



clear

# lenses

## overview guide

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

# the challenge

As we confront the challenges of the 21st century, our approach to solving complex environmental, social, and economic problems 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 being "less bad" and shift our focus toward creating health and abundance.

The fundamental shift in perspective moves from doing less harm, to doing more good. Instead of primarily focusing on 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, adapt, and thrive. It is not about maintaining what is, or restoring something to what it was. Rather, it is about creating systems and places that have the capacity to evolve toward increasing states of health and vitality. We call these Living Environments. A great example is Interface'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.

## 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.

Regenerate ::

Restore to a better, higher state; renewal or restoration of living systems after injury or as a normal process.

# principles of regenerative development

**From Separate to Aligned with Nature:** Humans are embedded in, and dependent upon, natural systems; yet, many of our activities deplete and compromise the very systems that we depend on for survival. By recognizing and appreciating our intimate relationship with natural systems, we have the opportunity to explore and realize how humans can be positive contributors in natural systems. This journey begins with learning from and following nature, and then emulating and enhancing nature's processes.

**Being of Service:** Becoming important to a larger system helps ensure our long-term viability. We are more likely to succeed as a business or project when everyone else in the system sees us as necessary for success. To be of service, we start by recognizing the underlying patterns, interdependent relationships, and needs within a system. Only then can we truly understand how to be of service, or a good fit within that system. Survival of the fittest, then, is not necessarily about being the toughest or strongest; rather, it is about positioning yourself, your community, or your organization as the best fit within a larger system.

**Account for Uniqueness:** Every place, entity, or society has its own unique qualities and patterns. Geographic, cultural, historic, and other characteristics vary, as do the sum of their parts. Regenerative development seeks processes and solutions that reflect, celebrate, and enhance uniqueness.

**From Scarcity to Abundance:** Creating benefit involves recognizing opportunities to heal and revitalize broken systems at every turn. Instead of operating in fear of not having enough, we can work to see and generate abundance. In the natural world, trees create an abundance of seeds, hoping that just a few will actually grow into trees. The abundance of species (or biodiversity) has the net positive impact that includes healthy soil, clean water, and resiliency during stress. Similarly, a business can create an abundance of positive impact through creating a high quality of life for employees, strengthening the local economy, and connecting people to their passions.

# regenerative development fulcrum

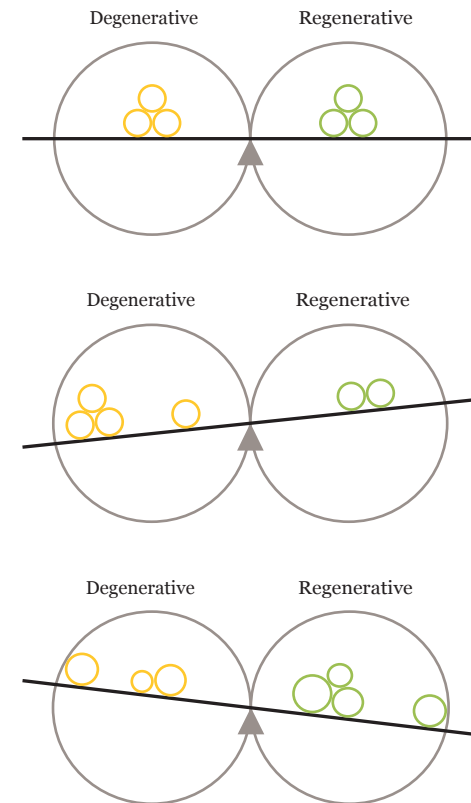
**Regenerative:** Developing the capacity to renew life, add strength or vigor; beneficial

**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.



# the lenses framework

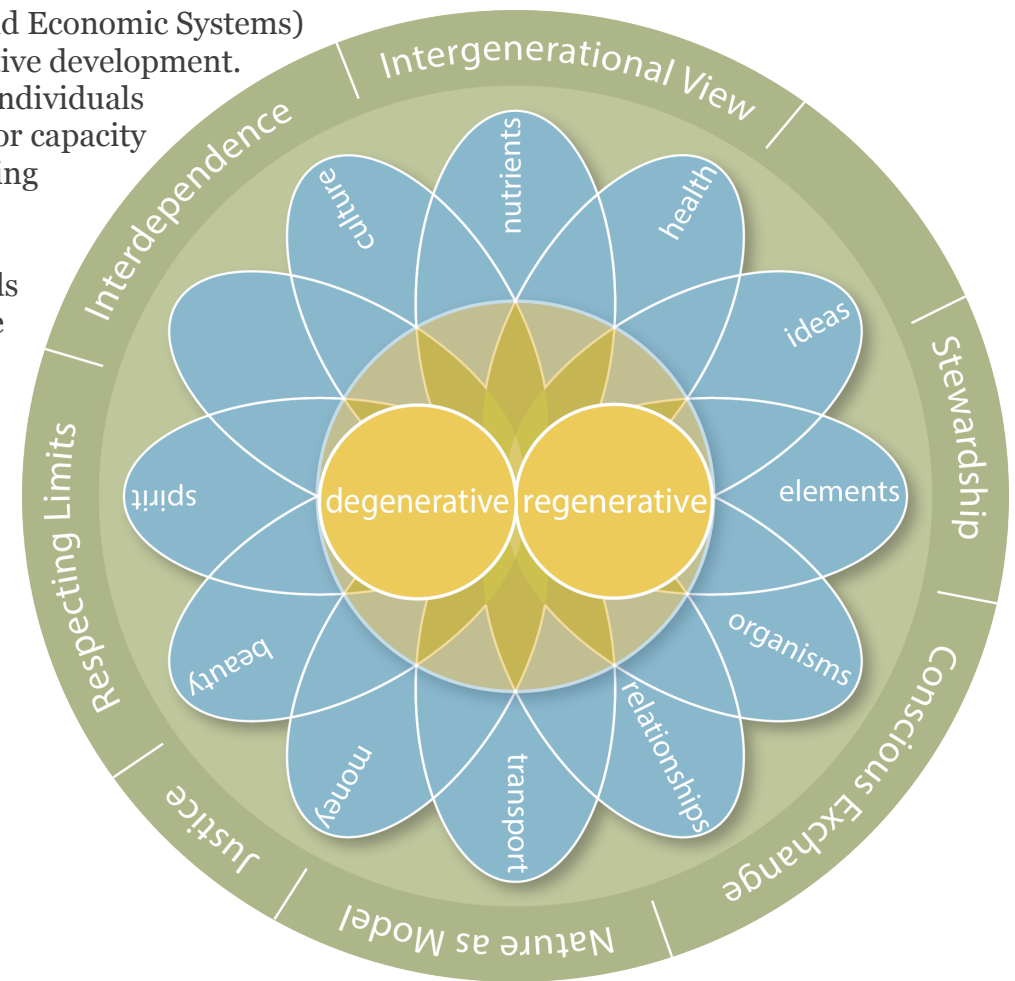
The LENSES (Living Environments in Natural, Social, and Economic Systems) Framework is designed to guide teams towards regenerative development. LENSES is a structured process where facilitators guide individuals and groups in exploring and realizing the opportunities for capacity building and benefit creation. It is not a checklist or a rating system, but rather a facilitated step-by-step process and management system for regenerative development. The process is strengthened by the visual framework that leads users through systems thinking in a way that is accessible and directly applicable to a project's needs.

LENSES can be used at many scales – from individuals to organizations and from buildings to communities. Application types include:

- master plans
- building projects
- business development and strategy
- special projects or initiatives

LENSES is most effective when used at the conceptual or renewal stage. Examples include:

- to design a new building
- plan or restore a neighborhood
- begin a new business
- revitalize an existing initiative
- guide a retrofit
- improve a floundering program



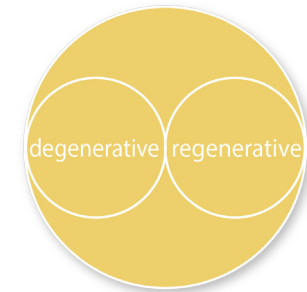
# the three lenses

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. As the creators of LENSES, we do not assume to have included all terms that are relevant to regenerative development on the framework. Therefore, we have included a blank space on the Foundation and Flows Lens. Users are encouraged to identify unique guiding principles and flows that may not already be listed on the framework.

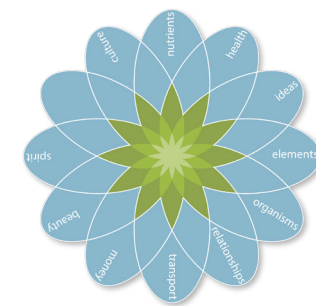
**Vitality Lens:** The Vitality Lens represents the degenerative to regenerative fulcrum model and is first used to introduce the concepts of regenerative development to users. It is later re-introduced for brainstorming and identifying regenerative development opportunities, and to lay the groundwork for management and evaluation.

**Flows Lens:** The Flows Lens graphically represents interrelated aspects of a system that make up the whole. After reviewing the Vitality Lens, teams will explore how each of the twelve “flows” move in, through, and out of themselves, 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.

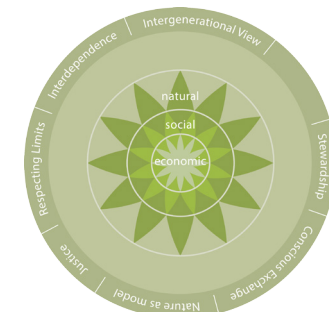
**Foundation Lens:** The Foundation Lens graphic and activities are designed to engage users in creating a shared sense of commitment. This lens is used after the introduction to the Vitality Lens and after insights are gained from the Flows Lens. Teams will explore how the guiding principles and triple bottom line depicted on the lens relate to themselves, their project, or organization. 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.



Vitality Lens



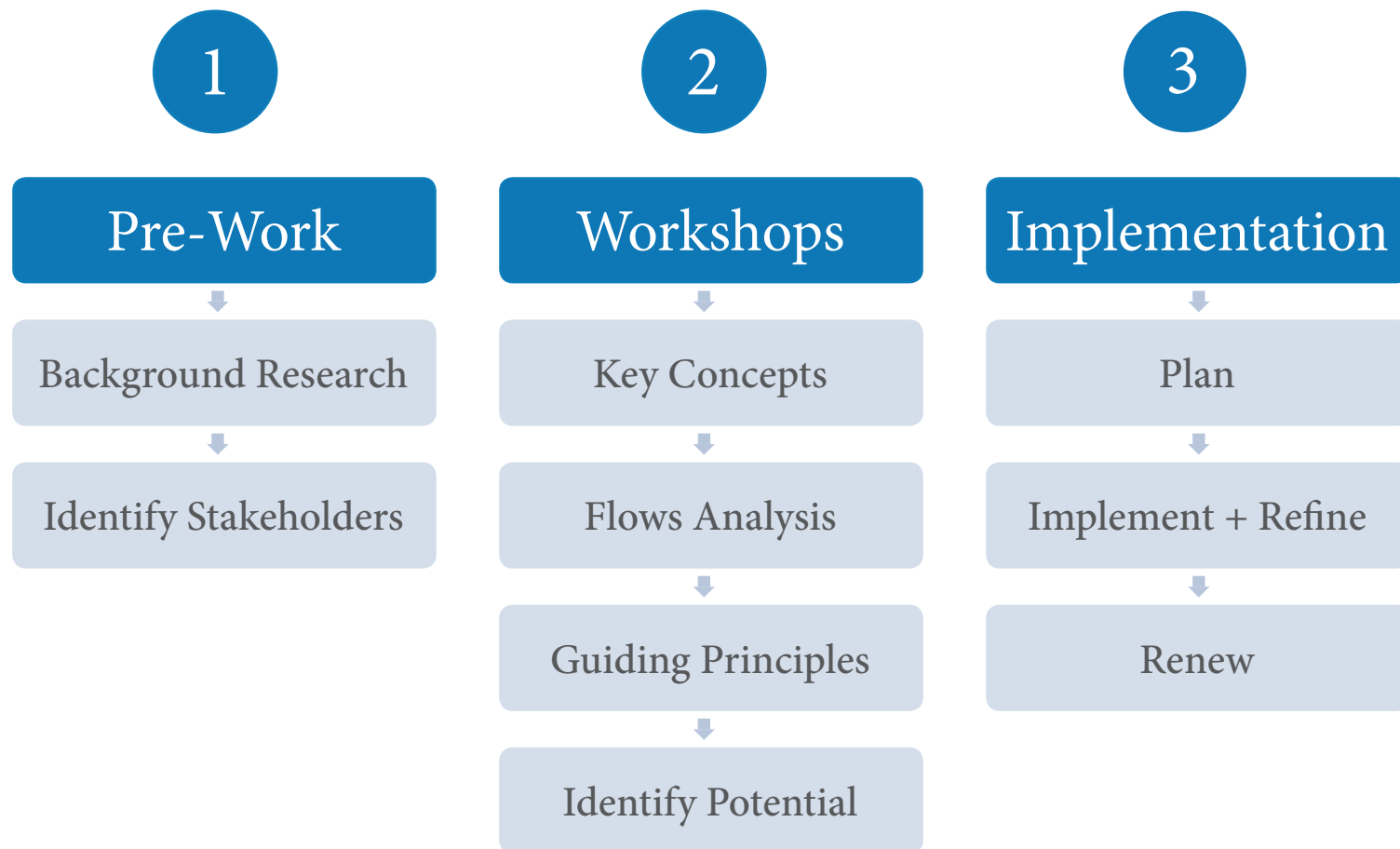
Flow Lens



Foundation Lens

# lenses process in action

The process of applying the LENSES Framework consists of three primary phases: Pre-Work, Workshops, and Implementation. Together, these phases constitute a comprehensive system for ongoing regenerative development. Each phase is scalable, depending on the scope of your project.





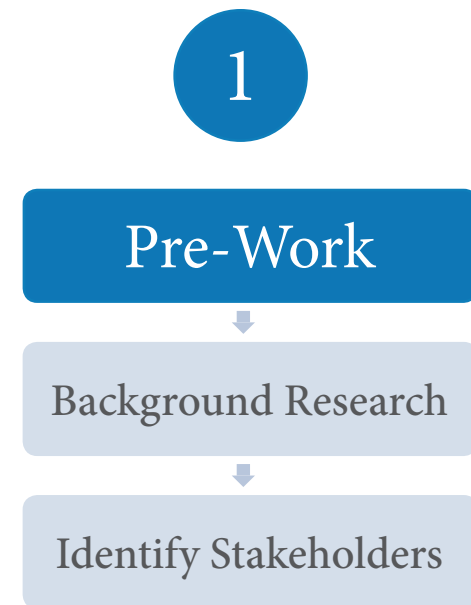
# lenses process: pre-work

The Pre-Work phase is carried out early as a means to develop contextual understanding. It is a learning journey that helps to set context, reveal key patterns and trends, and serves as a means to identify all stakeholders.

*An important note on Pre-Work:* Pre-Work really begins with the facilitator developing an initial understanding of systems thinking and regenerative development. Gaining a foundational understanding of regenerative development is an essential (and ongoing) step. Further, the Pre-Work starting point assumes that a very general intention, issue, or project has been identified, but that there is still a significant degree of openness to explore needs, potential and outcomes.

**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 interviews, site visits and community walks, reviews of past reports, photographic surveys, social media, audio recordings, etc.

**Identify Stakeholders:** The initial background research should inform the development of an inclusive and diverse set of stakeholders who will serve as resources, informants, advocates and benefactors for the project. This phase builds upon existing efforts and adds new ideas for identifying who to bring to the table and how to best engage them. Remember that not all stakeholders are human beings.



# lenses process: workshops

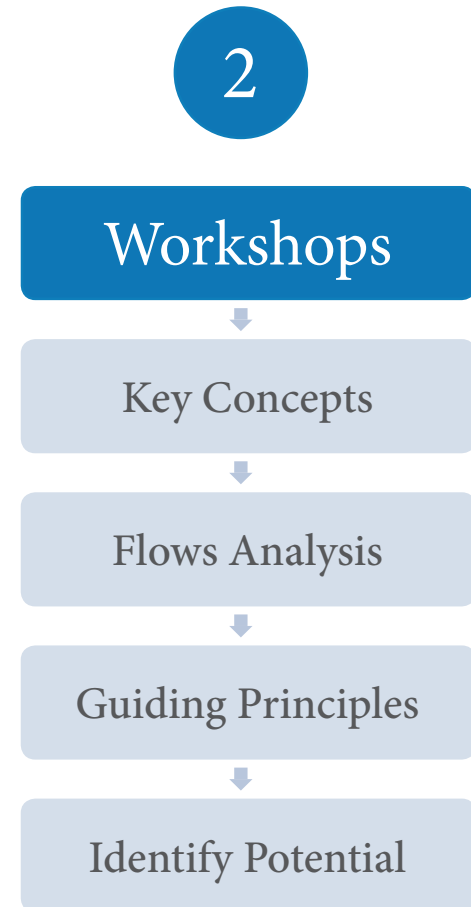
After the Pre-Work is complete, participants work together to apply the LENSES Framework. Workshops typically last for one to three days, although the number and length may vary depending on the scale and scope of the work. Keep in mind that workshops can be run iteratively as more information is collected. 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 differ from ones with community members. The objectives, however, are consistent. During the Workshops period, participants will complete a series of activities that address the following objectives.

**Introduce Key Concepts:** Introduce the concepts of regenerative development and Living Environments to ensure common understanding through the Regenerative Development Fulcrum and Vitality Lens. Referring to the LENSES Rubrics may also be helpful at this stage.

**Flows Analysis:** The context analysis is built upon the background research performed during the Pre-Work phase and is a continuation of the learning journey. 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.).

**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 on 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 vision of success.

**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.



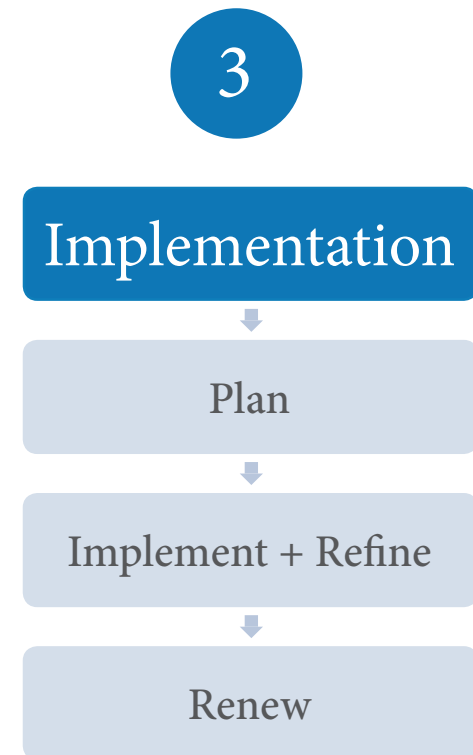
# lenses process: implementation

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.

**Plan:** Based on the strategic initiatives, guiding principles, commitments, and vision developed at the end of the 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 implement, test, and manage the strategic initiatives. It is important that teams reconvene at regular intervals to reflect on and evaluate progress and to adjust course as 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 significant progress or new developments. 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)

