



clear

# lenses

## overview guide

How to Create Living Environments in  
Natural, Social, and Economic Systems

February 2019



# the challenge

As we confront the challenges of the 21st century, our approach to complex environmental, social, and economic conditions will determine our future. While commendable, most of today's sustainability efforts tend to focus on reducing negative environmental and social impacts. As a society we have an opportunity, if not a pressing need, to move beyond the mindset of solving problems and shift our focus toward the potential for creating health and vitality.

The fundamental shift in perspective moves from doing things better, to doing better things. Instead of primarily focusing on solving or minimizing humans' negative impacts, we start to envision and create ways for humans to enhance and contribute to thriving, living systems across the globe. This shift in perspective is the first, and most important, step in creating a compelling vision for a future that we can all embrace and work together to achieve.

# regenerative development

## Regenerative Development

Regenerative Development is the process of cultivating the capacity and capability in people, communities, and other natural systems to renew, evolve, and thrive. It is not about maintaining what is, or restoring something to what it was. Rather, it is about creating the capacity for ongoing development toward increasing states of health and vitality.

## Living Environments

Living Environments are settings that are thriving, healthy, and resilient because their ecological, social, and economic systems relate in ways that elevate individual and collective vitality.

A great example of Living Environments are the communities involved with Interface Carpet's Net-Works program, which provides economic incentives for seaside communities to remove abandoned fishing nets from ocean habitats and then uses the reclaimed materials to produce commercial carpet tiles. The Net-Works program creates local economic opportunities focused on restoring ecological health, while greatly reducing raw material needs for carpet manufacturing.

*Regenerate ::*

*(verb): To bring new and more vigorous life.*

*Creating greater vitality, viability and capacity for evolution.*

*- Courtesy of Regenesiis*

# regenerative development fulcrum

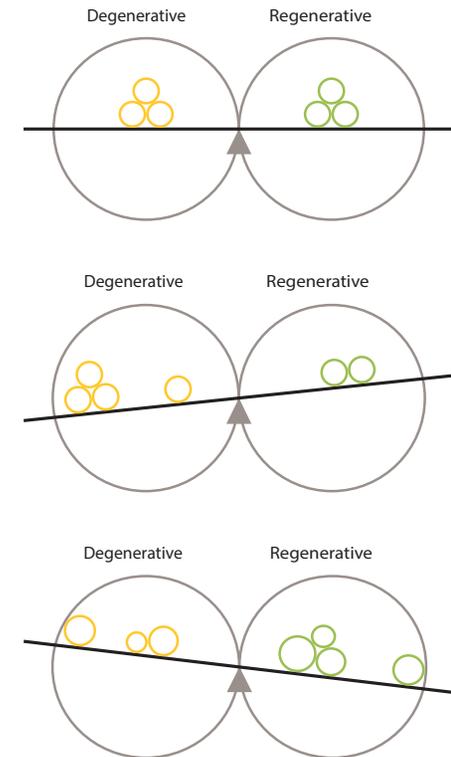
**Regenerative:** To bring new and more vigorous life. Creating greater vitality, viability and capacity for evolution.

**Degenerative:** Compromising or degrading functionality or capacity; harmful

As we start to consider the impact of our actions, the net result includes both degenerative and regenerative attributes. It's not likely that any project, company, or other endeavor is all one or the other, but it's helpful to think about the overall impacts or outcomes.

The idea can be demonstrated by the fulcrum models illustrated to the right. The orange and green circles represent degenerative and regenerative outcomes from an activity, process or decision, respectively. For example, if your job consistently takes more than it gives, and barely pays enough to make it worthwhile then the fulcrum is tipped to the degenerative side. Alternatively, if your job routinely nourishes your personal and professional wellbeing, then it would be tipped to the regenerative side.

Depending on the circumstances, the ability to scientifically measure outcomes on the fulcrum can be difficult to impossible. Regardless, exploring the fulcrum as a mental model is a meaningful way to understand implications of our actions, for better or worse.



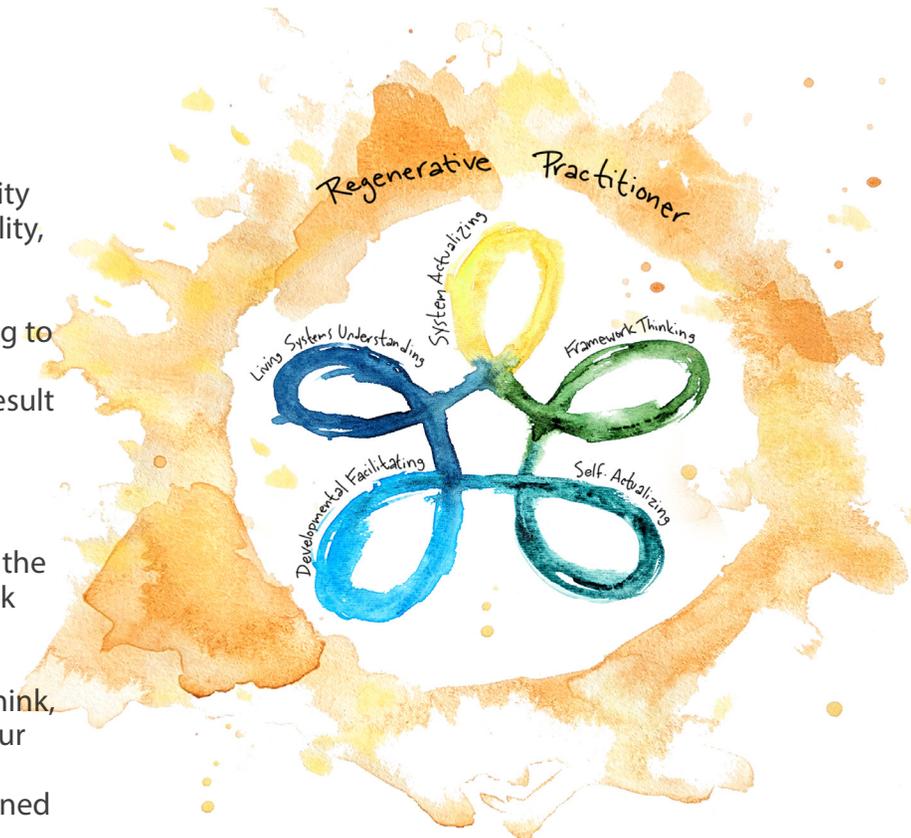
# becoming a regenerative practitioner

## Systems Actulizing

Systems Actualizing is the ultimate aim of a regenerative practitioner. System Actualizing is the process of awakening the regenerative capability embodied in all living systems to create increasing levels of vitality, viability, and capacity to evolve within the systems they are a part of. Developing one's capabilities in the other four areas of the Regenerative Practitioner Framework is in service of this higher purpose or aim. In essence, tending to Systems Actualization as a regenerative practitioner means constantly reckoning with the questions, "What am trying to bring into being as a result of my efforts and how will that work be in service of the greater whole?"

## Framework Thinking

Mastery of Framework Thinking has the potential to elevate and amplify the practice of regenerative development. Why frameworks? We cannot think without them. Everyone uses them. In other words, the mind needs to associate things with frameworks in order to understand the world. Frameworks help us group and structure the world, so we can engage, think, and create order. The intention of Framework Thinking, is to heighten your sensitivity to the frameworks you have buried within, increase your awareness of the ones you may need to develop, and become more attuned with those that are needed in any given time.



*Regenerative Practitioner Framework—  
Developed through a partnership with CLEAR  
and the Institute for the Built Environment*

## Self-Actualizing

In order to draw out the collective potential in others it is vital to begin awakening the inherent potential of oneself. The work of Self-Actualizing involves taking full responsibility for oneself and one's role (having an internal locus of control), recognizing the needs and motivations of others within the system (external considering), and protecting the space needed to realize potential (source of agency).

## Developmental Facilitating

Developmental Facilitating is a dynamic and adaptive process that creates opportunities for groups to transform their thinking and understanding, and to grow their capacity to realize potential. The medium is often through events and meetings, but the point is to catalyze an ongoing developmental process that has the ability and will to endure and evolve over time. Developmental facilitators identify what and how to evolve individual and collective thinking, create and hold space for group transformation, lead divergent and convergent thinking, and help establish systems for action planning and ongoing management. Effective Developmental Facilitating results in elevated thinking, deep caring, and shared commitment toward realizing potential.

## Living Systems Understanding

Working from an understanding of living systems aligns our efforts with the principles and reality of how life actually works. Such understanding aligns work efforts with the basic patterns and tenants of all life and enables a greater capacity to see where to intervene and how to transform the human relationship with living systems. The integrity and wisdom of living systems is at the heart of the evolutionary processes, which, in turn, is the heart of regenerative practice. At its core, regenerative practice is about coming in attunement with the life world through understanding and being able to work within the larger context in which we exist.

# spectrum of sustainability practice

While somewhat similar in appearance to the Degenerative/Regenerative Fulcrum, the Spectrum of Sustainability Practice is different in concept and construct. Unlike the Fulcrum, the left side of the framework is not seeking to identify things that are degenerative. Instead, each level of work is important to the functioning of a system. Each level offers unique value and has a role to play in shaping a better future. The value of understanding the Spectrum of Sustainability Practice is in being able to identify and distinguish between the levels, thereby allowing for greater degrees of clarity and specificity around regeneration.



*Image credit compliments of Cohere, "Reinventing Sustainability: Creating Net Positive and Regenerative Futures"*

**Compliance:** Meeting society's minimum standards for environmental and social protection (e.g. building codes, water quality standards, etc.).

**Efficiency:** Voluntarily going beyond society's minimum standards to do less harm (e.g. green rating systems, low-toxicity cleaning supplies, recycling, water and energy conservation, etc.).

**Net Positive:** Making an overall positive contribution to society, the environment and the global economy, seeks to understand good practices (e.g. B-Corps, Living Buildings, wetland restoration).

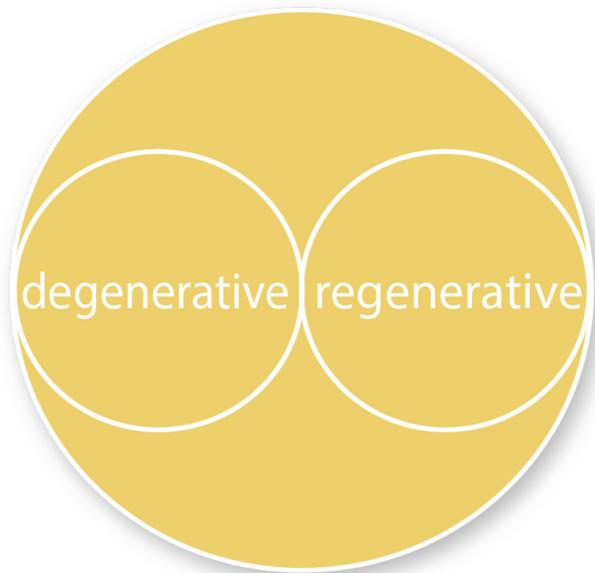
**Regeneration:** Catalyzing systemic transformations that results in increased levels of vitality, viability, and capacity to evolve (e.g. regenerative development, community capacity building, an innovation hub that enables local businesses to simultaneously increase the social and ecological health of their town).

The spectrum of sustainability practice shown above are particular to the conventional sustainability or green movement. The Framework, however, is adaptive and works for other industries such as health care, communications, and organizational development.

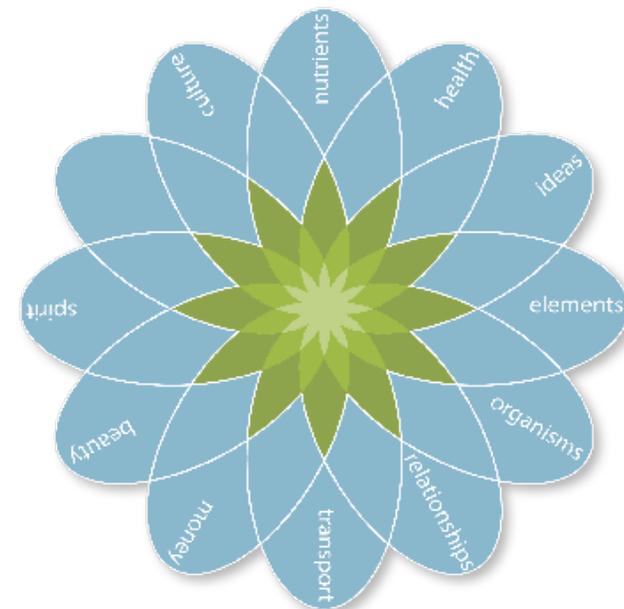
# the three lenses + the whole framework

The LENSES Framework is a system made up of three interrelated lenses. Each lens has a unique function and serves as a visual aid to help ground concepts and activities, and together the three lenses help teams see the whole and identify regenerative potential. The Flows and Foundation lenses each include a blank space that allows and encourages users to account for concepts that are unique to their place or project.

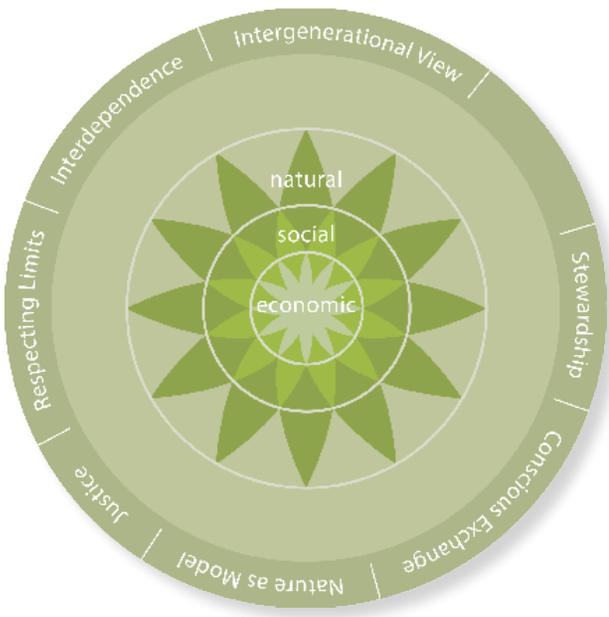
**Vitality Lens:** The Vitality Lens, while simple in form, encompasses a variety of concepts for the team to develop and reference over time and helps to identify degenerative and regenerative aspects of the project. When used in conjunction with the Flows and Foundation Lenses, it helps to identify key leverage points and initiatives.



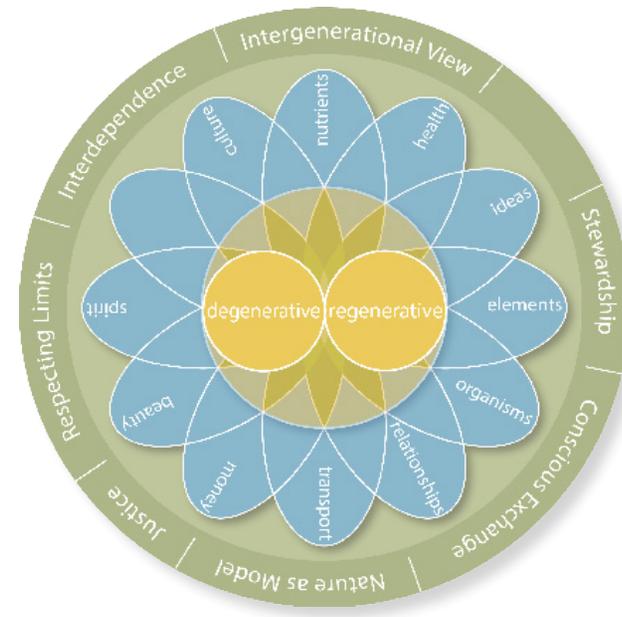
**Flows Lens:** The Flows Lens graphically represents interrelated aspects of a system that make up the whole. Teams use the Flows Lens to explore how each of the twelve “flows” move in, through, and out of people, a place, or an organization. Assessing how these flows move and change over time, with a focus on key patterns and relationships, cultivates a deep understanding of context.



**Foundation Lens:** The Foundation Lens is designed to engage users in creating a shared sense of commitment. Teams work together to define guiding principles within the context of their work. The results are a unique set of values and commitments that serve as a foundation of understanding – a place to return to – for inspiration and guidance on decision making.

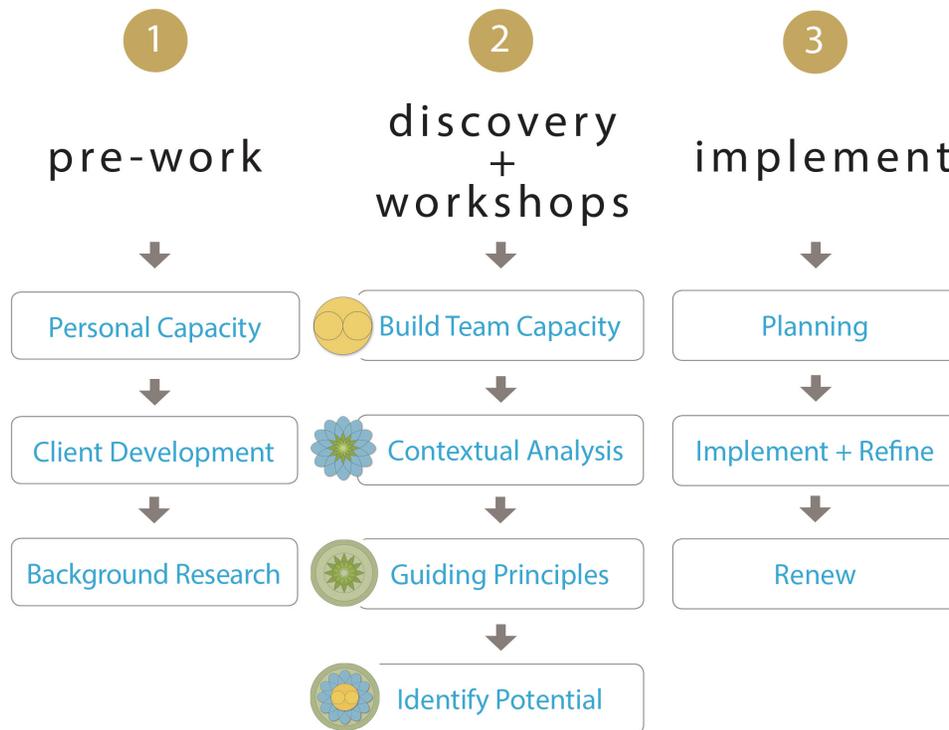


**Whole Framework:** The complete LENSES Framework, augmented and informed by the specific, local context, helps teams to see the whole, identify powerful key initiatives, and keep the vision alive over time.



# lenses process in action

The process of applying the LENSES Framework consists of three primary phases: Pre-Work, Discovery and Workshops, and Implementation. Together, these phases constitute a comprehensive system for ongoing regenerative development. Using the LENSES Framework, while presented in a linear fashion, is an iterative process and facilitators adapt their approach to meet the unique needs and of a project. For example, some projects may choose to work on establishing guiding principles (a Foundation Lens activity) prior to conducting flows assessment (a Flows Lens activity).



# lenses process: pre-work

The Pre-Work phase is carried out early as a means to develop personal capacity and contextual understanding. It is a learning journey that builds personal capacity and capability as a regenerative practitioner, develops trust from clients and communities, and engages the participants in meaningful project work.

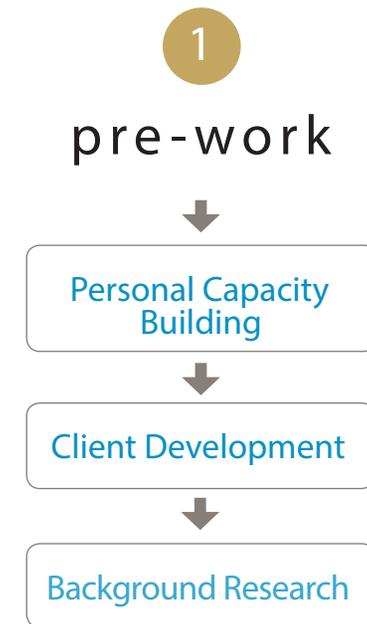
**Personal Capacity Building:** Pre-Work begins with the facilitator developing an initial understanding of systems thinking and regenerative development (see the Regenerative Practitioner Framework above, page 4).

Gaining a foundational understanding of regenerative development is an essential (and ongoing) step for any regenerative practitioner.

In addition to the Facilitator Manual, The LENSES Rubrics and the Vitality Lens are helpful for grounding and guiding the facilitator's thinking and understanding of regenerative concepts.

**Client/Project Development:** Building a reputation as a regenerative practitioner involves honing your ability to speak clearly about regenerative development and its value proposition, so that you are able to gain the trust of and align intentions of potential partners. In addition to the content in the LENSES Facilitator Program, external resources on networking and relationship building are available through LENSES Practitioner Program.

**Background Research:** Background research is conducted to become familiar with pertinent history and context, including relevant current issues and trends. This can be done through mixed methods including internet searches, interviews, site visits and community walks, reviews of past reports, photographic surveys, social media, audio recordings, etc.



# lenses process: discovery + workshops

During the Discovery and Workshops phase, facilitators and participants work together to apply the LENSES Framework. LENSES workshops typically last for one to three days, although the number and length may vary depending on the scale and scope of the work. Workshops can be run iteratively as more information is collected. It may be appropriate to discuss different content or dive deeper into a topic with different audiences involved at each iteration. For example, workshops held with core team members may have a different focus from ones with community members. The objectives for each lens, however, remain consistent, regardless of approach.

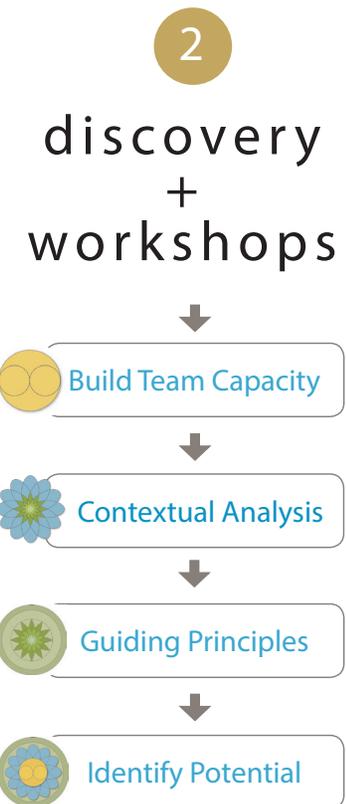
During the Discovery and Workshops period, facilitators and participants will complete a series of activities that address the following objectives.

## Vitality Lens: Build Team Capacity

**Build Capacity:** Introduce and begin working with the key concepts of living environments and regeneration to develop the capacity and capability of the team to start thinking and working with the idea of regeneration. Referring to the LENSES Rubrics may also be helpful at this stage.

## Flows Lens: Contextual Analysis

**Identify Stakeholders:** This phase builds upon existing efforts and adds new ideas for identifying who to bring to bring into the conversation and how to best engage them. Stakeholders may be anyone (or anything) who may serve as a resource, informant, advocate, inspiration, and benefactor for the project. Remember that not all stakeholders are human beings and your awareness and inclusion of stakeholders should grow over time.



### Flows Lens: Contextual Analysis (cont.)

**Flows Analysis:** The context analysis builds upon the background research from the Pre-Work and is a continuation of seeking to understand the unique qualities, characteristics, and essence of a particular place. Teams use the Flows Lens to work through a series of interactive and comprehensive activities to identify turning points over time and to deepen their understanding about the relationships between flows (e.g. culture, nutrients, natural elements, money, etc.).

### Foundation Lens: Guiding Principles

**Guiding Principles:** Once the team understands context, they develop guiding principles and commitments based on the terms on the Foundation Lens and the learnings from all prior activities. The guiding principles create alignment of core values and are revisited throughout a project as a cornerstone for process and decision-making. Guiding principles also ensure that original intentions are met and outcomes align with the group's vision of success.

### Whole Framework: Identify Potential

**Identify Potential:** After participants gain insights and grounding from the prior activities, they work collectively to identify key opportunities and develop strategic initiatives with actionable steps for generating vitality and realizing potential.

# facilitated workshops

**Keys for successful integrated workshops:** The social structures and dynamics of project teams are one of the key factors in successful vs. mediocre teams. Another way of talking about this is called integrative process. According to research from the Institute for the Built Environment, successful teams have the following five principles:

**Diverse & Inclusive Membership:** In addition to a core team, include individuals with diverse and expansive knowledge and perspectives.

**Connection & Communication across Team Members:** Develop a highly linked core team with a large periphery of diverse individuals and resources. The key is that communication is multi-directional and that there is shared ownership, vision, and understanding across the group. There is never just one person who “owns” the vision or is at the center of all activity and communication- such structures are unstable and unsustainable in the long term.

**Decision Making:** Decisions are informed by the whole. Depending on the construct of the project, there may be a core team who is making larger scale decisions, though it's important to recognize that decisions happen at many places and points in the system. The goal is that all of the decisions are aligned with the vision and guiding principles.

**Rules of Interaction:** Focus on learning and listening; no one person has full perspective. Ensure everyone is heard and respected and feels comfortable or familiar with each other. Make a conscious effort to connect people (and non-human stakeholders) across the entire system.

**3rd Party Facilitator:** Someone needs to tend to the process and guide the group interaction. While they should care about the quality of the outcomes, they should not be invested in a particular outcome. Without a good facilitator, groups typically fall to their lowest common denominator. A skilled facilitator moderates interactions to build trust, reciprocity, willingness to take risks, openness to learning, and even participation by group members. See the section below on facilitation.

*Adapted from Institute for the Built Environment, “The Social Network of Integrative Design”*

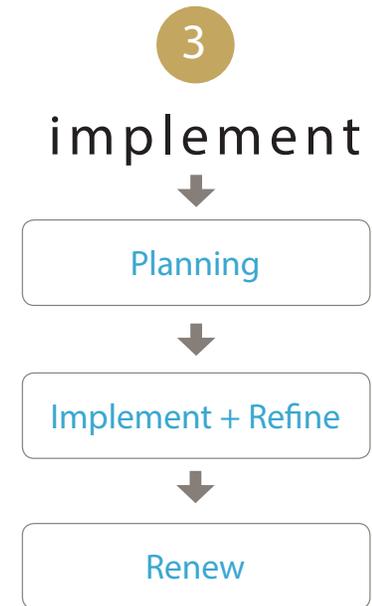
# lenses process: implementation

The concepts and strategies created through the LENSES process are carried forward during the Implementation phase. Ideas and plans are tested through Implementation and adjusted accordingly. The guiding principles and commitments identified in the prior phases serve as the basis for decision-making and evaluation.

**Planning:** Based on the strategic initiatives, guiding principles, commitments, and vision developed at the end of the Discovery and Workshops phase, the team creates a set of work plans. One work plan is developed for each strategic initiative, guiding participants to identify leaders, key partners, objectives, strategies, timelines, metrics of success, and desired outcomes.

**Implement + Refine:** Teams work together to test, implement, and manage the strategic initiatives. It is important that teams reconvene at regular intervals to reflect on and evaluate progress, adjusting course if needed. Lessons learned and new perspectives gained from implementing the initiatives are integrated into the Work Plans and mid-course refinements are made as needed.

**Renew:** Periodically, it is important to take a big step back and regenerate our thinking. This is different than the ongoing refinement that happens during Implementation. Typically, the need for renewal will naturally occur every one to three years, especially after making significant progress or if new developments appear. Teams may choose to work through the entire LENSES process again or focus on a select number of activities.







# gratitude

Our mission at CLEAR is to cultivate and equip changemakers to create a thriving, regenerative future.

More than 500 individuals from a wide array of backgrounds and expertise have contributed to the development of LENSES. We extend our gratitude to each of you for your thoughtful and generous contributions.

Like the regeneration movement, LENSES is evolving. We're committed to the continual development of LENSES to increase its value to professionals like you. Should you have questions, comments, or feedback, please share them with us at [info@clearabundance.org](mailto:info@clearabundance.org).

The LENSES Framework has been applied to projects around the globe, including Texas, Colorado, Costa Rica, Australia, South Dakota, and more. You can check out LENSES case studies on our website.

[www.clearabundance.org](http://www.clearabundance.org)

