Depth*: embedding fundamental change in systems and culture
- *Width*: widespread and coherent influence, and
- *Length*: sustaining and evolving impact over time.

The Value This Framework Provides

- **Expands the concept of impact beyond widening** (growth and replication) to include deepening (root-level changes) and lengthening (temporal continuity). Especially the *lengthening* dimension is often overlooked and underfunded, leading to short-lived interventions and burnt out changemakers.
- **Provides a simple & intuitive language** for change initiatives, movements, evaluators and funders for seeing impact, strategic planning and adaptive sense-making
- **Builds a comprehensive and coherent picture** of how multiple partners and programs contribute to widening, deepening and lengthening.

How to Take First Steps

For MEL practitioners as well as change initiatives and networks, SCALE 3D can be used for strategic design and planning tool as well as diagnostic tool. Here's how to start applying it:

- **Learn more about the framework** in [this slidedeck](#)  and this [presentation recording](#) 
- **Map your change initiative** using this [project canvas](#), or the more [detailed sheet](#), and clarify how your initiative is scaling across the three dimensions, and identify which type of scaling is most relevant and what indicators best capture it.

2. The Impact Garden – A Theory of Change inspired by Living Systems (Unity Effect / Jannik Kaiser)

Developed by Unity Effect, the Impact Garden was designed as a regenerative alternative to rigid logframes and linear Theories of Change. While traditional models often view projects as machines—converting inputs directly into outputs and impact—the Impact Garden views them as living ecosystems. Rooted in systems thinking and regenerative design, it shifts the focus from "manufacturing results" to nurturing the conditions in which change can grow, adapt, and eventually propagate.

The Architecture of the Model

The framework uses the metaphor of a garden to map ten interconnected dimensions of impact, ensuring that the "invisible" elements of a system are given as much weight as the visible results.



Key elements include:

- **The Sun (Strategic Vision):** The guiding star and purpose that energizes the system, providing direction for all growth.

- **The Soil (Own & Partner Resources):** The raw ingredients—funding, trust, skills, and networks—available to fuel the work and sustain it over time.
- **Irrigation (Strategic Learning and Adaptation):** The cycles of reflection and feedback that keep the system responsive, ensuring it does not dry out or stagnate.

The Value This Framework Provides

For evaluators, this model offers a distinct lens that validates the relational and structural work often missed by traditional metrics. It supports a shift in practice by:

- **Making the invisible visible:** By mapping "Supportive Conditions" and "Soil" separately from outcomes, it validates the essential "invisible work"—such as relationship building and culture—that underpins all sustainable impact.
- **Shifting the conversation:** It moves stakeholders from a mindset of proving impact (attribution) to improving health and understanding contribution, fostering a learning-oriented evaluation culture.
- **Navigating complexity:** It provides a flexible container that can hold both quantitative data (number of fruits) and qualitative stories (health of the soil, ripples of impact), making it adaptable to diverse and emergent contexts.

How to Take First Steps

For M&E practitioners, the Impact Garden can serve as both a diagnostic tool and a design framework for regenerative inquiries. Here is how you can begin applying it in your practice:

- **Apply the Framework:** To start mapping your own living Theory of Change, you can [access the comprehensive Impact Garden Playbook and Online Course](#), which guides you step-by-step through designing and applying the ten dimensions of the ecosystem.
- **Evaluate with Rigor:** If you are navigating the tension of how to "prove" impact to funders without defaulting to linear metrics, explore our [methodology on Making Credible Claims in Complexity](#). This approach helps you use the Impact Garden to structure robust, contribution-based evaluation narratives.
- **Measure Ecosystem Health:** To practically assess the "invisible" supportive conditions of your project, use the [Systemic Vitality Scorecard](#).

3. A Framework for Regenerative Theory and Practice

GROUNDING

A learning and healing journey

My own healing journey was what led me to inquire into collective healing and regeneration – I wanted to better understand regeneration at the individual and collective levels. My healing journey has been deeply connected to the land and Place I call home, Mahkato (Mankato), Mni Sota (Minnesota). This Place is known for being the site of the largest mass execution on US soil, 38 Dakota warriors were hanged in our downtown at 10 am on December 26, 1862 by order of President Abraham Lincoln. My ancestral settler-family lineage is connected to the story of this Place, the land remembers and holds the deep time, story, and context of this Place.

Place-sourced ways of knowing

For the last 14 years I've been engaging in ongoing learning in authentic relationship and partnership with Dakota Elders, working with the [Dakota 38 + 2 Wokiksuye \(Remembering\) Horse Ride](#) (2005-2022) and the [Makatohe Reconciliation and Healing Horse Ride](#) (2024 - ongoing). All of the Dakota groups I have had the honor of being in deep relationship and authentic partnership with come from the [exiled Dakota](#) people who are Aboriginal to this Place I call home. Over the years, our collective efforts have slowly started forming into an organization called “*Mahkato Okawitaya*”, meaning “Blue Earth Gathering”. Through our collective partnership efforts, we are working to support Truth, Healing, Reconciliation and LandBack throughout the region.

The stories of applied practice come from a Place that holds both the unique potential for collective healing, *and* the truth of what a painful and colonized history does to both people and land. There are many stories connected to this Place that are sacred. The name of Mankato (Mahkato) is connected to the “*mahkato*” (blue earth) clay that is found here – it is an important resource to the Dakota people and unique to this sacred place.

Informing an understanding of Regenerative Evaluation

The stories of this Place have informed my beliefs and understanding of Regenerative Evaluation. Through these years of learning and applied practice, regenerative evaluation emphasizes the importance of the role **Place has, as a participant** in evaluation practice. Regenerative Evaluation is a place-sourced

practice, and it is critical for Regenerative Evaluation practitioners to develop the skills and capabilities for being a good relative in this work, learning how to deepen relationships with Indigenous communities who are Aboriginal to place through a **partnership as praxis** (learning by doing) approach when working with Place. Understanding and honoring the Tribal sovereignty, Indigenous beliefs and ways of knowing and stories of ceremonies, songs, medicine and language help to decolonize Regenerative Evaluators understanding of relationship to land and deepens their understanding of the Story of Place.

DEVELOPING

An understanding for the need for Regenerative Evaluation

The term “Regenerative Evaluation” for me emerged as I worked through my [PhD journey](#). Part of that journey included a year-long evaluation internship with [Regenesis Institute](#). It was there I had the honor of evaluating [The Regenerative Practitioner's \(TRP\) program](#) followed by a collective storytelling process that engaged the [global field of regenerative practitioners](#) in sharing the learnings from their stories of applied practice working with the living system frameworks and practices they learned through the TRP. The stories that came in from across the global field of the Regenerates Community of Practice gave me a resounding sense of need for the development of **Regenerative Evaluation theory** for supporting the ongoing evolution of **place-sourced practices**.

A nuanced understanding of Place

I needed to develop **Place** as a construct for my research in the evaluation field. I explored how the evaluation field worked with Place through place-based practices, how Indigenous evaluators integrated “*Being a people of Place*” into their practice (see [Indigenous Evaluation Framework](#)), and what regenerative place-sourced practices bring to the evaluation field, based on the learnings that were shared through the stories of TRP graduates who were working in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. I was aware of the need for developing intercultural awareness and understanding of Place between Indigenous (in this case, Aboriginal Dakota) and non-Indigenous (primarily settler descendants) here in Mni Sota (Minnesota). Throughout my practice and research in and with the Dakota community, it has taught me that **Place-sourced practices are not the same as place-based practices**.

Table: Place as a Construct

Context Domain	Construct of Place
Evaluation / Non-Indigenous	Place-based evaluation: Focused on man-made geographic boundaries, jurisdictional maps with man-made lines, man-made built environments, and zip codes (US based).
Indigenous Evaluation / Indigenous Perspective	Indigenous Evaluation Framework: “Being a people of place” one of the four core values, place is seen as a living presence (LaFrance, Nichols & Kirkhart, 2012). This core value reflects how Place and land are central among Indigenous values, culture, and communities around the world. Aboriginal and Indigenous wisdom holds the deep context of Place of time.
Regenerative / Non-Indigenous	Place-sourced / Regenerative Evaluation: Grounded in the living systems paradigm, Place is agentialized through Storying of Place methodology that is applied as a Place-sourced practice in the field of regenerative development projects done in partnership between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous practitioners (see Regenesi Institute for Regenerative Practice).

Skills and understanding for working with Place

Throughout my research, it was clear that there are many fields of practice that have tried to develop and advance our collective understanding of Place. It is a concept that is seemingly simple at the surface, but the more you dive into learning about Place and the lineages of various disciplines and scholars who have contributed to our awareness of Place, the more you realize how complex and nuanced it is.

If evaluators are working with Regenerative Evaluation approaches, the research taught me some critical skills and understandings for working with Place that Regenerative Evaluation practitioners would need to consider.

- **Co-evalness:** is a concept for grounding into Place, space, time and community to situate ourselves ([Massey, 2005, pg. 131](#))
- **Two-eyed Seeing:** Albert Marshall (Mi’Kmaq Elder) talks about having one eye for Indigenous ways of knowing and the other eye for Western ways of knowing, and the strengths and benefits of utilizing both ways of knowing (read more on this [here](#)).
- **Shifting from place-based to Place-sourced:** This is a critical distinction, place-based sees place as an inanimate object that exists between man-made lines on man-made maps as opposed to a living-systems / Indigenous view of Place as a living, breathing relative and integrates planetary, cultural / societal and cosmological understandings of Place.

- **Relational Validity / Mitákuye Oyásin:** For Regenerative Evaluation, the emphasis on validity is rooted in the relational connections that go beyond human form (read more [here](#)), in the Dakota the phrase Mitákuye Oyásin translates to “All My Relations”, recognizing the interconnected relationships between all living things past, present and future.

Putting Evaluation in its Place *In a Good Way

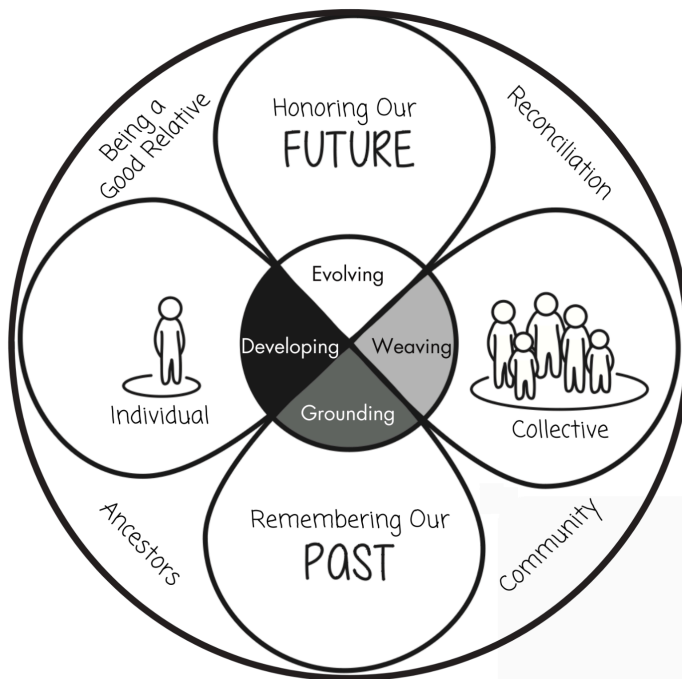
My dissertation research focused on understanding the intersections of where the evaluation field was currently at in its relationship with Place, learning what Place meant through the lens of Dakota Aboriginal wisdom, and integrating Place-sourced regenerative practices into the evaluation field. For my dissertation research, I followed the [Makatoḥ Reconciliation and Healing Horse Ride](#), a 16-day ceremonial prayer ride where Dakota who have been exiled ride horseback in December for over 330 miles to return home to their ancestral homelands where they honored and remembered the ancestors who were hanged on December 26th at 10am. I wanted to understand the role Place had in the various stops that the ride made along the way, and what the experience of Place was for the Dakota who were exiled and returning back to their ancestral homelands through the ceremonial healing horse ride.

One of the additional gifts this work offered was witnessing and learning how non-Indigenous participants in community Circles integrated this learning from the Dakota experience of Place into their own understanding and relationship with Place. The participatory methodologies for working with Place integrated a more robust and intercultural understanding of “Mitákuye Oyásin” (All My Relations), this enhanced my understanding of what relational validity means when it comes to Regenerative Evaluation practice and theory.

It was from these interviews with the Elders, Riders and Community Circle conversations where I learned a lot more about the deeper and complex dynamics about Place, and its role with truth, healing, and reconciliation work here within the Dakota ancestral homelands. It became really clear what Place was teaching me about Regenerative Evaluation. Within the circles of conversations I’ve been in, there are stories that hold deep wisdom about this Place that expand the story of what happened here beyond that of being a site of mass execution. You can **learn more about this story of place** by watching the [full-length, HD documentary called Dakota 38 + 2 on YouTube here](#).

The research with the Dakota Elders and riders contributed to the development of a place-sourced framework for the Dakota community and a Regenerative Evaluation framework and theory for Regenerative Evaluation practitioners.

A Framework for Regenerative Evaluation



Value of this framework

- **Deepening practices for Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving**
 - **Grounding:** The medicine wheel holds us in the present, in space, time, Place and community. For the Aboriginal Dakota who contributed to this work, Place is a source for ceremony, medicine, songs, language and creation stories.
 - **Developing:** The skills and capabilities required to be a good relative and understand who you came from (*Ancestors*), where you came from (*Place*) and who you are in relation to this work (positionality / critical reflexivity).
 - **Weaving:** Nesting into living systems and all relations, understanding *community* and living systems, *reconciling* past and future connections that are evolving in real-time in the present moment.
 - **Evolving:** Reconciling our understandings and practices, learning to care for the people, Places, past, present and future generations.

- ***Spatial Justice and Spatial Decolonization***

- This work helps develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of time (past, present and future) and the relationship time and place has to our understanding and stories of Place.
- The evaluation field has an opportunity to reckon with its role in working with Place from a decolonizing approach in order to not perpetuate further impacts and harm from colonization (Soja, 2010; Goeman, 2013).
- Regenerative Evaluation Framework and Theory contributes to the field of evaluation for situating our theoretical roots in a more complex understanding of the historical and political contexts of the programs / initiatives that are being evaluated (Alkin, 2013; Shadish et al., 1991).

- ***Key Essential Practices for Regenerative Evaluation***

- **Truth first, Truth hurts.** Working to generate value-adding effects through regenerative practices in evaluation requires an acknowledgement of where place-sourced wisdom is held and who holds it. Colonization has an influence on the evaluation field and its relationship to Place, without acknowledging it, we're at risk of perpetuating harm and jeopardising the validity of our results. By acknowledging the truth of what happened, where and when to whom, grounding in hard truths helps to begin to acknowledge the relationships and stories that Place holds in Regenerative Evaluation efforts.
- **Place as Participant.** Place has a voice, patterns, stories and insights to contribute as a participant in Regenerative Evaluation practices. Regenesi's Institute's *Story of Place* methodology is a powerful practice for integrating Place-sourced wisdom into Regenerative Evaluation practices.
- **Partnership as Praxis.** Aboriginal Dakota contributed to my learning and understanding of Place and where Place-sourced wisdom contributes to a more contextualized understanding of Place. Partnership with Indigenous communities helps strengthen and integrate the patterns that have been stewarded in Place since time immemorial. *"The issue of cultural competency cannot stand in a vacuum; it is connected to colonization, decolonization and*

sovereignty” (Cavino, 2013, pg. 352). For non-Indigenous Regenerative Evaluation practitioners, this work must be done with cultural humility, consent, care, and honoring Tribal sovereignty every step of the way. Undoing the harms of settler colonialism, means that working with Place in evaluation requires that evaluators take a decolonizing approach; decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Trust takes time to build and Regenerative Evaluation takes time.

- **Potential is greater than Problem.** Traditionally, the field of evaluation tends to look at what is working and not working and tries to gather the data, insights and understanding for informing decision-making regarding what moves forward, shifts or changes as a result of the evaluation efforts. Evaluation is like riding a horse backwards while trying to see where you are going and determining if “it” is working by looking at where you’ve been. Regenerative Evaluation taps into place-sourced potential and is forward looking. Regenerative Evaluation integrates both humans and the Places where they inhabit. By exploring the role of place-sourced potential as evaluators, we can begin to integrate a shift in how we approach our evaluation designs and better inform the questions we are asking.

This Regenerative Evaluation Framework helps to translate the learnings from deep, Place-sourced wisdom in the Dakota context into a more generalizable approach while working to protect and honor the learnings that were shared. It is my hope that this Framework inspires something within you, and that it does not not culturally appropriate the sacred teachings and stories that were shared in the Dakota context where this research and framework has come from.

WEAVING

The Start of A Theory for Regenerative Evaluation

The dissertation research contributed to the start of a theory for Regenerative Evaluation. This theory provides us an avenue for developing and evolving a better understanding of the role and importance that Place has in the evaluation field as a whole. For a theory to develop, it is helpful to understand the dimensions of what Regenerative Evaluation looks like in practice, understanding who’s knowledge is

honored, what values are integrated, how it is used, and where it can be applied (social programming).

Table: Regenerative Evaluation Theory

Practice	Knowledge	Values	Use	Social Programming
Grounding - Place-sourced patterning, sensing and sensemaking with land, Place, and history, remembering and honoring the ancestors Developing - Place as Participant, honoring Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, developing two-eyed seeing capabilities Weaving - Partnership as praxis, decolonizing, participatory reflection and sensemaking, story sharing, shared meals, collective care and inquiry Evolving - Intergenerational work, being a good relative, reciprocal learning, value-adding meaningful actions for co-evolving mutualism	Ontology (nature of reality) - Relational, Spatial, Temporal, Communal Epistemology (justification for knowledge claims) - Living systems, Indigenous ways of seeing, being, relating, and knowing Methodology (how to construct knowledge) - Place-sourced practices for two-eyed seeing, 7 Regenerative Principles, Storying Place with Aboriginal / Indigenous communities	Metatheory - Living systems and Place-sourced knowledge is everywhere where we are, humans are not separate from the environments they are in. Prescriptive Theory - Place has an active role and voice in regenerative evaluation. - If we are in tune with our ways of seeing, relating, and understanding “here” in partnership with Indigenous communities who are Aboriginal to Place, we enable decolonizing conditions that produce value-adding effects to support truth, healing, and reconciliation Descriptive Theory - Place centers and values Aboriginal wisdom, sovereignty, self-determination and knowledge traditions	Descriptive - Story of Place Emergent and Developmental - New interpretations of old teachings Timeframe is transformed into “Place-frame” - Deep time (geological, biological, hydrological) - Deep history (Aboriginal, Place-sourced, cultural knowledge) - Deep context (decolonizing through acknowledging harmful effects of colonization) Regenerative Evaluation use - Understand effects of colonization - Decolonizing evaluation practices - Building partnership efforts between Indigenous / non-Indigenous communities - Truth, healing, reconciliation - Program services / treatments for addiction, recovery, mental health, climate displacement, etc.	Global - UN, USAID, International Tribal Law Policy, Program, Practice - National, regional, local and Tribal governments Organizational - NPO / NGO, Education, Social and Environmental sectors

How to take 1st Steps

- Truth first, Truth Hurts:** Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat talk about “*history is not about time, it is about place*” in their book [Power and Place](#). You cannot heal what is not acknowledged, this is why the Truth needs to be shared about what happened, where, when, and to whom in the work we do as Regenerative Evaluation practitioners in order to fully understand the deep time, history and context of Place and what influence it may have on the validity of our results in our evaluation practice.
- Place as Participant:** Place holds the patterns of the planetary, social, and cosmological and cultural beliefs that have formed since time immemorial. Place has a story, a voice, a role in shaping and forming patterns that influence the understanding of the results we see in our evaluation practice.
- Partnership as Praxis:** Indigenous ways of knowing enhance and contribute to a decolonized understanding of Place. This partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities helps center the Place-sourced wisdom that is essential for Regenerative Evaluation. For non-Indigenous Regenerative Evaluation practitioners, developing the skills and capabilities for learning to *be a good relative* in this work helps to strengthen the relational validity of your evaluation results.

- **Potential is greater than Problems:** This does not mean to ignore problems, it does mean that Regenerative Evaluation doesn't ignore potential either. It expands the lens of where we gather insights, wisdom, knowledge and data to help inform our evaluations. It leverages the Place-sourced potential that is within the Place where Regenerative Evaluation is applied in practice.

Reckoning with and Evolving Evaluation Theory

The *Evaluation Theory Tree* ([Christie and Alkin, 2012](#)) helps the field of evaluation see itself within the context of how evaluation is used, its methods and values, as well as acknowledging the field's role in social accountability, shaping social inquiry, and epistemology. Regenerative Evaluation invites the field to reckon with its **theoretical roots being embedded on stolen land**, in a colonized context that has perpetuated genocide and harm of Indigenous communities here on Turtle Island (Smith, 2012). As Regenerative Evaluation practitioners, we have a role and responsibility in understanding colonization in our evaluation practice. Understanding colonization is essential for non-Indigenous evaluators who work in partnership with Indigenous communities. Place-sourced practices help to inform Regenerative Evaluator's work towards justice and understand what better outcomes and success means in a decolonial context that is grounded in and connected to Place.

The Regenerative Evaluation Journey Continues

For me, the journey of Regenerative Evaluation is still unfolding, and it is not new – in many ways we are remembering ourselves back to this practice of working with Place as a participant. I'm still learning from the work that my dissertation has taught me. One thing I have learned is that as evaluators, we have a role and responsibility to listen to the stories of the Places where we do our work.

The field of evaluation has more work to do when it comes to acknowledging the impacts colonization and genocide has had on the Places, spaces, land, people, policies, and programs that are being evaluated. Without acknowledging these things, Regenerative Evaluation practitioners risk perpetuating harm in their evaluation efforts. I highly recommend that readers who are interested in Place-sourced practices for Regenerative Evaluation, to take time to develop the skills and capabilities for working with Place. I have learned much about this from my experience in The Regenerative Practitioner program and learning more about Regenesi's Institute's methodology called ["The Story of Place"](#). This is a

methodology that regenerative practitioners have used all around the world in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The dissertation is still teaching me, if you would like to take a deeper dive into the essential elements for this theory that is still in development for Regenerative Evaluation, ***you can find my dissertation [here](#)***. This work has much further to go, and more community voices are needed for deepening and nuancing these findings. Please reach out and connect, I would love to learn more about how you are thinking about this too, my email is drkatieboone@proton.me, I look forward to weaving and connecting with you!

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Other Supportive Frameworks

Alongside these community-developed approaches, several other frameworks align with Regenerative Evaluation principles and can be integrated depending on context.

Complexity-Aware Monitoring & Adaptive Learning

- Helps evaluators navigate uncertainty and track emergent change.
- Moves beyond static indicators by using real-time feedback loops.
- Example: USAID's Complexity-Aware Monitoring framework.

Biomimicry & Regenerative Design

- Applies nature's intelligence to evaluation, ensuring that measurement strengthens rather than extracts from living systems.
- Can inform evaluation frameworks that adapt, self-regulate, and evolve like ecosystems.

Doughnut Economics & Beyond Growth Metrics

- Challenges conventional success metrics by prioritizing social and ecological balance.
- Useful for organizations seeking to align evaluation with planetary boundaries and social well-being.

Feminist & Equitable Evaluation Approaches

- Ensures evaluation does not reinforce systemic injustices.
- Encourages participatory, co-created impact frameworks rather than externally imposed measures.

Choosing the Right Framework for Your Context

Instead of searching for one perfect method, Regenerative Evaluation invites flexibility, experimentation, and adaptation. **The key is to choose and modify frameworks based on context, values, and purpose—ensuring that evaluation itself is a generative process rather than an extractive one.**

4.2 The Methods Mosaic

Curating Your Toolkit

There is no single "regenerative method." A standard survey can be deeply regenerative if co-designed with the community to serve their needs. Conversely, a storytelling circle can be extractive if the stories are harvested solely for a donor report without consent or care.

Therefore, we do not view methods as "good" or "bad," but rather as tools that must be matched to the right intention and the right moment in the cycle.

We call this section the Methods Mosaic because it brings together a diverse array of "tiles" to create a complete picture. In the tables that follow, you will find a blend of:

- Established social science tools: Such as Network Analysis and Semi-Structured Interviews, which provide rigor and structure.
- Participatory & embodied approaches: Such as Deep Listening Circles (Council) and Systemic Constellations, which allow us to access the emotional, relational, and "unspoken" layers of a system.

How to Navigate This Section

To help you select the most appropriate tool for your context, we have organized the methods according to the Three Phases of Regenerative Inquiry:

- Phase 1 (Grounding & Design): Methods to help you listen, map the context, and build relationships before acting.
- Phase 2 (Tending & Inquiry): Methods to track progress, gather real-time feedback, and support learning during implementation.
- Phase 3 (Harvesting & Replanting): Methods to make sense of data collectively and translate insights into future strategy.

We invite you to view this as a palette. You may choose to combine a "hard" quantitative method with a "soft" narrative method to see the system with two eyes. The goal is to curate a mix of methods that allows you to be intentional in your evidence while remaining tender in your relationships.

Phase 1: Grounding & Design (The Soil)

Methods to listen, map, and orient before acting.

Method	Best Used For...	Connection to Regenerative Practice
Deep Listening Circles	Surfacing underlying values, traumas, and hopes in a group setting.	Shifts stance from "expert" to "witness"; builds relational soil.
Semi-Structured Interviews	Gathering rich, individual perspectives with enough structure to compare data, but enough flexibility to follow the energy.	Allows the participant to shape the agenda; moves from interrogation to dialogue.
Systemic Constellations	Visualizing invisible dynamics and relationships in a system using physical representation.	Reveals the "Soil" conditions (trust, blockage) that surveys often miss.
Social Network Analysis (SNA)	Mapping the relationships and flows of information between actors.	Shifts focus from isolated nodes (individuals) to the health of the connections.
Causal Loop Diagrams (Systems Mapping)	Visualizing feedback loops, root causes, and interdependence.	Moves beyond linear logic to see the complexity of the whole system.
Critical Systems Heuristics	Uncovering whose views are included and whose are excluded in the design.	Centers ethics and power dynamics; asks "who benefits?".
Context Analysis / Ethnography	Immersing oneself in the daily life of the community to understand the "lived reality."	Honors the principle of "Place-Sourced" wisdom.
Eco-Cycle Planning	identifying where a project is in its lifecycle (birth, maturity, creative destruction).	Aligns evaluation with the cyclical rhythms of nature.

Phase 2: Tending & Inquiry (The Growth)

Methods to track progress, adapt, and build capacity in real-time.

Method	Best Used For...	Connection to Regenerative Practice
Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)	capturing intended and unintended impacts in a visual, participatory way.	Visualizes the "web" of impact rather than a linear chain; high engagement.
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Interviews	Identifying strengths, assets, and what is already working ("Positive Deviance").	Focuses on system vitality and energy rather than deficits.
Photovoice / Video Diaries	Allowing participants to document their own reality and perspective.	Shifts the power of narrative to the participant; honors lived experience.
Micro-Narrative Collection	Gathering large numbers of fragmented stories to spot emerging patterns.	Balances the depth of story with the scale of quantitative data.
After Action Reviews (AAR)	Rapid learning cycles immediately following an event or activity.	Supports iterative learning and immediate feedback loops.
Reflective Practice Circles / Intervision	Peer-to-peer coaching to solve challenges and digest learning.	Turns evaluation into a capacity-building intervention.
Participatory Surveys	Gathering quantitative data where questions are co-designed with the community.	Ensures the metrics used are meaningful to those being measured.

Phase 3: Harvesting & Replanting (The Seeds)

Methods to make sense, report, and strategize for the future.

Method	Best Used For...	Connection to Regenerative Practice
Most Significant Change (MSC)	Collecting and selecting values-based stories of impact without using indicators.	Honors qualitative nuance and allows the community to define "success."
Outcome Harvesting	Working backward from evidence of change to determine contribution.	Useful in complex environments where outcomes cannot be predicted.
Data Walks / Placemats	Participatory analysis where stakeholders interpret the data displayed on walls or tables.	Democratizes sense-making; reduces evaluator bias in interpretation.
Collective Story Harvesting	Using a structured process to listen to stories from multiple angles (e.g., the leadership lens, the community lens).	Builds "Joint Sense-Making" and deeper empathy.
World Café	Hosting large-group dialogue to cross-pollinate insights and finding patterns.	Harnesses the collective intelligence of the whole system.
Learning Histories	Documenting the "journey" of a project, including failures and pivots, rather than just results.	Captures the evolutionary learning, not just the static output.
Future Search / Visioning	Using the findings to collectively dream and plan the next cycle.	The act of "Replanting"—turning evaluation into future strategy.

5. Applying Regenerative Evaluation: Entry Points to Transformative Impact

From Projects to Ecosystems

So far, we have explored the roots, principles, and methods of Regenerative Evaluation. But where does this approach actually land in the real world?

A common misconception is that evaluation is only for "projects"—specific interventions with a start and end date. However, living systems are fractal: the patterns found in a single leaf are repeated in the structure of the whole tree. Similarly, the principles of Regenerative Evaluation can be applied at multiple levels of a system.

In this chapter, we outline the four primary contexts where this framework comes to life:

1. **Project & Program Evaluation:** Shifting from proving attribution to unearthing potential and adaptive learning.
2. **Organizational Vitality & Adaptive Strategy:** Turning the lens inward to measure the health, culture, and strategic coherence of the organization itself.
3. **Funding & Investment:** Moving beyond compliance-driven reporting to trust-based learning partnerships.
4. **Policy & Systemic Governance:** Using foresight and feedback loops to design policies that are responsive to complex realities.

While the specific tools may change depending on the context, the core intention remains the same: to measure in a way that not only regenerates the health of the system but activates its innate potential to shape desirable futures.

(Note: In the following chapter, we will ground these applications in reality by sharing specific stories and case studies from our community).

1. Project & Program Evaluation

The Micro Level: Tending the Work on the Ground

The Context: This is the most common entry point. It applies to teams running specific interventions who feel trapped by rigid logframes that fail to capture the nuance—and the future possibilities—of their work.

The Core Shift

- From: "Did we deliver what we promised?" (accountability for outputs)
- To: "What potential have we activated, and what is asking to emerge?" (accountability for potential & contribution)

Why It Matters

Traditional project evaluation often acts as a "post-mortem," dissecting what happened in the past. Regenerative Evaluation acts as a bridge to the future. It creates a container not only to reflect on "what worked," but to identify the latent potential—the new leaders, the unexpected energy, the budding relationships—that has been unlocked and needs nurturing in the next cycle. It captures the "invisible work" (trust-building, confidence, connection) that serves as the soil for future impact.

Key Inquiries

- Enabling conditions: What relationships, resources, or trust were critical for the changes we observed?
- Unearthing potential: What latent strengths or new possibilities were revealed during this project that we should nurture next?
- Capacity: How has the agency and confidence of the participants evolved to sustain this work without us?

Gathering Insights

- Most Significant Change (MSC): To capture values-based stories of impact and future aspirations.
- Ripple Effect Mapping: To visualize indirect impacts and "spores" of change spreading beyond the project scope.
- Psychometric Assessments: To track inner growth (e.g., self-efficacy) as a leading indicator of future potential.

2. Organizational Vitality & Adaptive Strategy

The Meso Level: Tending the Soil of the Organization

The Context: You cannot produce regenerative impact with an extractive organization. This application turns the lens inward, helping networks and organizations assess their own health, alignment, and strategic direction.

The Core Shift

- From: "Are we efficient and hitting our KPIs?" (machine metaphor)
- To: "Are we coherent, resilient, and adaptive?" (living system metaphor)

Why It Matters

Burnout is endemic in the social sector. By applying Regenerative Evaluation internally, organizations can identify where energy is blocked (e.g., toxic culture, unclear decision-making) and where it flows. It transforms strategy from a static 5-year plan into an adaptive compass that unlocks the collective intelligence and potential of the team.

Key Inquiries

- Vitality: Does the way we work give us energy or deplete us?
- Coherence: Is our internal culture aligned with the external impact we seek to create?
- Adaptability: How quickly can our strategy sense and respond to feedback from the ecosystem?

Gathering Insights

- Relational Mapping (e.g., Kumu): To visualize the health of internal communication and silos.
- Developmental Evaluation: To embed real-time strategic learning into leadership meetings.
- 360° Feedback + Storytelling: To capture diverse perspectives on organizational culture.

3. Funding & Investment Strategies

The Macro Level: Resourcing the Ecosystem

The Context: This applies to foundations, impact investors, and donors who want to move beyond "policing" grantees to truly supporting systemic change.

The Core Shift

- From: "Managing risk and demanding attribution." (Control)
- To: "Building trust and understanding contribution." (Stewardship)

Why It Matters

The way money is measured dictates how money is spent. When funders demand short-term, linear proof of impact, they force grantees to think small. Regenerative Evaluation allows funders to track the "ROI" of intangibles—like ecosystem resilience and network health—enabling them to invest in the long-term conditions that allow future potential to flourish.

Key Inquiries

- Systemic health: How does our funding strengthen the underlying "soil" (trust, infrastructure) of the sector?
- Power dynamics: Does our reporting process extract time from grantees, or does it build their capacity?
- Risk vs. potential: Are we funding only what is "proven," or are we holding space for the emergence of necessary innovation?

Gathering Insights

- The Impact Garden: To map how funding inputs nourish root systems, not just fruits.
- Participatory Grant Reporting: Where grantees co-design the indicators of success.
- Portfolio Sense-Making: Looking for patterns across multiple grants rather than evaluating them in isolation.

4. Policy & Systemic Governance

The Meta Level: Creating the Enabling Environment

The Context: For policymakers and government bodies, the challenge is designing laws and structures that can cope with the complexity of the modern world. This section integrates Future Foresight, as effective policy must be anticipatory, not just reactive.

The Core Shift

- From: "Static compliance and electoral short-termism."
- To: "Adaptive governance and intergenerational responsibility."

Why It Matters

Policies often fail because they rely on linear logic ("If we pass Law X, Outcome Y will happen") which breaks down in complex systems. Regenerative Evaluation introduces feedback loops that allow policies to be "prototyped" and adapted. Crucially, it brings an anticipatory lens, using foresight to design for future generations rather than just current voters.

Key Inquiries

- Intergenerational justice: How will this policy affect the vitality of the system for the next seven generations?
- Feedback loops: What mechanisms allow this policy to learn and adapt if it isn't working?
- Weak signals: What emerging trends (from foresight data) indicate we need to shift course now?

Gathering Insights

- Participatory Policy Labs: Co-creating evaluation frameworks with citizens.
- Transformative Scenario Planning: Testing policies against multiple future scenarios to ensure resilience.
- Longitudinal Impact Studies: Tracking effects over decades, not just election cycles.

Start Small, Learn Continuously

While the concepts, methods and possibilities laid out in this chapter may feel vast, every meaningful transformation begins with a single step.

Rather than waiting for the perfect conditions to apply Regenerative Evaluation, what if you started with a simple experiment today?

What's one small regenerative practice you could integrate, perhaps starting a new feedback loop, using storytelling instead of static metrics, or bringing more participation into sense-making?

A Small Experiment to Try This Week

Choose one meeting, project, or report where you typically measure success.

Instead of only looking at outputs, ask:

- What unseen factors are shaping this outcome?
- What relationships, resources, or conditions made this possible?
- How did this process affect the well-being, energy, and learning of those involved?

Simply bringing these questions into your conversations can begin shifting the intention and energy behind measurement and evaluation.

Bringing Regenerative Evaluation to Life

As you begin experimenting with regenerative approaches, you are already part of shaping this field. The learning is not just in the theory but in the doing. Try, reflect, adapt, and share what emerges.

We'd love to hear about your insights and experiments, connect with the [Regenerative Evaluation community](#), share your reflections, and explore together.

The journey is yours.

6. Case Studies: Regenerative Evaluation in Practice

Theory only matters when it touches the ground. While the previous chapters map the philosophical roots, principles, and frameworks of Regenerative Evaluation, this chapter is dedicated to the messy, beautiful reality of applied practice.

To demonstrate how these concepts translate into real-world action, we open this chapter with two foundational case studies from our community. These cases span different sectors and frameworks, illustrating that Regenerative Evaluation is a highly adaptable approach to learning and measurement:

- **Inclusive Social Entrepreneurship with SEND e.V.:** This case explores how to shift power dynamics and unearth innate potential within the social enterprise sector. It demonstrates how regenerative principles—and the Impact Garden framework—can fundamentally shift how an ecosystem’s health and inclusivity are measured and nurtured.
- **Building Support Infrastructure with Transition Together:** Set within a global grassroots movement of community-led sustainability initiatives, this case explores how to evaluate the true value of a national support network. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, it demonstrates how the SCALE 3D framework was used not only to prove impact to funders, but to guide strategic learning and help local community groups make sense of their own systemic growth.

An Invitation to Collaborate

Because this is a Living Paper, this section is designed to grow alongside the field. An ecosystem thrives on a diversity of stories, and we are actively seeking to expand this library of practice.

As you take the frameworks and principles from this paper and test them in your own context, we invite you to share your learnings, frictions, and breakthroughs with the Community of Practice. Over the coming months, we will be offering micro-grants and support to harvest and publish new case studies from our members. This chapter is intentionally unfinished—because the next case study might be yours.

6.1 Inclusive social entrepreneurship with SEND e.V.

Written by Jannik Kaiser (Unity Effect)

The Inquiry: How can a summative evaluation move beyond "reporting on the past" to become a roadmap for future systemic change?

The Context

SEND e.V. is the central network for social entrepreneurship in Germany. With funding from Google.org's Social Innovation Fund, they launched a multi-layered program designed to support underrepresented founders and build regional clusters to foster a more inclusive sector. However, as the program neared its end, the team faced a common challenge. Conducting a final impact evaluation ran the risk of becoming a "post-mortem" exercise—a box-ticking activity to satisfy donor requirements after most activities had already concluded.

- **The tension:** Asking partners and participants for data at this late stage risked feeling purely extractive, potentially draining energy from the network rather than generating it.
- **The invitation:** Unity Effect was invited to design a process that would provide the necessary rigor for reporting while adding genuine value to the partners involved.

The Journey

We approached the evaluation as a strategic learning partnership. Instead of designing the indicators in isolation, we began by hosting participatory workshops with program partners to define success. They identified two clear priorities: creating partner profiles that could be used for their own future fundraising, and building their own internal capacity for evaluation.

- **Participatory definition of success:** We shifted the focus from "what the donor wants to know" to "what the partners need." This resulted in a dual-purpose evaluation that served both upward accountability and lateral support.
- **Meta-Communication for capacity building:** To meet the partners' desire to learn, we used transparent "meta-communication" throughout the process. We explicitly explained the "why" and "how" behind our survey designs and methods, turning the data collection process itself into a capacity-building intervention.

- Mapping with the Impact Garden: We used the Impact Garden framework to visualize the program's complexity. This allowed us to map the Supportive Conditions (the ecosystem infrastructure built) alongside the Systemic Changes (shifts in sector inclusivity), capturing the full breadth of the work .

The Harvest

The evaluation process yielded far more than a final report. By centering the partners' needs, the process generated high engagement and rich data, revealing that SEND's work was a systemic contribution to the "soil" of the German ecosystem. This included aspects such as

- Strategic assets: The final report included tailored profiles for each partner to use immediately in their own storytelling and fundraising.
- Forward-looking strategy: The final workshop focused on future application. Insights gathered provided a roadmap for stakeholders—from government to funders—to advance the systemic shifts SEND initiated .
- Organizational learning: The process strengthened the SEND team's internal ability to think and measure systematically, leaving them with new language and tools to guide their future work.

Regenerative Principles in Action

We consciously anchored our process in specific regenerative principles. Here is how three of them came to life in practice:

- Shift power and center marginalised voices: We decentralized the definition of "success," allowing partners to determine what value the evaluation should deliver for them (fundraising profiles) rather than imposing a top-down agenda.
- Unearth and amplify innate potential: Through meta-communication and transparent design, we used the evaluation to reveal and strengthen the partners' own capacities for impact measurement, leaving them stronger than we found them .
- Nurture system vitality: By using the Impact Garden, we focused on the interconnectedness of the ecosystem, mapping how relationships and supportive conditions contributed to the whole.

Read more about the project and access the final report [on Unity Effect's website](#)

6.2 Transition Together

Written by Tim Strasser (Common Ground)

The Inquiry. How can we use SCALE 3D to demonstrate to our funder the value of the national support infrastructure for local community initiatives, while also guiding strategic learning for the adaptive development of this support infrastructure, as well as supporting local groups with their sense-making?

The Context:

Transition Network is a global grassroots movement of community-led sustainability initiatives in urban settings, such as community gardens, energy & food cooperatives, and repair cafés. [Transition Together](#) was a 3-year project (2022–2025) to develop a support infrastructure for Transition groups in the UK, funded by the National Lottery Foundation. SCALE 3D was chosen as a framework for strategy, evaluation and action learning, although only after the high-level project strategy and milestones were already agreed with the funder.

- *The Tension:* The annual milestones that were promised to the funder functioned as the main guideline for orienting, measuring and reporting on the progress of the project. Although some flexibility was granted, this limited the degree to which SCALE 3D could guide adaptive planning based on emergent sense-making and learning.
- *The Invitation:* Embed SCALE 3D in the project as a whole and in each of the workstream activities, to collect relevant monitoring data (as much as possible during the delivery instead of post hoc) and guide strategic sense-making and learning.

The Journey

Write a narrative paragraph describing how you approached the work. Focus on the human experience—how you designed the space, how you communicated, and the energy in the room.

A back-casting approach was used to articulate the high level Theory of Change of the project, using SCALE 3D to clarify the desired long-term impacts and required transformative capacities (outcomes at target group level) for each of the three dimensions of widening, deepening and lengthening. Each workstream clarified how their activities could contribute to the high level objectives of wider

reach & inclusivity (widening), systemic understanding & action (deepening), as well as continuity & resilience (lengthening) of the Transition movement.

- Initially, the SCALE 3D model was applied in its entirety, including all the detailed elements of transformative impacts, capacities and network leadership roles that are included in the model. Yet, once we realised that this was too making things too complicated, we prioritised and converged on a smaller number of primary strategic objectives.
- Arriving at this selection of objectives was in itself a valuable strategic sense-making process that underwent numerous iterations to eventually arrive at more clarity and focus, considering the large scope and complexity of the project's ambitions. This happened through a series of online and in-person meetings with the whole team and each individual workstream, as well as surveys and co-design meetings with local groups and a steering committee representing the Transition movement.
- Local Transition initiatives – especially those that received small grants of “seed funding” – were also supported through online workshops to apply a simplified SCALE 3D canvas for their own strategic planning and impact reporting. This was highly valued by local groups, as they appreciated the simplicity of the ‘deepening, widening, lengthening’ language, the alignment with what they seek to achieve, and the way it helped them reflect on their work in a holistic and adaptive manner.

The Harvest

The evaluation process helped generate value for the project and its funder, as well as the Transition Movement by:

- sharpening the strategic focus of the Transition Together project as well as local groups
- generating a mix of qualitative data and quantitative data about the achievements, challenges, learnings, and needs of Transition initiatives
- producing stand-alone reports about larger deliverables (Online Summit, Seed Funding, Multi-partner innovation prototypes) as well as a final project impact report that offered useful reflections for the project and the Transition movement
- harvesting stories of impact of local groups that were useful for impact reporting as well as inspiring other local groups

- testing and refining the SCALE 3D model itself, including a simplified canvas for projects of local groups

Regenerative Principles in Action

While much of this work was done before the Regenerative Principles were explicitly articulated, some of them were implicitly part of the project already.

Here is how three of them came to life in practice:

- *Honor Place, Story and Lived Experience*: collecting place-based stories of local groups about their achievements and impacts, as well as challenges and learnings. These were summarised and categorised using the widening, deepening and lengthening objectives, for a handy overview of different kinds of stories.
- *Embrace Iterative Learning and Emergence*: SCALE 3D helped both the project as a whole as well as local groups to evolve their strategic ambitions and theories of change, by sensing and responding to both planned and unplanned developments and emergent needs.
- *Cultivate Self-Awareness & Reflexivity*: The language of widening, deepening, and lengthening helped the project team and local groups be more aware about how their work is orienting and contributing towards one or more of these dimensions, and how the emphasis needs to evolve over time.

Read more about the project and access the final report [here](#). See the simplified 3D canvas for projects and local groups [here](#).

7. Looking Ahead: The Future of Regenerative Evaluation

An Evolving Inquiry for a Complex World

Evaluation is a powerful force for shaping reality. By deciding what we measure, we signal what we value. For decades, the field of evaluation has built rigorous frameworks to ensure accountability, improve performance, and provide evidence for decision-making. We stand on the shoulders of the practitioners, researchers, and societies who have worked tirelessly to professionalize this discipline and ensure that resources are used effectively.

However, the context in which we operate is shifting. The 21st century confronts us with challenges of unprecedented complexity—from the climate crisis to deep social fragmentation—that defy linear cause-and-effect logic. In this landscape, the demand on evaluators is changing. We are being asked to do more than retrospectively assess whether a project met its goals. We are being invited to embrace the responsibility of what it means to be an evaluator today: to help systems sense their own health, to surface latent potential, and to navigate uncertainty with integrity.

Regenerative Evaluation offers a pathway to meet this moment. It is not a rejection of established methods, but an evolution of them. It acknowledges that in a living, interconnected world, we can no longer claim to be entirely "neutral" observers. Our questions inevitably influence the systems we touch. Therefore, rigor must look different: it must include not only technical precision but also relational depth, historical awareness, and the courage to acknowledge our own humanity in the process.

This Living Paper is a snapshot of this emerging practice. It is an offering to the broader field—a lens, a set of principles, and a community of inquiry. As we look to the future, we see Regenerative Evaluation as a growing movement that will evolve through three distinct pathways: Institutionalizing the Practice, Scaling Real-World Applications, and Growing the Community.

Pathway 1: Institutionalizing the Practice

Weaving Regeneration into the Fabric of the Field

We do aim to bring the principles of regeneration into dialogue with the official canon of evaluation, enriching the toolkit available to practitioners everywhere.

Engaging the Profession

We aim to work in active partnership with major evaluation bodies (such as the European Evaluation Society and American Evaluation Association). By forming thematic working groups and submitting our frameworks to peer review, we seek to validate and refine Regenerative Evaluation. We want to demonstrate how principles like "Nurturing System Vitality" can enhance traditional standards of utility and accuracy.

Shifting the Funding Architecture

A significant lever for change lies in how evaluation is commissioned. We are committed to working with "first-mover" foundations to co-design new Terms of Reference (ToR). By integrating regenerative principles into the commissioning phase, we can move beyond compliance-driven contracts toward learning partnerships that value systemic mapping and learning histories as highly as final reports.

Anchoring in Evidence

To shift policy, we must deepen the theoretical base. We invite researchers to critique and test these frameworks, moving Regenerative Evaluation from practice-based wisdom to an evidence-backed methodology.

A Research Cluster on Regenerative Inquiry

We envision a collaborative Research Cluster on Regenerative Inquiry—a dynamic hub connecting community knowledge holders, practitioners, and academic researchers. By documenting longitudinal case studies, it will bridge complexity science, daily practice, and lived experience. Crucially, this cluster must shift power by centering communities historically marginalized by extractive research. Rather than seeking top-down institutional validation, our goal is to weave diverse ways of knowing into a pluralistic evidence base capable of challenging dominant paradigms and driving systemic shifts in philanthropy and policy.

Pathway 2: Scaling Real-World Applications

From Project Logic to Systemic Governance

Regenerative Evaluation is applicable across scales. While many of us begin by applying these principles to a single project, the true potential lies in applying them to broader systems. We aim to expand the scope from the micro-level of programs to the meso-level of organizations and the macro-level of policy.

Organizational Vitality

We see a critical need to apply this lens to organizations themselves. We aim to scale the use of "Organizational Vitality" assessments—helping networks measure their own "soil health" (trust, culture, coherence) as a prerequisite for sustainable impact. This shifts evaluation from an external audit to an internal practice of organizational hygiene.

Living Labs for Experimentation

To scale safely, we propose the creation of "Regenerative Evaluation Learning Labs." These are designated spaces where organizations and donors agree to experiment with these methods in real-time, protecting the freedom to fail and transparently documenting the friction and breakthroughs of measuring differently.

Policy and Systemic Governance

Ultimately, we envision Regenerative Evaluation informing public policy. By integrating Foresight and Systemic Feedback Loops, we can help governments design for intergenerational resilience. This involves evaluating policies not just on immediate output, but on their contribution to the long-term vitality of the social and ecological commons.

A Global "Living Lab" Fund

We dream of a dedicated multi-donor fund designed to resource "Living Labs" across different continents. This fund would allow organizations to run 3-5 year experiments in Regenerative Evaluation without the pressure of standard reporting, creating a global portfolio of evidence on how these principles work in diverse cultural and political contexts.

Pathway 3: Growing the Community

Strengthening the Mycelium of Practice

Just as a forest relies on the fungal network (mycelium) to share nutrients, Regenerative Evaluation relies on a decentralized, resilient network of people.

Cultivating Peer Learning

We are dedicated to growing a community that prioritizes peer support. Evaluation can be a lonely profession, especially when upholding complexity in a system that demands simplicity. We will continue to host "Intervision" sessions where evaluators can receive peer coaching. Focusing on the evaluator's well-being is a core part of the regenerative ethos .

Open Sourcing the Toolkit

Knowledge grows when shared. We are committed to keeping core tools—like the Impact Garden—accessible and open. We invite the community to adapt and remix them for specific cultural contexts, building a "commons" of regenerative methods free from restrictive intellectual property barriers .

Weaving Diverse Lineages

We actively seek to weave connections with adjacent fields—biomimicry, indigenous scholarship, deep ecology, and social justice. By staying open to these lineages, we ensure that Regenerative Evaluation remains a vibrant, evolving ecosystem rather than a closed echo chamber .

Resourcing the Stewardship

Sustaining this mycelial network requires energy. We aim to secure resources to establish a "Backbone Stewardship" for the field. Whether through a new entity or a collaborative mandate, this stewardship would fund the "invisible work" of community weaving—hosting gatherings, maintaining the commons, and nurturing the next generation—so the community can thrive without burning out.

Invitation to Co-Evolution

A Call to Shape the Future Together

The future of Regenerative Evaluation is not written in this paper. It will be written in the field notes of practitioners who dare to ask different questions in their next kick-off meeting. It will be written in the boardrooms where funders decide to value trust and learning alongside accountability. It will be written in the communities that reclaim the power to define their own success.

We offer this Living Paper as an invitation to co-evolution. We recognize that we are navigating new terrain, and we do not claim to have all the answers. The tensions we face—between rigor and relationship, between standardizing and sensing—are real, and they require our collective wisdom to navigate.

To the Evaluators:

We invite you to see your role not just as an assessor of the past, but as a steward of the future. Where can you stretch your practice to include more life, more history, and more potential?

To the Funders and Commissioners:

We invite you to partner with us in designing terms of engagement that allow for emergence. How can we measure what truly matters, so that we can invest in what is truly alive?

To the Skeptics and Critical Friends:

We invite your rigor and your challenges. Help us sharpen this thinking so that it can stand the test of reality.

There is a place for everyone in this inquiry. Let us work together to build a practice of evaluation that is worthy of the complexity of our times and the vitality of the world we serve.

Literature overview

The transition toward a regenerative paradigm is not the invention of a single framework, but rather the weaving together of many rich, established disciplines. The following literature list serves as a curated starting point for practitioners wishing to deepen their understanding of the ideas that inform Regenerative Evaluation. It is by no means exhaustive, but it maps the essential landscape of our practice—from the deep theoretical roots to the tangible, applied methods used in the field.

I. Foundational Knowledge & Theoretical Roots

This section gathers the underlying philosophies, sciences, and wisdom traditions that shape the regenerative worldview. These texts guide the necessary shift from mechanistic, linear thinking toward a dynamic, living-systems paradigm.

1. Systems Thinking & Complexity Science

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Santa Fe Institute (Ongoing Research). Various publications on complex adaptive systems and emergent behavior in human and ecological systems. Snowden, David, & Boone, Mary (2007). *A Leader's Framework for Decision Making*. Harvard Business Review.

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Damasio, Antonio (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

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van Manen, Max (2014). *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. Routledge.

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3. Indigenous Knowledge & Wisdom Traditions

Andreotti, Vanessa (2021). *Hospicing Modernity: Parting with Illusions from the Everyday Pendulum*. North Atlantic Books.

Cajete, Gregory (1999). *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Clear Light Publishers.

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Yunkaporta, Tyson (2019). *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. Text Publishing.

4. Futures Studies & Strategic Foresight

Inayatullah, Sohail (2008). *Six Pillars: Futures Thinking for Transforming*. Foresight.

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Lave, Jean, & Wenger, Etienne (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Mezirow, Jack (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Jossey-Bass.

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