

Regenerative-Focused Evaluation: Centering Place in Evaluation Theory and Practice

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Background: The intensifying polycrisis, marked by interacting crises across climate, inequality, and political instability, is surfacing deep social and ecological challenges that demand evaluation move beyond business-as-usual approaches toward more transformational, relational, and regenerative practice. Conventional place-based evaluation frequently overlooks the deep relational, historical, and ecological dimensions of Place, limiting its capacity to contribute to just and regenerative futures.

Purpose: To develop regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice through four interconnected movements, grounding, developing, weaving, and evolving, and to argue that Place-sourced practices, such as centering Indigenous sovereignty and the wisdom of living systems, offer the evaluation field a path toward truth, healing, reconciliation, and regenerative futures for all relations.

Setting: Doctoral research conducted in sustained partnership with Dakota Elders and community leaders in Mahkato (Mankato), Mni Sota (Minnesota), complemented by a growing global community of regenerative evaluation practice and an illustrative application to coastal and marine infrastructure through the Transeation project.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: Conceptually informed theory development drawing on doctoral research, a targeted synthesis of relevant literature, a growing global community of practice, and the diverse professional experience of the authors.

Data Collection and Analysis: Semi-structured narrative-inquiry interviews and community Circles with 57 Elders, Riders, and supporters on the Makato Reconciliation and Healing Horse Ride (December 2024), analyzed through a three-phase process of inductive coding, sense-making, and abductive analysis. The resulting framework was returned to the Dakota community for member-checking and review before being finalized.

Findings: Regenerative-focused evaluation centers Place as a living, sentient participant in evaluation, drawing on living-systems thinking, Indigenous epistemologies, and decolonizing approaches, such as centering Indigenous sovereignty and the wisdom of living systems, explored through the twin lenses of relational validity and relational accountability. Four interconnected movements, Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving, constitute the core framework, illustrated through field stories from Mahkato and coastal infrastructure practice. The article further argues that activating these movements depends on both individual capacities and the systemic capabilities that enable or constrain their meaningful application.

Keywords: *regenerative-focused evaluation; Place-sourced evaluation; transformational imperative; relational validity; relational accountability; decolonizing evaluation; polycrisis; Indigenous epistemologies; living systems.*

The world is in a polycrisis, multiple, interacting crises in climate, inequality, and political instability that compound and overwhelm institutions built for isolated problems (Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice, 2026). This convergence presents a transformational imperative: the urgent need for deep, systemic change toward more just, regenerative, and resilient futures. Conventional evaluation practice, rooted in linear causality and human-centered metrics, is poorly equipped to meet this moment, and regenerative-focused evaluation has emerged as one response.

Regenerative-focused evaluation centers Place, understood as a living, sentient participant rather than a geographic backdrop, which we, the authors, explore through centering living-systems thinking, Indigenous epistemologies, and decolonizing approaches, and the twin lenses of relational validity and relational accountability to the people, communities, and living systems where evaluation is conducted. Relational validity extends evaluation's validity criteria beyond human-centered frameworks to encompass the interconnectedness of human life with other species, land, and living systems; relational accountability refers to the evaluator's responsibility to those relationships, building respect, reciprocity, and responsibility not only to human communities but to the Places and living systems within which evaluation is conducted (Elliott-Groves et al., 2019; Kirkhart, 2010; Meixi et al., 2022; Reo, 2019; Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2012). This is not simply a new methodology to adopt but a fundamental reorientation of how evaluation relates to Place, to Indigenous knowledge, and to the living systems within which it is conducted.

In this article, we develop regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice through four interconnected movements, Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving, drawing on doctoral research conducted in sustained partnership with Dakota Elders and community leaders in Mahkato (Mankato), Mni Sota (Minnesota); a targeted synthesis of relevant literature; a growing global community of practice; and our diverse professional experience. We begin by situating the inquiry methodologically and in terms of positionality, then trace the intellectual roots of regenerative thinking before turning to the principles and four movements that constitute regenerative-focused evaluation in practice. Two

field stories, one from Mahkato, one from coastal infrastructure practice, illustrate the approach in action, and we close with a call to the evaluation field to engage Place as a participant in responding to the transformational imperative.

Situating the Inquiry: Methodology and Positionality

The doctoral research underlying this theory was conducted through semi-structured, narrative-inquiry interviews and community Circles with 57 Elders, Riders, and supporters on the Makatoh Reconciliation and Healing Horse Ride (December 2024), analyzed through a three-phase process of inductive coding, sense-making, and abductive analysis. Consent was treated as an ongoing, culturally grounded practice rather than a one-time procedural step: Each interview and Circle opened with informed consent and a tobacco tie offering, followed Dakota protocols of smudging, song, and prayer where appropriate, and participants retained the right to decline at any time without consequence (Boone, 2025). The resulting framework was returned to the community for review, first through member-checking with Dakota Elder and staff carrier for the ride Wilfred Keeble, and again with all participating Riders and Elders, who were invited to comment on and revise a draft, alongside a community presentation and meal shared with the Crow Creek Sioux Tribal community, before being finalized (Boone, 2025).

A note on positionality is essential here, and not only as a standard disclosure, but as an expression of the relational practice we are describing. Naming one's relations to Place, ancestry, and history is itself a Place-sourced discipline (Boone, 2025); positionality, understood this way, is something regenerative-focused evaluation asks of evaluators in general, not only of the authors of this paper. The first author, Boone, is a non-Indigenous practitioner working in sustained partnership with the Dakota communities described above, and her own connection to this Place runs deeper than professional interest: Her settler ancestors lived alongside the Dakota at Lake Shetek and were saved, in 1862, by the bravery of Lakota "Fool Soldiers"¹, a relationship of debt and gratitude that has shaped her scholarly commitment to reconciliation in this specific Place (Boone, 2025).

¹ The Fool Soldiers were a group of young Lakota men who, in November 1862, negotiated the release of white settler captives taken during the US–Dakota War—at great personal cost and risk to themselves. Their act of courage and humanity is a landmark moment in Dakota-

settler relations in Mni Sota, and one largely overlooked in mainstream historical accounts. For a fuller account, see Kotlier, N. (2016). *The Fool Soldiers: A Story of Courage*—or the relevant historical source Boone (2025) draws on.

This positionality carries both privilege and responsibility, and our article's argument about the risks of appropriation applies equally to its author. The Dakota community's agency, sovereignty, and voice have been central to how this work has unfolded throughout, developed over 15 years of ongoing, reciprocal relationship rather than extractive research.

The other coauthors bring diverse professional and geographic positionalities. They are all white men located in the Global North—combining a range of evaluation, disciplinary, and institutional backgrounds, whose perspectives have critically refined the theory developed here, though without the same Place-specific relationship to Mahkato and the Dakota community that grounds the first author's contribution. In preparing this article, Claude (Anthropic) was used in a supportive capacity to assist with editorial refinement, including improving clarity, concision, and structural coherence across sections, while all substantive ideas, analysis, interpretive judgments, and conclusions were developed entirely by the authors. AI-assisted editing was reviewed and validated by the lead editor prior to submission.

The conceptual foundations of regenerative-focused evaluation draw from the first author's doctoral research, integrating a decolonizing approach to Place-sourced practices, living-systems thinking as developed within the regenerative design tradition (Mang & Haggard, 2016; Patton, 2011, 2020), and Storying Place methodologies developed through the Regeneration Institute for Regenerative Practice (Boone, 2025). These foundations have been further developed and triangulated through collaboration with the article's coauthors, and through the evolving Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice, a global network of over 220 practitioners whose collective inquiry continues to refine regenerative evaluation theory and practice (Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice, 2026).

These foundations resonate with findings from the IEAC's Three Horizons foresight exercise that informs this special issue (Ofir et al., this issue), situating regenerative-focused evaluation as a contribution to a broader, globally grounded diagnosis of what evaluation must become, including the reorientation of evaluation competencies toward values-driven, systems- and power-aware, and eco-just practice (Chaplowe et al., this issue).

Methodological limitations are an inherent and expected feature of Place-sourced inquiry rather than a weakness, reflecting the deeply contextual, relational, and coevolving nature of regenerative-

focused evaluation itself. The theory's origin in a specific Indigenous context and geographic Place, while a source of its depth and authenticity, means that claims of portability and transferability across cultures and Places require further community-grounded testing and validation. The applied example offered here, the Transeation coastal infrastructure project, remains in development, offering promising illustration rather than evidential proof of regenerative-focused evaluation outcomes.

Intellectual Roots: The Fields Grounding Regenerative Thinking

Regenerative-focused evaluation is grounded in an interdisciplinary foundation spanning systems thinking and complexity science, ecology, regenerative design, futures thinking, phenomenology, and Indigenous knowledge systems, each contributing to a richer understanding of living systems and human relationships to Place. Phenomenology contributes a way of validating lived, embodied experience as a primary source of knowledge (Seamon, 2000; Erfani, 2022), alongside Indigenous relational worldviews that ground evaluation in kinship, reciprocity, and the spiritual dimensions of human and nonhuman relations (Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice, 2026; Boone, 2025). The field of ecology weaves in knowledge of living systems, and the field of regenerative design integrates humans within living systems to coevolve the conditions for life to flourish (Mang & Reed, 2012; Mang & Haggard, 2016). The practice of regenerative-focused evaluation is forward-looking, integrating learning from futures thinking to identify change and work with the latent potential of the systems and Places our practices touch.

The Indigenous context is specific to Place, time, community, and history (Rowe, 2018). Importantly, where Indigenous epistemologies inform the work, they are not simply another disciplinary input among equals, they represent fundamentally Place-sourced ways of knowing that challenge the assumptions underlying many of the other fields listed, and that must be engaged on their own terms rather than subsumed within a Western interdisciplinary framework. This does not mean regenerative-focused evaluation is reducible to Indigenous practice alone, nor that Indigenous worldviews are singular or uniform; rather, this article's specific contribution grew through sustained partnership with the Dakota community, in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous

knowledge systems, each with their own integrity, were brought into intentional relationship (Boone, 2025). Indigenous epistemologies make Place, history, and cultural context central to evaluation practice (Hopson, 2014; Marks, 2001; Rog, 2012). Waapalaneexkweew (2018) shares that when non-Indigenous evaluators do not understand the complexities among culture, context, and Place, they risk perpetuating harm within the communities they serve—harm that ripples across generations and is a direct result of postcolonial trauma from displacement from homelands and loss of language, culture, traditional knowledge, and ceremonies. Indigenous worldviews are fundamentally relational, where kinship contributes to knowledge generation and evaluation is practiced in a way that connects human, nonhuman, environment, and cosmos in a relational web that brings a spiritual nature to the evaluation practice (Cram et al., 2023).

The Dakota phrase and prayer “Mitákuye Oyásin”, meaning “All My Relations”, offers a powerful illustration of relational validity and accountability in practice, building a shared language that bridges Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of relations (Wilson & Taylor, 2005). This advances a critique of power dynamics that moves beyond culture alone (Smith et al., 2018) and helps evaluators reevaluate causation as relative and connected to experience grounded in Place (LaFrance et al., 2012).

Our approach to regenerative-focused evaluation builds on and extends existing approaches to culturally grounded evaluation, including the Indigenous evaluation framework (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010) and culturally responsive evaluation (Hopson, 2014), both of which strengthen evaluation’s multicultural validity, its responsiveness to the values, criteria, and ways of knowing of different cultural and ethnic communities (Kirkhart, 2010). Regenerative-focused evaluation extends this work by centering relational validity, moving evaluation’s validity criteria beyond race and ethnicity to encompass the interdependence of human life with land, water, nonhuman species, and the living systems within which evaluation takes place (Kirkhart, 2010; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Treating Place as a living, sentient participant in evaluation, rather than only as cultural and historical context, is one practical expression of this broader shift.

How evaluators perceive and construct Place is not neutral, it is shaped by cultural, colonial, and epistemological legacies that determine what counts as context and whose knowledge of that

context is legitimate. Three broad orientations illustrate this:

1. **Place-Based:** Conventional, non-Indigenous evaluation has tended to construct Place through man-made geographic and jurisdictional boundaries, city blocks, zip codes, counties, regions.
2. **Being of Place:** The Indigenous evaluation framework centers Place as one of four core values, “being a people of Place” (LaFrance, 2012), reflecting cultures and communities whose wisdom holds the deepest context of Place over time.
3. **Place-Sourced:** Regenerative-focused evaluation offers a third path. Place-sourced practice, grounded in living-systems thinking, gives Place agency through a methodology, Storying Place, that has been applied in partnerships among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous regenerative practitioners (Mang & Haggard, 2016).

Our specific contribution sits within that third orientation, developed in direct partnership with the Dakota community, weaving regenerative and Indigenous ways of knowing Place together rather than holding any of these three approaches in opposition (Boone, 2025).

Place as a Blind Spot: Gaps in Current Evaluation Practices

“Where in your systems theories is the land?” asks Rowe (2023, p. 160), a question that cuts to the heart of one of evaluation’s most significant blind spots. Place is frequently forgotten by evaluators, a significant blind spot given its centrality to regenerative-focused evaluation. In regenerative-focused evaluation, Place is seen as a living, breathing, sentient being made up of living systems within which humans are nested and that shape human interactions and experience of “co-evalness” (Fabian, 2002; Massey, 2005) within shared space, time, relationship, and community. Place holds deep patterns that are embedded in the essence and spirit of the land, waterways, and social patterns. This deeper understanding of Place is woven throughout Indigenous epistemologies and found in regenerative, Place-sourced practices (Mang & Haggard, 2016; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Place-sourced practices honor Indigenous ways of knowing through a decolonizing approach that deepens understanding of culture, relationship, and partnership with Indigenous communities

across Turtle Island (North America)² and beyond (Fletcher et al., 2023; Gibbons, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Winkel et al., 2009).

Conventional evaluation has not yet fully reckoned with what this blind spot means in practice. Within the Turtle Island context in particular, evaluation's theoretical foundation is itself built on stolen land, a colonial legacy that has perpetuated harm to Indigenous communities and that spatial justice and spatial decolonization invite the field to actively address (Chilisa et al., 2023; Goeman, 2013; Soja, 2013; Smith, 2012). As Massey (2005) argues, Place is never static but continuously made and remade, and the harms of colonization are a central driver of the chaos of the polycrisis we now face: climate change, loss of traditional ecological knowledge, and the prospect of ecological collapse. Evaluators are therefore called to engage with Place not as backdrop but as participant, understanding how its patterns, histories, and living systems shape what is being evaluated and how.

Working with Place invites the field to evolve beyond multicultural validity and strengthen the relational validity of evaluative practices, prioritizing the interconnectedness of human life with other species and land, and reducing the risk of perpetuating colonialist evaluation practices (AEA, 2018; Kirkhart, 2010; Smith et al., 2018; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). For non-Indigenous evaluators, regenerative-focused evaluation creates a pathway for integrating Indigenous cultures and traditional ecological knowledge in evaluation practices (Kawakami, 2007; Poelina et al., 2022), supporting the coevolution of decolonizing evaluation practice.

A rich body of cross-disciplinary scholarship on sense of Place has been largely overlooked by the evaluation field. Evaluators know that context, culture, and local communities influence the design of our evaluations, offering the field an opportunity for further research (LaFrance, 2012; Kirkhart, 2010; Rowe, 2012; Shadish et al., 1991a; Shamai, 1991). Scholars across anthropology, architecture, city planning, environmental psychology, outdoor education, and human geography have written extensively about how people interpret and make meaning of the environments they inhabit, from the

concept of Lewin's (1943) "life space" to sense of Place from Basso (1996), insights that regenerative-focused evaluation now brings directly into evaluative theory and practice (Cajete, 1994; Harun et al., 2015; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Mohseni et al., 2024; Relph, 1976; Shamai, 1991; Tuan, 1977). This cross-disciplinary body of knowledge offers evaluation a rich and largely untapped foundation for developing more Place-responsive, relationally valid practice.

Principles of Regenerative Evaluation

Evaluation is not neutral. It plays a critical role in supporting movements, networks, and organizations to catalyze transformational change while addressing the power dynamics and differences around equity, fairness, and justice (Greene, 1997; Hopson, 2014; Symonette, 2004). The principles that guide regenerative-focused evaluation reflect this orientation, emerging from two complementary but distinct sources: sustained community partnership grounded in a specific Place and Indigenous context, and broader collaborative inquiry across a global community of practice. Together, they form the normative foundation from which the four movements of regenerative-focused evaluation, Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving, are practiced.

From a decolonizing perspective, Place extends beyond the social relationships to more deeply incorporate land and all life forms that inhabit it (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Place becomes a participant in regenerative-focused evaluation when evaluators develop the competencies, skills, and practices for working with it. Table 1 presents four foundational principles grounded in the Mahkato, Mni Sota, context, emerging from sustained partnership with Dakota Elders and community leaders. These principles reflect deep, Place-specific wisdom that anchors regenerative-focused evaluation practice in this specific Place; they are not offered as a universal precondition for regenerative-focused evaluation everywhere it is practiced, but as an illustration of what Place-sourced principles can look like when they emerge from authentic, long-term community partnership.

² "Turtle Island" is an Indigenous term for the continent of North America, derived from creation stories of various Indigenous Nations. It is used today by

Indigenous peoples and allies to acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants and challenge colonial relationships to land.

Table 1. Principles of Regenerative-Focused Evaluation from Mahkato, Mni Sota

Principle	Description
Truth first, truth hurts	Hard truths need to be acknowledged when working with Place from a decolonizing approach. Understanding what happened, when, to whom, and where they are now helps to reckon with difficult histories. Without acknowledgment, there is no healing. Evaluators risk perpetuating the historical and intergenerational trauma of colonization and the erasure of sovereign nations who were displaced and exiled from their ancestral homelands (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & Chase, 2016; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999).
Place as participant	Developing authentic relationships and recognizing Indigenous people from past, present, and future means understanding the cosmological and creation stories, culture, language, songs, ceremony, and deeper patterns of the precolonial, geological, hydrological, biological, sociocultural, economic, and settlement patterns of Place. This decolonized and living systems view of Place invites the voices and stories that reflect the unique Place-sourced memories and wisdom that are deeply embedded in the context of Place.
Partnership as praxis	Learning through partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities helps to strengthen respectful relationships that are connected to Place. Honoring agency, voice, choice, and sovereignty is a practice of deep respect, humility, and learning what it means to be a good relative.
Potential is greater than problems	Shifting from problem-focused evaluation to potential-focused regenerative practices for evaluation means that practitioners have an opportunity to develop capabilities for seeing Place-sourced potential and forward-focused inquiry that are grounded with the people and living systems connected to Place.

A second, complementary set of principles has been codeveloped through the broader Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice (Table 2). Where the Mahkato principles grow directly out of this article's specific relationships,

history, and trust, these principles are more generalizable dispositions, personal, relational, and systemic, that practitioners across diverse contexts may find useful starting points for their own community-grounded work.

Table 2. Guiding Principles for Regenerative-Focused Evaluation from the Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice

Principle	Description
Align with 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.
Cultivate self-awareness and 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.

Principle	Description
Time as teacher	Any point in time carries both 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.
Shift power and center marginalized voices	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 decentralized ownership where communities get to identify and determine what success is.
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.
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.
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 become a generative act of reciprocity, ensuring that the process gives back to participants by deepening their self-knowledge and agency.
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.
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.

Together, these two sets of principles form the normative foundation of regenerative-focused evaluation. Table 1 carries what is irreducibly specific to this Place and partnership; Table 2 carries what may travel further, while still requiring grounding in whatever community and Place it is applied to. Their relationship to the four movements that follow is one of orientation to practice: The principles articulate the values and commitments that animate regenerative-focused evaluation; the movements elaborate how those values are enacted in evaluative action. One principle in Table 2 warrants particular attention: “Center love as a force for transformation” directly challenges evaluation’s traditional claims to objectivity and neutrality, reframing evaluation instead as a fierce commitment to the flourishing of the system and all its relations. For evaluators schooled in conventional frameworks, this may be the most provocative principle here, and perhaps the most necessary.

Regenerative-Focused Evaluation: Practicing Four “Movements”

The theory and practice of regenerative-focused evaluation can be usefully explored through four interconnected movements, Grounding,

Developing, Weaving, and Evolving (Table 3), informed by the regenerative design methodology of the Regenes Institute for Regenerative Practice and the doctoral research that author Boone has conducted with the Dakota community (Mang & Haggard, 2016; Boone, 2025). These movements are not linear stages but iterative, Place-responsive practices that together constitute a coherent approach to regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice. Each movement builds on and informs the others, reflecting the cyclical, emergent logic of the living systems within which regenerative-focused evaluation is conducted.

Table 3 maps the essential practices for applying regenerative-focused evaluation theory and praxis, portable and transferable across cultures, languages, and Places, though always requiring grounding in the specific context, community, and Place where evaluation is conducted. Activating these movements in practice depends on both capacities, the extent to which individuals and institutions are prepared and supported to apply regenerative-focused evaluation, and capabilities, the systemic and structural conditions that determine whether those capacities can be meaningfully sustained over time (Chaplowe et al., this issue).

Table 3. Four Movements for Applying Regenerative-Focused Evaluation Theory and Praxis

Movements	Description
Grounding	Regenerative-focused evaluation involves an understanding of the Place-sourced patterning; sensing and sense-making with land, Place, and history; remembering and honoring the ancestors; and understanding the geological, biological, hydrological, sociocultural, cosmological, and Indigenous understandings of Place.
Developing	Regenerative-focused evaluation works to develop the capabilities for two-eyed seeing (Wright et al., 2019), strengthening our understanding of seeing place as a participant by understanding the deep patterns that mirror the interconnected, interrelated nature of the living systems ecologies that human systems are nested in. It deepens our understanding of long-held patterns over time through reflexive practice and Story of Place. It means developing skills and capabilities for honoring Tribal sovereignty and self-determination of the Indigenous partners engaged throughout.
Weaving	Regenerative-focused evaluation integrates the social, cultural, and ecological living systems where evaluations take place. This invites the principle of partnership as praxis by partnering with Indigenous communities and practices that are decolonial, participatory, story-sharing, reflective, and sense-making (Weick, 1995) with collective care and inquiry.
Evolving	Regenerative-focused evaluation taps into the greatest potential for producing value-adding effects that become realized through coevolving mutualism, reciprocal learning, and

Movements	Description
	meaningful actions that are informed by Place-sourced ways of knowing, being, and doing. This brings an intergenerational practice to the work, evolving our understanding of what it means to “be a good relative” (Deloria, 1998).

Grounding: Rooting Evaluation in Place

Grounding is the movement through which regenerative-focused evaluation roots itself in Place, establishing the ontological, epistemological, and ethical foundations from which relational practice can grow. Evaluation is shaped by the values embedded in our social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2000), with its roots embedded in social accountability and social inquiry, as well as the epistemologies of the historical and political contexts within what is being evaluated (Alkin, 2013; Shadish et al., 1991b). Evaluators are therefore called to engage regenerative-focused evaluation practices that honor the relationships of humans and nonhumans, the patterns of Place, and the regeneration of all living systems that life depends upon.

Regenerative-focused evaluation theory applies living systems thinking in partnership with the Places where evaluators work and with Indigenous communities, seeing Place as a living, sentient, breathing relative whose voice and agency actively participate in the work, giving expression to what Deloria (1992) describes as the land’s call for relief and spiritual unification against the “constant burden of exploitation” (p. 292). Grounding is also an invitation to remember: For many evaluators, the capacity to perceive Place relationally has been shaped by colonial legacies that sever relationship between people and land, center jurisdictional and resource-based ways of seeing, and treat positivist, linear-causal traditions as neutral defaults, rendering Indigenous and other relational ways of knowing Place illegible within conventional evaluation frameworks.

This article understands regenerative-focused evaluation is grounded in a relational, spatial, temporal, and communal ontology that integrates living systems thinking and Indigenous ways of knowing, through Place-sourced practices, two-eyed seeing (Wright et al., 2019), regenerative principles, and Storying Place methodology in partnership with Indigenous communities (Boone, 2025; Mang & Haggard, 2016). Two-eyed seeing is a concept introduced by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, who describes it as the practice of viewing

a phenomenon through both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing simultaneously, using the strengths of each, rather than blending them into one (Wright et al., 2019). Honoring Tribal sovereignty and self-determination is critical when partnerships with Indigenous communities are applied in regenerative-focused evaluation. Regenerative-focused evaluation recognizes humans as integrated within rather than separate from the environment, with Place as an active participant producing value-adding effects in support of truth, healing, and reconciliation (Boone, 2025), a theory continuing to coevolve through a global community of practice rather than fixed or finished.

Developing: Relational Practices in Regenerative-Focused Evaluation

Where Grounding establishes the theoretical and ontological foundations of regenerative-focused evaluation, Developing builds the relational practices and capabilities for bringing those foundations into evaluative action. Regenerative-focused evaluation leverages the Storying Place methodology developed through the Regenes Institute, an emergent and developmental approach that integrates longstanding teachings in new ways, transitioning evaluators from timeframes to Place-frames that work with the deep patterns of time, history, and context while acknowledging the effects of colonization (Boone, 2025; Mang & Haggard, 2016). Place-sourced practices are not optional but essential for evaluation conducted in Indigenous contexts, Place is central to the essence of who Indigenous people are and to Tribal memory (Thapa, 2020; Wilson & Taylor, 2005), and place-based approaches focused on man-made geographic boundaries are insufficient when conducting evaluation on stolen land. Developing these relational practices requires sustained commitment to building trust, deepening cultural understanding, and honoring the protocols and sovereignty of Indigenous partners throughout the evaluation process, not only at its outset.

Weaving: Fields and Networks of Practice

Weaving is the movement through which regenerative-focused evaluation connects “islands of coherence” into “ecosystems of coherence” (Scharmer, 2024), building across disciplinary, sectoral, cultural, and geographic boundaries the networks and communities of practice through which regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice coevolve. Evaluators are already connected to the Places where they live and work, nested inside the living systems they are part of, and these innate connections to Place are the foundation from which Weaving begins. A growing global community is actively weaving these connections. Thousands of regenerative practitioners have developed Place-sourced practices and living systems frameworks through the Regenes Institute’s The Regenerative Practitioner program, some coming from the evaluation field, others discovering regenerative-focused evaluation as their applied practices require evaluative approaches aligned with living systems thinking.

Centering Indigenous voices remains essential throughout this Weaving work, Indigenous scholars, evaluators, and community members hold the stories, songs, ceremonies, and language that contribute deep contextual wisdom to Place-sourced practices. The Regenes Institute’s Story of Place methodology helps to amplify the essential patterns of Place, weaving together planetary, societal, and cosmological stories to invite Place in as a participant in evaluative practice (Mang & Haggard, 2016). Regenerative-focused evaluation aspires to develop more opportunities for partnership efforts to restore the Places, people, and cultures that have been tending to Places all around the world since time immemorial, while recognizing that not all regenerative practitioners work in partnership with Indigenous communities, and that such partnerships must always be mutually desired and community-led.

Evolving: Looking and Moving Forward

Evolving is the movement through which regenerative-focused evaluation grows, adapts, and deepens, shaped continuously by the communities, Places, and relationships that practice it. It is not a destination but an ongoing orientation, a commitment to remaining open, responsive, and relationally accountable to the living systems and human and nonhuman relations within which regenerative-focused evaluation is conducted. Since the launch of the Regenerative Evaluation Living Paper (Regenerative Evaluation Community

of Practice, 2026) in March 2026, the Regenerative Evaluation Community of Practice has grown to over 220 members, adding 150 since the paper launched, reflecting clear and growing interest in how regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice can be applied to address the complex challenges of the current polycrisis. This growth is not incidental but essential; regenerative-focused evaluation is by nature a coevolving field, shaped by the communities, Places, and relationships that practice it.

The potential of regenerative-focused evaluation extends beyond reinvigorating the evaluation field, it provides the Place, time, and relationships needed to support the truth, healing, and reconciliation that these complex times require more broadly. Evolving toward more relational, less human-centered ways of working invites curiosity about how to collaboratively codevelop regenerative-focused evaluation, re-storying our past, present, and future as we develop new capabilities for seeing, being, relating, and connecting with each other and all our relations. As Simpson (2011) reminds us, “Reconciliation is a process of regeneration that will take many years to accomplish” (p. 22). Place-sourced practices may be among the most powerful means of cultivating the conditions for that regeneration, enabling the truth, healing, and reconciliation of the people, Places, and living systems we inhabit to coevolve toward a thriving planet for generations to come.

By Land and By Sea: Stories from the Field of Regenerative-Focused Evaluation Practice

The following two stories illustrate regenerative-focused evaluation in practice across contrasting contexts, one deeply rooted in a specific Place and long-term Indigenous partnership, the other emergent and institutional. Together they demonstrate how the four movements of Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving take shape differently depending on context, while remaining grounded in the same relational and Place-sourced orientation.

By Land: Regenerative-Focused Evaluation Framework from Mahkato, Mni Sota

The Dakota saying “okiciyaka unyanpi”, “to tell as we go” (Wilson & Taylor, 2005, p. 18), captures how regenerative-focused evaluation practices have unfolded in Mahkato (Mankato), Mni Sota

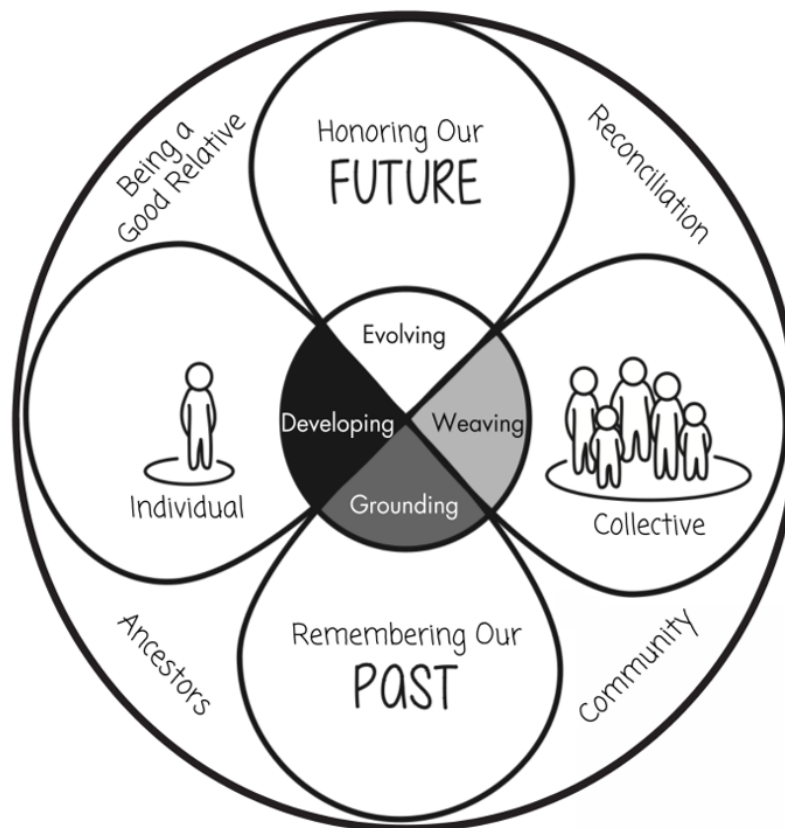
(Minnesota), a town within the ancestral homelands of the Dakota people. The Regenerative Evaluation Framework (Figure 1), developed in partnership with the Dakota community connected to the Makato Reconciliation and Healing Horse Ride in 2024,³ centers relational practices at individual and collective levels, held within the four movements of Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving.

- **At the individual level**, regenerative-focused evaluation creates space for critical reflexivity, striving toward what Emma C. Deloria shared: “One must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative” (Deloria, 1998, p.25). As regenerative-focused evaluators, understanding who we come from, where we come from, and who we are in relation with is

critical to situating ourselves within our evaluation practice.

- **At the collective level**, regenerative-focused evaluation as applied here in this Place (Mahkato, Mni Sota) invites all relations, human and nonhuman, to work toward reconciling and evolving practices that support a thriving and regenerative future. This engages a broader community of participants, situates the work within the living systems where regenerative-focused evaluation is taking place, and works toward reconciliation and a thriving future.

Figure 1. Regenerative Evaluation Framework



Note. From *Putting Evaluation in its Place *In a Good Way* [Doctoral dissertation], University of Minnesota, by K. Boone, 2025 (<https://hdl.handle.net/11299/278772>).

³ Retracing a 330-mile winter journey from South Dakota to Mankato, Minnesota, this annual ride commemorates the 38 Dakota warriors executed in December 1862 following the US–Dakota War—the largest mass execution in US history. Re-founded in December 2024

under the leadership of Dakota Elder Wilfred Keeble, the ride serves as a living platform for community truth-telling, intergenerational healing, and active reconciliation.

The framework is structured as a circle, with the four movements, Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving, at its core. The circular structure represents the nonlinear, cyclical nature of this work. To the left of the core movements, the individual level reflects the critical reflexivity and relational accountability that regenerative-focused evaluation cultivates in practitioners. To the right, the collective level represents the broader community of human and nonhuman relations engaged in working toward reconciliation and regenerative futures. Together, the inner and outer levels embody the healing that regenerative-focused evaluation aspires to support in partnership with the Dakota community in Mahkato, Mni Sota.

This unique Place has provided spaces where regenerative-focused evaluation has been applied at local, institutional, regional, and statewide levels in support of truth, healing, and reconciliation. Mahkato holds a unique history as a gathering place where the Dakota gathered mahkato (blue earth) clay and powerful medicines, and as the site of profound historical trauma and remarkable reconciliation efforts spanning 6 decades. It is home to the Mahkato Wacipi (Mankato Powwow), the first and only annual reconciliation powwow, held in Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnership since its founding. A group of Dakota Elders and leaders from Exiled Tribes—who are descendants of those who were removed from their ancestral homelands in 1863, holds a vision for Dakota people returning to the land, stories, language, culture, and ceremonies of this Place.

Regenerative-focused evaluation has supported this work in concrete ways. This partnership with Dakota Elders and leaders from exiled Tribes has supported the sharing of Indigenous Dakota Place-sourced wisdom with Gustavus Adolphus College, shifting its institutional narrative from a “settler institution” to one situated within the Dakota context. Since the dissertation’s completion, the Regenerative Evaluation Framework has been applied in sense-making with staff, faculty, administration, and students who are reckoning with the campus’s history and re-settling into the truth of how the campus came to be in this Place. Relationships have been deepening, and new understandings have begun to shape what the future of the campus will be for generations to come. Gustavus Adolphus College was founded in 1862, the same year the Dakota 38 were hanged, two simultaneous events

within the same river valley, a juxtaposition that carries profound weight for truth, healing, and reconciliation.

Within an Indigenous worldview, rivers have memories, this Place was once home to Native agriculture, medicines, and a great forest; it is now eroding farm fields (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Deloria, 1992). Regenerative-focused evaluation work continues to ripple outward through ongoing partnership between Catholic nuns and exiled Dakota working toward the return of land to the Dakota people in Southern Minnesota, stories continuing to unfold through authentic partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, human and nonhuman relatives alike. The four movements of Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving are helping to establish the patterns of coherence and clarity as the emergent path for truth, healing, and reconciliation continues to unfold on the ancestral homelands of the Dakota people past, present, and future.

By Sea: Regenerative-Focused Evaluation in Coastal and Marine Infrastructure Practice

Applying regenerative-focused evaluation to coastal and marine infrastructure, the Transeation project provides an example of a regenerative logic framework currently in development. The following long passage from the Green Living Projects founder, Emmanuel Pauwels, illustrates what Weaving looks like in emerging regenerative-focused evaluation practice, an application of regenerative-focused evaluation logic to coastal and marine infrastructure through the European Union-funded Transeation project.

Green Living Projects (Pauwels, 2026) is developing a regenerative-focused evaluation logic for coastal and marine infrastructure through the Transeation project, beginning with a reframing question: what changes when infrastructure is understood not as a technical object placed into a marine space, but as a participant in relationship with the living systems of a Place?

Coastal and marine infrastructure, ports, offshore renewable energy, aquaculture systems, desalination plants, coastal protection works, and coastal tourism infrastructure,

shapes coastal and ocean life by affecting ecosystems, livelihoods, governance systems, and communities. Evaluating transformational change potential cannot be done through conventional rating systems focused on technical performance or environmental impact alone.

The regenerative logic being developed through Transeation reframes “rating” as “developmental evaluation” (Patton, 2011), asking how a project is participating in the living systems of which it is part: How are we working from a deeper understanding of Place? How do we enable value-adding flows? How do we cultivate relationships for long-term stewardship? How are we learning from feedback and adapting over time? How do we grow the capacity of people and institutions to work with complexity, interdependence, and emergence? The central evaluative question becomes: to what extent and in what ways is this project helping the living systems it touches become more alive, coherent, adaptive, and capable of renewal?

Transeation remains in development, but it points toward an important opportunity, regenerative-focused evaluation becoming part of the design and stewardship of infrastructure projects so they become catalysts for transformational change. It is an invitation for the evaluation field into coastal and marine Places where many pressures of the polycrisis are becoming visible, and where Place-sourced, relational, and developmental evaluation is urgently needed. (Pauwels, 2026)

Evolving the Field: Current Spaces for Coevolution

These field stories are not isolated examples, they are two points of entry into a much larger, still-developing field. Across the world, regenerative-focused evaluation practitioners are grounding into the particular Places where they work, developing relational skills and capabilities, weaving connections into living systems and communities of practice, and coevolving regenerative-focused theory and practice together. Table 4 maps several of the spaces where this is currently happening, not as separate stages, but as living instances of all four movements at once.

Table 4. Current Coevolving Spaces for Regenerative-Focused Evaluation Theory and Practice

Organization	Description
International Evaluation Academy's Regeneration working group	A nascent working group co-stewarded by Andrealisa Belzer and Sam Buckton with other members including Scott Chaplowe, John Colvin, Nicky Bowman, Katie Boone, and Jannik Kaiser. It is an internal group within the International Evaluation Academy that is working to identify the key resources, contributors, processes, and protocols for regenerative-focused evaluation to contribute to broader transformation in evaluation systems and the contexts they influence.
Global Regenerative Co-Lab / #RegenEval Slack channel	The Global Regenerative Co-Lab group started in 2019 and stays connected via a Slack workspace with over 1,200 members from all over the world. The #RegenEval channel was recently opened up by Dr. Katie Boone following the launch of the Regenerative Evaluation Living Paper (Regenerative Evaluation

Organization	Description
	Community of Practice, 2026) in March 2026. The #RegenEval channel currently has only 10 members, as this virtual community space is still growing, developing and evolving.
Unity Effect's Regenerative Evaluation community of practice	This community of practice brings peers together in dialogue to discuss challenges, share knowledge, and explore the living practices of regenerative-focused evaluation. It is a place for people to contribute to this emerging field and join a community of learners.
Regenesis Institute for Regenerative Practice's "The Regenerative Practitioner" series	For 25+ years, Regenesis Institute has been developing a regenerative development methodology through a cohort-based program that is offered both online and in person across the Americas, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. This is a deep dive for practitioners who are seeking to develop their capability and practices for their regenerative work.
RegenEval's "Mahkato Learning Lodge"	Based on the research and learnings on regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice, this is a website that will be launched in the fall of 2026, alongside the publication of this article. It will be a space to provide resources to regenerative-focused evaluation practitioners to help them connect with the Dakota Elders who hold space for Place-sourced wisdom practices from the Ancestral Dakota homelands, helping to inform the ongoing learning and evolution of regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice.

These spaces are not endpoints but invitations. This research invites readers to consider their unique role in helping center Place-sourced practices in their evaluations, through the Places where their hands, hearts, and feet touch, and to join the growing spaces for connection, weaving, and coevolution mapped in Table 4. Regenerative-focused evaluation, like the movements that animate it, is always already moving toward what comes next. It is in that spirit of continuous coevolving mutualism and relational accountability that we invite readers to connect with these spaces for continued learning and evolution of regenerative-focused evaluation.

Conclusion: Aiming Toward Regenerative Futures

This article opened by naming regenerative-focused evaluation as a fundamental reorientation, not simply a new methodology to be adopted, one that requires not only individual commitment, but institutional and systemic transformation, and that begins with honestly reckoning with what conventional evaluation has missed, obscured, or perpetuated. Within the Turtle Island context, evaluation has not yet fully reckoned with its

theoretical foundation being built on stolen land and a colonized context that has perpetuated genocide and harm to Indigenous communities (Brousselle, 2026; Brousselle et al., 2024; Smith, 2012; Cavino, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Scott & Petillo, 2021; Waziyatawin, 2008; Wolfe, 2006). Regenerative-focused evaluation is a response to that reckoning, an invitation to the field to remember its relational roots and recommit to Place, to all its relations, and to the living systems that sustain life on this finite planet.

The four movements, Grounding, Developing, Weaving, and Evolving, elaborate what regenerative-focused evaluation looks like in practice, but whether those practices can take root depends on the capacities and capabilities that enable or constrain them (Chaplowe et al., this issue). An evaluator may develop the relational and Place-sourced capacities elaborated across the four movements, yet remain constrained by institutional cultures that privilege linear, extractive, or compliance-driven approaches, underscoring that developing capabilities requires attending to the deeper mental models, structural arrangements, and leadership orientations that determine whether regenerative-focused evaluation can sustain itself over time.

Decolonizing approaches to regenerative-focused evaluation are a transformational imperative in and of themselves. Indigenous knowledge has been described as the next “gold rush”, and as non-Indigenous people with well-meaning intentions engage this work, they risk causing further harm through colonial practices of appropriation. Being a good relative requires tending to meaningful and authentic relationships and practicing partnership as praxis in ways that fundamentally respect sovereignty, agency, and choice, ensuring that partnerships are mutually desired and genuinely beneficial to the communities involved. Without centering Place-sourced knowledge, evaluators risk producing harmful and biased recommendations that perpetuate the ongoing limitations of colonization (Cavino, 2013; Prado, 2011).

Regenerative-focused evaluation is a young and still-evolving field, and much remains to be learned. For those seeking entry points, the spaces mapped in Table 4 offer concrete starting places, communities of practice, learning programs, and emerging networks through which regenerative-focused evaluation theory and practice are being codeveloped. For evaluation commissioners and institutions, the imperative is to create the enabling conditions, the capabilities, that allow evaluators to bring relational, Place-sourced, and decolonizing approaches into their work without being constrained by compliance-driven cultures and extractive institutional norms. And for the field as a whole, the invitation is to engage Place as a participant, not as a peripheral consideration but as a central one, in responding to the transformational imperative.

The transformational imperative invites the field of evaluation to engage Place as a participant, centering Place in the practice of evaluation as a means of building a relationally accountable approach to addressing the polycrisis. The livelihood of human and nonhuman planetary species and living systems depends on the field of evaluation responding to this call, returning to Place as a field that has forgotten its roots, and in doing so, helping to cocreate the conditions for a just, regenerative, and thriving future for all relations.

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