



# The Impact Garden

A framework to create the  
conditions for systemic change

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction to the Impact Garden</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Applications</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Evaluation	7
2.2 Strategic Planning	10
2.3 Network and Ecosystem Building	13
2.4 Project or Product Creation	16
<b>3. Creating your own Impact Garden</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4. Deep dive into the dimensions</b>	<b>21</b>
4.1 Vision / Guiding Star (Sunlight)	22
4.2 Resources (Soil)	23
4.3 Supportive Conditions (Garden Bed)	24
4.4 Role Architecture (Garden Team)	25
4.5 Meaningful Interactions (Pollination)	26
4.6 External Conditions (Weather and Climate)	27
4.7 Short and Mid-Term Outcomes (Fruit)	28
4.8 Systemic and Long-Term Changes (Spores)	29
4.9 Change Pathways (Garden Plan)	30
4.10 Learning Loops (Irrigation System)	31
<b>5. Growing Forward</b>	<b>33</b>

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## 1. Introduction to the Impact Garden

Many traditional frameworks for making sense of impact rely on linear metaphors and mental models. Such an “A leads to B” model might be a first step for an organisation to map and understand its work, yet is often incapable of accounting for complex dynamics and unforeseen developments. This, in turn, can quickly lead to a dynamic of needing to prove one’s impact and the logic of one’s change model, rather than being open to learning and aiming to understand the (frequently invisible) conditions that lead -or don’t lead- to change.

Rooted in a regenerative approach to measurement and evaluation, Unity Effect’s Impact Garden model draws on the metaphor of living systems and nature. Rather than “comparing apples and oranges”, **the model seeks to understand the soil and ecosystem** in which the apple and orange trees grow, and how additional resources might support their cycle of growing healthy and tasty fruits over a sustained period. While the model originally emerged to transform measurement and evaluation practices, through successive iterations and real-world applications it has evolved to also support strategic planning, network and ecosystem building, and project or product creation.

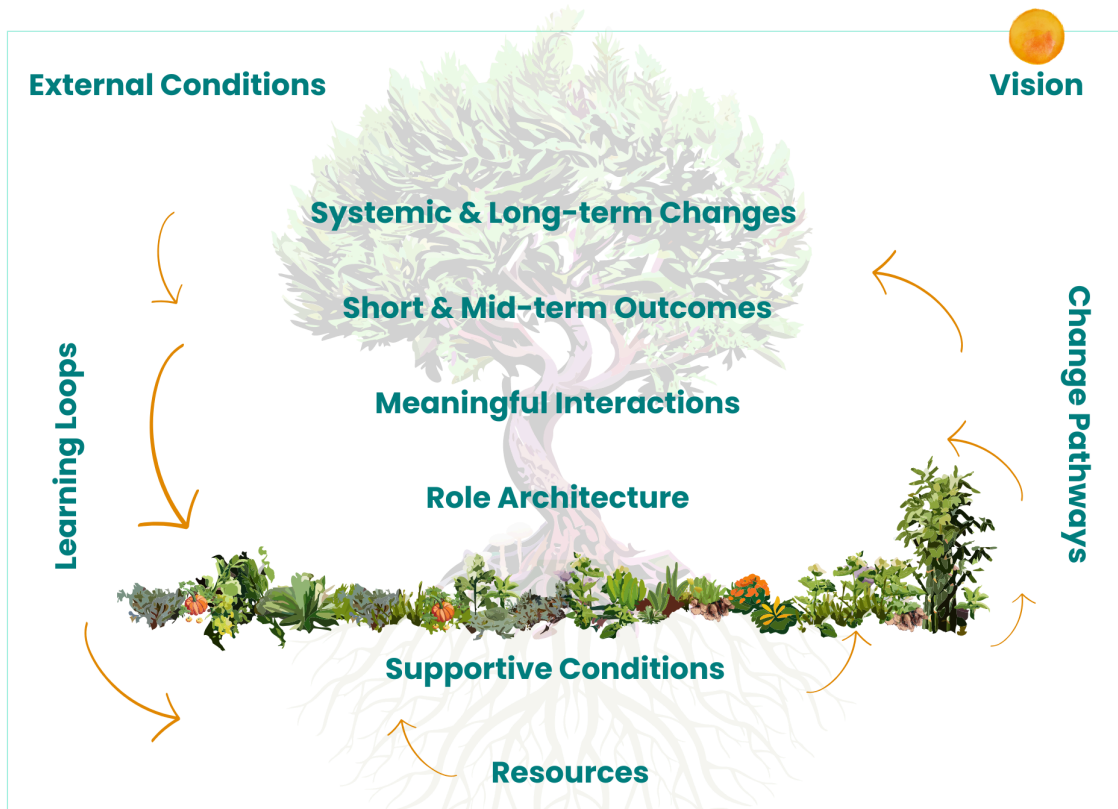
The following playbook presents this model and its key components. If you would like to read more on the need for a new paradigm with which to approach measurement and evaluation, you can:

- Read our blog post on [“Measurement as a regenerative practice”](#).
- Explore our approach to [Regenerative Measurement and Evaluation](#) and the services we offer

You can also take our [Impact Garden online course](#) for a guided, in-depth exploration of the model. This playbook serves as an optional companion resource that can enhance your course experience, though both can be used independently. Feel invited to engage with the course alone, use this playbook as a standalone guide, or combine them for a more comprehensive understanding

## The Model

The core idea of the Impact Garden is to understand and measure the conditions for systemic change, and to consider how to best contribute to it with one's available resources. The following chart shows the overall model:



In our analogy with a natural ecosystem (above), the Impact Garden's different elements comprise:

- **Vision / Guiding Star (sunlight):** A desired state in the future that you wish to contribute to.
- **Resources (soil):** The raw ingredients that you and others have at hand and are willing to invest (into a project, to solve a challenge, etc.).
- **Supportive conditions** (garden bed): How you package and provide the resources to others.
- **Role architecture (garden team):** A shared understanding of who will tend to the required processes, relationships, and pathways of change, and defining intention, expectations, and accountability to each role.
- **Meaningful interactions (pollination):** How people interact with the supportive conditions – the “packages” – you are providing.

- **External conditions (weather and climate):** Larger forces outside your control that impact your work.
- **Short and mid-term outcomes (fruit):** Observable changes in the short and mid-term that show your ecosystem is working.
- **Systemic and long-term changes (spores):** Differences and dynamics that can be observed after a longer period of time. You can define what "longer" means (e.g. 6 months, 1 year, 3 years).
- **Change pathways (garden plan):** Your understanding of how change unfolds in your work over different time horizons. An articulation of your theory of change and connecting it to your operational roadmap.
- **Learning loops (irrigation system):** Learning from action in loops that keep your system alive and responsive.

You'll hear more about each element in the Deep dive into the dimensions chapter.

## Four Ways to Enter the Garden

You've now seen the complete map of the Impact Garden. But it's more than a map to look at – it's a tool to be used. While the ten dimensions work as a single, interconnected system, you can "enter the garden" with a specific intention. The following chapter explores the four primary applications of this model:

1. **Evaluation:** To move beyond linear reporting and understand the living conditions, relational dynamics, and emergent outcomes your work is fostering.
2. **Strategic Planning:** To use the garden as a "shared language" to co-design an emergent, life-affirming strategy that aligns your entire team or network.
3. **Network and Ecosystem Building:** To intentionally design and cultivate the "garden bed" and "pollination" processes that allow a new network to thrive.
4. **Project or Product Creation:** To use the framework as a design tool to co-create the structure, roles, and learning loops for a new project or offering.

## 2. Applications

The Impact Garden is a visual framework and practical tool that can be adapted to support different types of work across diverse contexts. The same core elements can illuminate different aspects of your work depending on where you focus your attention. Whether you're measuring impact, or developing new initiatives, the garden provides a common language and structure for navigating complexity.

This chapter outlines **four primary ways to apply the model strategically**: Evaluation, Strategic Planning, Network and Ecosystem Building, and Project or Product Creation.

In Evaluation, these elements help you understand what's changing and why. In Strategic Planning, they reveal how your activities connect to your broader purpose. In Ecosystem Building, they make visible the relationships and conditions that allow diverse actors to thrive together. And in Project Creation, they ground innovation in realistic assessments of what's possible and what's needed.

As you explore these applications, remember that they're not mutually exclusive. Many organisations find themselves using the Impact Garden in multiple ways simultaneously—perhaps starting with strategic planning, then using the resulting garden to guide evaluation, or mapping an ecosystem that then informs new project development. The boundaries between these applications are fluid, reflecting the interconnected nature of the work itself.

## 2.1 Evaluation

The Impact Garden is rooted in our regenerative approach to measurement and evaluation. A central part of this approach is to foster participation and dialogue in the process of defining and implementing any evaluation framework. This approach recognizes evaluation as an opportunity for collective learning, relationship building, and ongoing adaptation. This involves four key dimensions:

**Steering a participatory process:** True participation means sharing power, taking decisions jointly, and basing collaboration on mutual trust and empathy. The Impact Garden creates a shared visual representation for the overall vision, contributions of all parties, and pathways to desired impact. This visual language helps diverse stakeholders—from community members to funders to implementation partners—contribute their perspectives and see how their work connects to the broader system.

**Defining the evaluation framework:** The Impact Garden serves as a Theory of Change (ToC) framework to design methodologies for impact evaluation and data collection tools. Key elements include defining pathways for change (developmental trajectories across time and space towards desired systemic changes), and indicators (information that illuminates each pathway).

**Data collection and sense-making:** A key emphasis here is on the integration of data collection into existing working processes. This includes communicating the "why" clearly, being transparent about time commitments for different stakeholders, and offering support throughout the process. This dimension recognizes that meaningful data emerges from making sense together of what's happening, not just from measurement itself. It balances quantitative and qualitative approaches, creating space for stories, observations, and contextual understanding alongside metrics.

**Learning and improvement over time:** The model supports both learning from your work and iterative improvements, while remaining flexible enough to be adjusted according to new information. As conditions shift or new insights emerge, the evaluation framework can evolve—reflecting the living, adaptive nature of the systems we're working within. This ongoing learning loop ensures that evaluation remains relevant and useful rather than becoming a rigid compliance exercise.

## Impact Garden Case Study: ChangemakerXchange

**Partner:** ChangemakerXchange (CXC) is a global community of support for young social innovators, empowering them to create positive change.

**The Invitation:** CXC sought to evaluate one of their cohort-based programs, "Changemakers4Democracy." The invitation was to move beyond traditional, linear impact metrics and find a way to truly understand the complex, relational, and systemic value the program was cultivating for its participants and their wider ecosystems.

**Our Shared Journey:** Using the Impact Garden as a shared language, we collaborated with Juan Francisco from CXC to co-design an evaluation process. This process was, by design, intentional and relational, focusing on how to gather data with the community, not from them. The framework provided a visual and holistic map to identify and make sense of the emergent outcomes that a simple logframe would have missed.

**The Harvest:** The process revealed several key insights:

- **Understanding Ecosystemic Contribution:** The evaluation shifted from trying to prove impact to deeply understanding CXC's unique contribution to the health of the wider democracy ecosystem.
- **A Scalable Language for Impact:** The Impact Garden was so effective in capturing the program's value that CXC began exploring how to scale its use, applying it as a sense-making tool for other programs and pillars of the organisation.
- **A Regenerative Process:** The journey affirmed that evaluation itself can be a regenerative practice—one that gives energy back to the community and surfaces insights that nourish the entire organisation's strategy.

### In the words of Juan Francisco:

"We aimed to evolve our current program measurements toward a more holistic view. Working with the Impact Garden provided us with this systemic lens. Furthermore, the regenerative approach serves as a baseline for getting started and offers a deeper way of measuring and understanding how each person and element operates within a broader Theory of Change."

(Juan Francisco Barón - Project Consultant ChangemakerXChange)



## Exercise: Building your evaluation compass

Meaningful evaluation serves everyone involved and illuminates real change. This exercise helps you define an approach that strengthens rather than burdens.

### 1. Get oriented:

- What do we need from evaluation? What do the people we work with need?
- Where does evaluation feel like a tick-box exercise? How could it become useful instead?

### 2. Get specific about purpose:

- What change do we want to make visible?
- Who needs to see these insights, and what decisions will they inform?
- Why measure this now?

### 3. Identify indicators that matter:

- **Outcome signals:** What would we notice if this change were happening?
- **Multiple perspectives:** How would different stakeholders see progress?
- **Process indicators:** How will you track collaboration, trust-building, or other relational qualities?
- **Feasibility:** What can be measured without creating excessive burden?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 2.2 Strategic Planning

Strategic planning can happen in disconnected ways: leadership sets ambitious goals while teams wonder how those goals relate to daily work, or departments create siloed plans that don't speak to each other. The Impact Garden offers a different approach: one that creates **alignment by making the whole ecosystem visible**.

This application focuses on strengthening internal processes of your team, organisation or network, aligning available resources with goals and ambitions. The Impact Garden can complement methodologies such as OKR, sprints, or annual planning processes.

For strategic planning, the Impact Garden embraces a long-term perspective and:

- Clarifies the vision or overarching intention (e.g. living into the purpose of the organisation)
- Shows how a team or organisation can build on existing projects and services
- Maps out mid-term goals (e.g. key results) and links them to available resources and the overarching vision

The model provides a **map for people and teams to understand their place within the bigger whole** and clarify the role of other actors and projects. Its strength lies in creating shared understanding—when everyone can see the same visual map, conversations become more productive. People understand the dependencies and relationships present, and the map can serve as a reference point for decision making. Throughout the strategic cycle, teams can return to the garden and ask: Does this opportunity align with our Guiding Star? Do we have the Resources to support it?

The Impact Garden can also help teams get honest about what they're willing to let go of, because while strategic planning is about adding, it's also about composting. The garden invites you to ask: What projects or approaches are no longer serving our vision? What can we let go of to make space for what matters most?

## Impact Garden Case Study: Ea – Weaving a Shared Vision in Hawaii

**Partner:** Joyce Lee-Ibarra, in collaboration with representatives from 12 Hawaiian organisations.

**The Invitation:** How can a diverse group of organisations, each with its own focus, find a truly shared vision? Twelve organisations in Hawaii came together for a two-day workshop. The invitation was to move beyond individual missions and discover a common language and purpose, rooted in shared values and a deep connection to place.

**Our Shared Journey:** Guided by Joyce Lee-Ibarra, the workshop used the Impact Garden as its central framework. The process was deeply participatory, prioritizing the power of storytelling to build trust. By understanding the participants' contexts and values before the workshop, the space was prepared for deep connection. The framework served as a shared map that allowed the group to navigate their collective stories and find the "similarities and synergies" in their work.

**The Harvest:** Instead of a typical strategic plan, a single, powerful "north star" emerged from the group: Ea.

- **A Living Vision:** 'Ea', a Hawaiian value meaning agency, self-determination, life, and breath, became the unifying concept. It was a shared truth that all participants felt a deep connection to through their work.
- **Strategy Rooted in Place:** The case study is a beautiful reminder that regeneration is not a new concept; it is an ancient practice. The most powerful strategies emerge from "connection to place" and the wisdom already present in the community.
- **The Foundation for an Ecosystem:** By finding this shared vision, the group built the trust and alignment necessary for a newly forming network to thrive. The strategy and the ecosystem became one and the same.

## Exercise: Aligning your garden

Strategic planning is about setting goals, but, as this exercise shows us, it's also about creating a shared understanding of how everything connects and making intentional choices about what to grow and what to compost.

### 1. Map your current reality:

- What projects, services, and activities are you currently tending?
- What resources (funding, relationships, knowledge) are supporting them?
- How do these connect to your Guiding Star (your overarching purpose)?

Mark what feels **aligned**, what feels **disconnected**, and what feels **unclear**.

### 2. Look ahead (1, 3, or 5 years depending on your time horizons):

- What mid-term goals or key results would move you closer to your vision?
- What new capacities, partnerships, or conditions would need to emerge?
- Where do you see opportunities to build on what's already working?

### 3. Compost and cultivate:

- What projects or approaches are no longer serving your vision?
- What could you let go of to create space for what matters most?
- What would need to shift in how you work to support your aspirations?

Identify 2-3 things to compost (release or transform) and 2-3 things to cultivate (strengthen or begin).

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 2.3 Network and Ecosystem Building

Networks and ecosystems thrive not just through individual projects, but through the underlying infrastructure that connects them: relationships, trust, shared resources, and collaborative processes. The Impact Garden's emphasis on understanding the conditions for systemic change makes it particularly powerful for this work. By **mapping the enabling conditions that allow diverse initiatives to flourish together**, you can identify opportunities for collaboration, resource sharing, and mutual support.

This application focuses less on what any single organisation or actor within the network is doing and more on how multiple actors can work together within a thriving ecosystem. **It helps diverse stakeholders find common ground while honoring their unique contributions.** Unlike traditional approaches where leaders set direction top-down, effective ecosystem building combines intentional network leadership with space for emergence. It requires designing the conditions, through shared frameworks, facilitation, and planning, that allow collective patterns to form and evolve organically. The visual, participatory nature of the Impact Garden supports this emergence. People discover connections and possibilities they couldn't have planned in advance, while the Role Architecture maps out clear ownership and engagement pathways.

The process of co-creating an Impact Garden together can itself be a trust-building exercise, particularly valuable in newly forming networks. As participants share their resources, vulnerabilities, and aspirations within the visual framework, they build the relational foundation necessary for authentic collaboration. What often emerges is a map of the ecosystem that no single organisation could have created alone—showing how initiatives interconnect in ways that become the foundation for ongoing collaboration.

The Impact Garden has been used effectively to map innovation ecosystems across academic departments, develop shared visions among organisations working toward common regional goals, and integrate diverse practices within professional communities. In each case, the model helped participants move from dialogue toward joint action by making the whole system visible and identifying natural points of synergy and mutual support.

## Impact Garden Case Study: Climate Coaching Alliance (CCA)

**Partner:** The Climate Coaching Alliance (CCA) is a global community for coaches, facilitators, and leadership professionals. It co-creates a space for sharing resources and supporting members in responding to the climate emergency.

**The Invitation:** How can a global network of practitioners move from shared interest to aligned action? A working group within the CCA wanted to co-create and plan a new Inner Development Goals (IDG) Community of Practice. The invitation was to find a framework that could help them design this new space in a way that was as regenerative, holistic, and "life-affirming" as the nature-based practices they hoped to promote.

**Our Shared Journey:** In our collaboration with Denise Pang, the working group used the Impact Garden as its guiding framework. The process was intentionally grounded by beginning with an "Earth Listening Circle" (from the Pachamama Alliance) to connect the group's visioning to a "sacred reciprocity with the Earth." This set the foundation for a truly regenerative planning process, moving from a shared vision to the practical design of their new ecosystem.

**The Harvest:** The Impact Garden provided the language and structure for the group to design its new community, from the ground up:

- A Clear, Co-created Plan: The framework helped the group "clarify their shared intentions" and identify "practical ways to cultivate the space" for members to collaborate, share knowledge, and grow together.
- A Regenerative Process: The collaboration itself modeled a new way of working. It proved to be "energizing and regenerative... efficient and deeply meaningful," built on mutual trust and shared values.
- A "Life-Affirming Alternative": The case study demonstrates how the Impact Garden can be a powerful alternative to traditional planning tools, enabling a new network to design its structure and activities from a place of deep connection and purpose.

### In the words of Denise Pang

"I was immediately drawn to its regenerative language and perspective, offering a life-affirming alternative to traditional planning and facilitation tools in my Org. Dev. practice." (Denise Pang, Climate Coaching Alliance)

## Exercise: Mapping your ecosystem

Networks thrive through relationships, trust, and shared infrastructure, not just individual projects. This exercise helps you see the whole system and find natural points for collaboration.

### 1. Map the actors in your ecosystem:

- What organisations, initiatives, or individuals are working toward related goals?
- What unique resources, knowledge, or capacities does each bring?
- Where do you see overlaps in purpose or approach?

### 2. Look for the infrastructure that connects actors:

- What relationships, platforms, or processes already link people together?
- What enabling conditions (trust, shared language, funding, spaces) allow collaboration to happen?
- Where are there gaps in connection or support?

### 3. Identify opportunities for collaboration:

- Where could resources be shared to benefit multiple initiatives?
- What outcomes become possible when actors work together that aren't possible alone?
- Which connections feel natural and energizing versus forced?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 2.4 Project or Product Creation

When developing new projects or products, it's easy to jump straight to solutions without fully understanding what conditions need to be in place for success. In fact, a common mistake in innovation is designing based on assumptions rather than understanding actual conditions and dynamics. The Impact Garden invites you to take a more holistic view and **start with the ecosystem, not the solution.**

By mapping the landscape before deciding what to plant, teams ground their work in reality rather than wishful thinking. The Impact Garden helps you map the journey of project or product creation from initial resources through enabling conditions to desired outcomes. This prevents the innovation trap of designing projects that look impressive on paper but lack the conditions needed to succeed.

This application is particularly useful for:

- Understanding what conditions need to be in place for a project or product to succeed
- Identifying resource requirements and dependencies
- Clarifying pathways from conception to impact
- Engaging stakeholders in co-creating the vision and approach

The model's non-linear approach also helps project or product creators anticipate complex dynamics and remain adaptive throughout the development process.

As you map existing resources and supportive conditions, gaps become visible. These aren't reasons to give up, they're signals about where you need partnerships, creativity, or strategic adjustments. The visual framework also serves as a powerful communication tool, helping others quickly understand your project's logic with a clarity that traditional proposals often lack.

The garden's emphasis on continuous learning reminds project creators to build in early feedback loops. Observing how people actually interact with your project, rather than how you assumed they would, provides essential learning. This iterative approach, where the framework itself can be adjusted based on new information, keeps projects grounded in lived reality while maintaining connection to long-term vision.



## Impact Garden Case Study: Inner Development Goals (IDG) Summit

**Partner:** The Inner Development Goals (IDG) Summit 2024, in collaboration with the UN Climate Secretariat's Global Innovation Hub and the global IDG community.

**The Invitation:** How do you bring a diverse group of global actors – from UN leaders to community practitioners – out of panel discussions and into genuine co-creation? Track 5 of the IDG Summit, "Transforming Systems," curated by Laila Martins, had the ambition to do just that: to design a process that would allow participants to develop tangible project ideas for global climate innovation.

**Our Shared Journey:** The Impact Garden was chosen as the leading framework to design and guide the entire track. It was strategically integrated at every stage: first, in the planning and communication leading up to the summit to align stakeholders, and then during the event as the primary facilitation tool to guide participants through a structured ideation process.

**The Harvest:** The framework provided the common language and a visual map for a highly diverse group to collaborate effectively, turning the track itself into a new "product" – a replicable model for co-design.

- **A Space for Co-Creation:** The Impact Garden successfully guided participants from high-level dialogue into a structured process of co-creating new, tangible project ideas.
- **A Strategic Design Tool:** The case study demonstrates how the framework can be used for project creation at a meta-level – to plan and design the entire architecture of an innovation ecosystem or a complex, multi-stakeholder event.
- **Aligning Diverse Actors:** The framework's holistic, living systems approach provided a common ground for actors from the UN Global Innovation Hub and the IDG community to find alignment and generate new ideas.

### In the words of Laila Martins

"The Impact Garden was the leading framework that allowed us to strategically plan the track and guide participants—from the UN to the IDG community—into a genuine process of co-creation and ideation to develop new global innovation projects." (Laila Martins, curator and co-facilitator of the IDG Summit Track)

## Exercise: Grounding your project or product in reality

Innovation often starts with solutions before understanding context. This exercise helps you map the ecosystem first, then design what's actually needed and viable.

### 1. Map the landscape before you plant:

- What similar projects, products, or approaches already exist in this space?
- What resources (funding, skills, relationships, infrastructure) are currently available?
- What do people actually need, not what do you assume they need?

### 2. Identify the conditions for success:

- What needs to be true for your project to thrive (trust, readiness, enabling policies, partnerships)?
- Which conditions already exist? Which are missing or weak?
- Where do gaps signal the need for partnerships, creativity, or strategic adjustments?

### 3. Trace pathways from conception to impact:

- How will resources flow into activities and eventually create outcomes?
- What dependencies or potential blockers do you see along the way?
- Where could you build in early feedback loops to learn from how people actually interact with your work?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

### 3. Creating your own Impact Garden

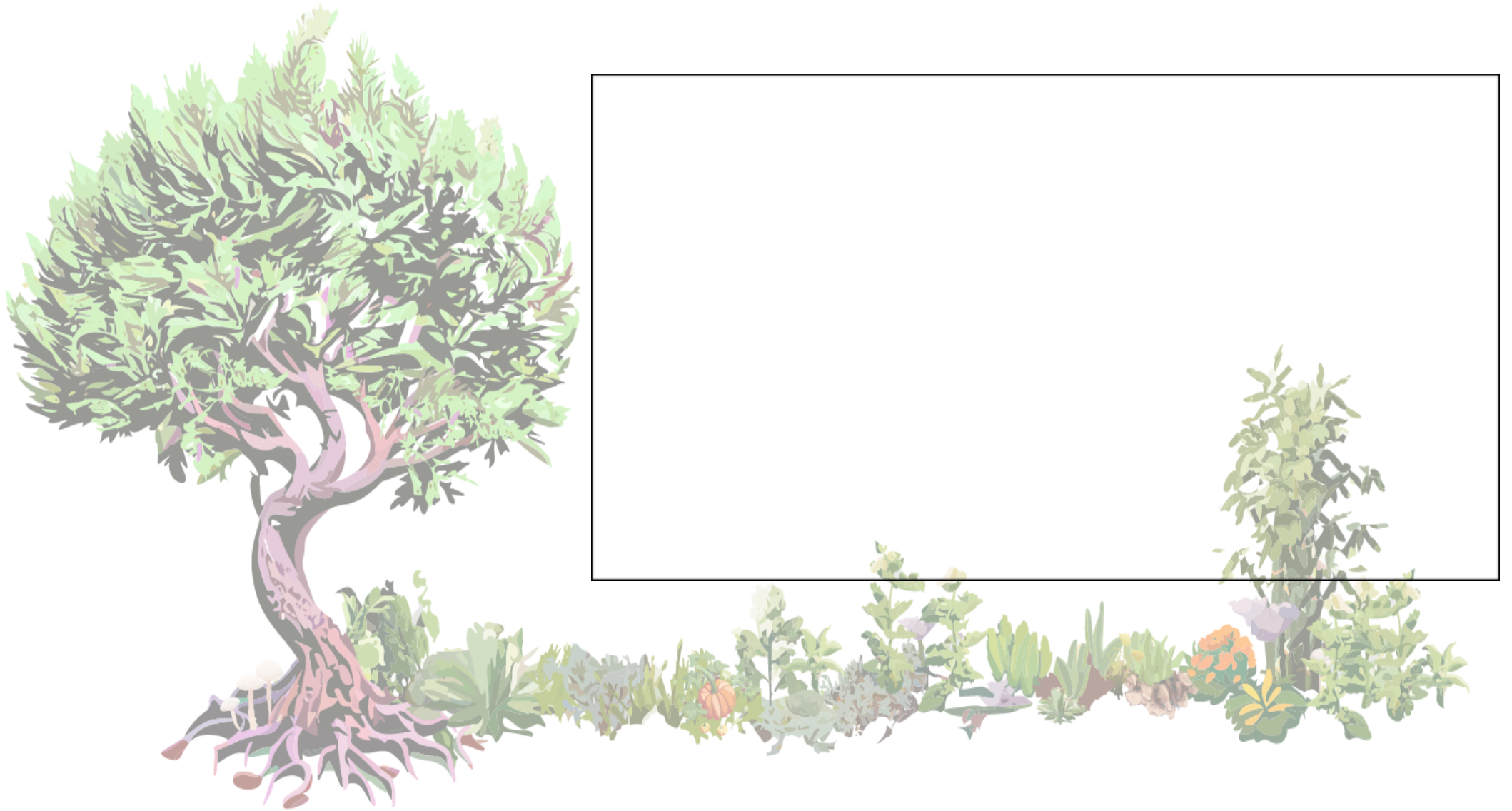
The best way to work with the Impact Garden is to just try it out. This can be as easy as taking pen and paper, making a sketch of the model, gifting yourself inner and outer calmness, and starting to add some notes or drawings to the different parts of the model (resources, conditions, etc.) for a project or idea of yours.

Here are some **foundational principles** that apply no matter what you're using the Impact Garden for:

- Use the Impact Garden in a creative way. Don't start to lock things in too early, but take your time and use visuals and scribbles.
- Include external partners in the process, and use the model as a basis for joint dialogue. This can be especially useful for multi-stakeholder projects with a shared strategy or monitoring system.
- "The map is not the territory." Never forget that the Impact Garden is a tool to help you understand and focus your contribution to meaningful change. It serves as a map to make sense of and actively engage in the world around you. Yet as with any map or navigation system: It should not dictate what you do and where you go.

The following page is your space to bring your own Impact Garden to life. Print it out, grab some pens, and start mapping your project directly onto the model.

Sketch your resources, draw connections between elements, and visualize the outcomes you're working toward. Use arrows, circles, colors, whatever helps you see the interconnections. This is your garden to cultivate.



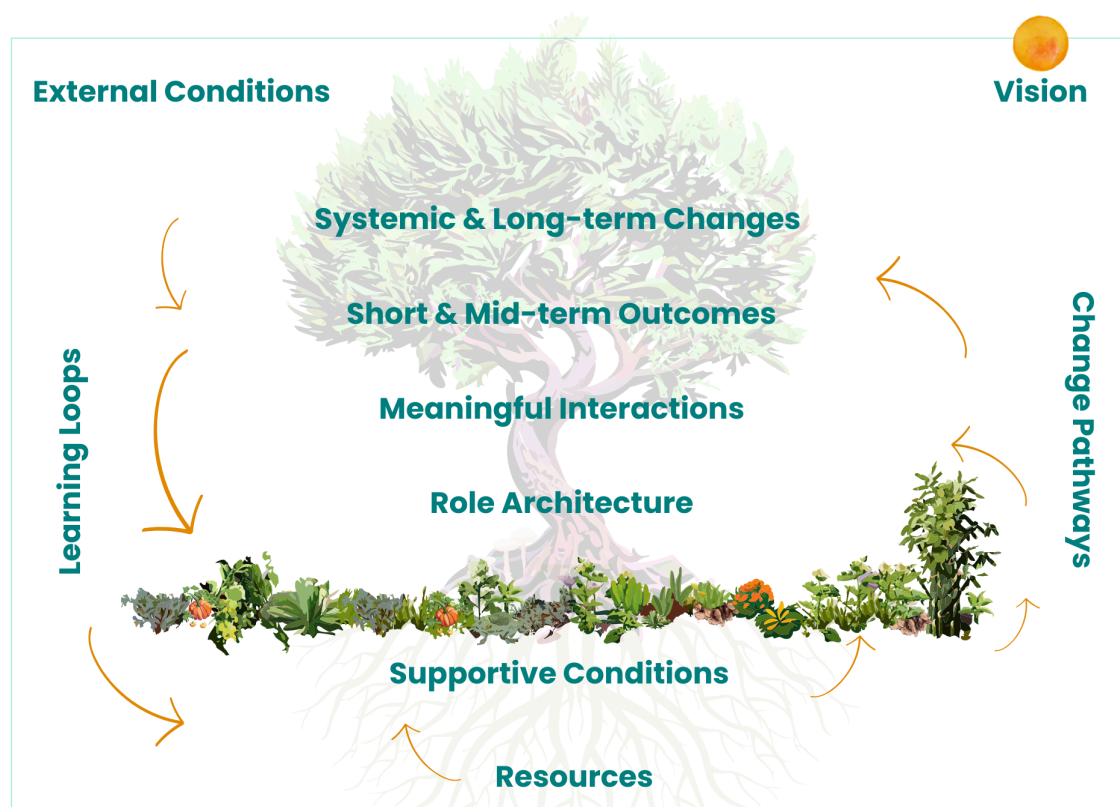
## 4. Deep dive into the dimensions

The Impact Garden model consists of interconnected dimensions that work together to create a holistic understanding of systemic change. Each dimension serves a distinct purpose while remaining dynamically connected to the others.

The following sections explore each dimension in detail, providing practical guidance on how to work with them individually and understand their relationships within the larger system.

As you read through these, remember that the boundaries between dimensions are fluid—like elements in a living ecosystem, they influence and support each other in ways that aren't always immediately visible.

### The Impact Garden with its ten dimensions:



## 4.1 Vision / Guiding Star (Sunlight)

**What it is:** Your Guiding Star is the desired future state you want to contribute to—the sunlight your work grows toward. It gives direction and meaning to all your efforts. It could apply to your organization, a program, or a specific project. To help clarify your vision, ask yourself: if this work truly thrives, what will the landscape look like? Everything else in the garden grows in relation to this energy.

**Examples:** Advancing social justice in your city, building a regenerative learning ecosystem, creating a thriving, inclusive organizational culture

**Tip:** Build on what exists, but stay flexible. You may already have an organisational vision, but individual projects can have their own Guiding Stars that align with but remain distinct from the larger mission.

**Exercise.** Take a moment to reflect:

- What future reality is this initiative contributing to through this work? (Paint a picture, even if it's incomplete or aspirational.)
- If this work were wildly successful in 10 years, what might be different in the world, your organization, your project or your ecosystem?
- Who benefits from that vision? Who is centered in it?
- What beliefs or values are embedded in this vision?

Once you answer the above, try to summarise your points in one short sentence to support you as your “elevator” pitch.

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.2 Resources (Soil)

**What it is:** Resources are the raw ingredients that you and others have at hand and are willing to pour into the work. They're the soil that makes growth possible. If your Guiding Star is the direction you're heading, your resources—both yours and your partners'—are what you have to work with (or need to cultivate) to get there.

### Examples:

- Time and energy
- Financial means
- Knowledge and experience
- Networks and contacts
- Trust, access, and reputation
- Attitude, organisational culture, and motivation

**Tip:** Check alignment with ambitions. Compare your available resources with your long-term desired changes. If they don't match, you don't need to give up—but you may need to adjust expectations, seek new partners, or mobilise hidden assets.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- What are we and our partners bringing to this work? (Ideas, time, energy, knowledge, lived experience, reputation, money, networks, access, etc.)
- Which of these feel abundant? Which feel strained or missing?
- Are there resources we've been overlooking or underutilizing?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.3 Supportive Conditions (Garden Bed)

**What it is:** Supportive conditions are how you design, integrate, and make resources accessible to others. They're the garden bed that supports the growth of those you seek to empower, the people you work with, and those that you provide the product or service for.

**Examples:** Programs, workshops, or services; learning materials and resources; team culture and strategy development; collaboration principles and frameworks; spaces for peer connection

**Tip:** Name the invisible elements. Often the most supportive conditions are things like how your team functions, the care you put into preparation, or the psychological safety created.. Make these visible as part of what enables impact.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- What are we offering to others through this initiative or organization?
- How are they structured? (Are they flexible, equitable, accessible?)
- What care or intention have we embedded into the way we support?
- Are we responding to a real need? (E.g. A need is mobility, not necessarily an electric car.) Learn more about this from the [UNFCCC Global Innovation Hub](#).
- What assumptions are we making about the needs of those we aim to support? (Are we projecting a solution?)

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.



## 4.4 Role Architecture (Garden Team)

**What it is:** Role architecture is about who will tend to the garden — with their minds, hearts, and hands. It's the shared understanding of the roles, intentions, and responsibilities needed to bring your vision to life. It isn't only about job titles; it's about clarity and alignment on expectations and accountability. What does each person or partner commit to, and how is that made visible?

### Examples:

- Organisational maps
- Governance structures
- Decision-making protocols
- Role descriptions with clear boundaries

**Tip:** Make roles visible, even if they feel informal. Sometimes we assume people know their responsibilities. But especially in cross-functional or networked settings, assumptions create confusion.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- Who is involved in this work, and what roles are they playing?
- How are roles and expectations communicated and held?
- Where is "[source](#)" and leadership coming from? Where is power concentrated or shared?
- Are there any role gaps, overlaps, or misalignments?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.5 Meaningful Interactions (Pollination)

**What it is:** Meaningful interactions capture how people actually engage with your supportive conditions. It's the pollination phase, where your carefully prepared offerings meet real-world use with two main stakeholder groups:

First, there are the collaborators: the people and partners helping to shape, lead, or deliver the work. How are they engaging? Are they contributing meaningfully, building trust, or co-owning the process with the team and the participants?

Then, there are the participants or users. What's their experience like? Are they engaging, showing up repeatedly, giving feedback, buying the product or service?

**Examples:** Active participation and repeat engagement; trust-building; feedback and co-ownership of processes; usage patterns and uptake of resources.

**Tip:** Stay open to surprises and build in feedback loops. While you might have designed a program in a certain way, people may engage with it differently than expected. Adjustments based on real engagement can make a big difference.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- What are the key activities or touchpoints in this initiative?
- How do people engage with the offerings, and how do they feel?
- What results or reactions have you observed?
- Where is the energy flowing, or not?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.6 External Conditions (Weather and Climate)

**What it is:** External conditions are the larger forces that influence your work from the outside. They're often beyond your control, yet never irrelevant. They're the climate and weather patterns that shape everything you're trying to grow. Your job isn't to control the weather, but to stay aware, prepare for it, and respond wisely.

### Examples:

- Policy changes that impact funding, eligibility, or legal frameworks
- Economic shifts, like inflation, job market disruption, or recession
- Public narratives that shape perception
- Tech disruptions like the rise of generative AI or blockchain
- Social unrest or rapid mobilisation, such as protests or collective organizing

**Tip:** Name what you can't control and find what you can influence. You might not be able to stop a policy from passing, but you can prepare, adapt, and use that moment to tell a story that matters.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- What external forces are influencing this work, for better or worse?
- How might political, economic, cultural, or environmental trends shape outcomes?
- Where does this initiative feel aligned with the external climate, and where are you resisting it?
- What helps this initiative stay adaptive in the face of uncertainty?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.7 Short and Mid-Term Outcomes (Fruit)

**What it is:** Short and mid-term outcomes are the early signs that something is growing—the first fruits appearing in your garden, showing that your supportive conditions and meaningful interactions are working. This includes the results of the project, service, or product and also changes in people, relationships, and capacity. Not every branch bears fruit at the same time, but each one reflects that your garden is moving in the right direction.

### Examples:

- Shifts in perception or awareness
- Growth in skills and capacity
- Trust forming between partners or customers, network expansion
- Tangible project milestones being reached
- Changes in behavior or practice

**Tip:** Don't overlook "small" outcomes. Outcomes can be easy to miss if you're only looking for final impact. Internal, emotional, or relational changes often carry the deepest significance.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- What near-term changes are you seeing or hoping for?
- How are mindsets, behaviors, or relationships evolving?
- What milestones or deliverables signal progress?
- What feels like a "harvest moment" in this work?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.8 Systemic and Long-Term Changes (Spores)

**What it is:** Systemic and long-term changes look at transformation across systems, cultures, or paradigms over time. They're like spores floating through the air, quietly connecting, transforming, and nourishing the whole ecosystem. These long-term and systemic changes are rarely linear, but they're what many of us are truly aiming for.

### Examples:

- Mindset shifts rippling through an entire sector
- New models being replicated elsewhere
- Cultural norms evolving
- Institutions adapting how they work
- Networks expanding in reach and influence

**Tip:** Track signals rather than direct causation. You may not always see long-term change directly, but you can notice early indicators and set intentions toward systemic shift.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- What long-term changes might this work influence?
- How does it contribute to shifts in power, narrative, or policy?
- What is becoming possible that wasn't before?
- How are new ideas being planted elsewhere without your direct involvement?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.9 Change Pathways (Garden Plan)

**What it is:** Change pathways bring everything together by clarifying how change actually unfolds in your work. They're your garden plan—the blueprint capturing your assumptions about how all the elements work together across different time horizons. In essence, this is where you articulate your theory of change and connect it to your operational roadmap. It's about making visible the logic that connects your daily activities to your long-term vision.

**Tip:** Stay curious and make assumptions visible. It's often hard to prove direct attribution, so the goal isn't to draw perfect causal links, but to stay curious and pay attention to what's actually happening. Articulating your theory of change helps you test and refine your approach over time.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:

- How do you believe change happens through your work? What links are you seeing between your activities and the outcomes?
- What assumptions are you making about that process?
- Which elements of the supportive conditions appear to be generating the most change?
- What stories, data, or patterns help you understand how change is happening?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

## 4.10 Learning Loops (Irrigation System)

**What it is:** Learning loops create continuous circulation of insights, like an irrigation system that cycles water from source to soil and back again. What you discover about your impact flows back to inform your vision, resources, and approach, and help others learn with you.

### Examples:

- Quick pulse checks after workshops or events
- Regular internal team reflections
- Shared learning spaces with partners
- Letting go of things that no longer serve
- Surfacing what works, so you can amplify it

**Tip:** Embrace imperfection as strength. Communicating your willingness to learn can actually build trust with funders and partners. It shows you're committed to continuous improvement rather than claiming perfection.

**Exercise.** Take time to explore these questions:


- What is this initiative learning from the changes that are taking place?
- What feedback is this initiative gathering, and how is it responding?
- What assumptions have been challenged or confirmed?
- What rhythms of reflection or sensemaking does this initiative have in place?

 Use this space to write, sketch, or map out your reflections.

# The Impact Garden



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<b>LEARNING LOOPS</b>	<b>SYSTEMIC AND LONG-TERM CHANGES</b>	<b>VISION / GUIDING STAR</b> 
	<b>SHORT AND MID-TERM OUTCOMES</b>	
	<b>MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS</b>	<b>CHANGE PATHWAYS</b>
<b>SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS</b>	<b>ROLE ARCHITECTURE</b>	
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>EXTERNAL CONDITIONS</b>	





## 5. Growing Forward

What kind of gardener do you want to be – in this climate, at this time in history?

Now you have the tools to plant, tend, adapt – and grow something that truly matters.

Whether you're evaluating impact, planning strategy, building networks, or creating something entirely new, the principles remain the same: nurture the conditions for flourishing, stay attuned to the interconnections, and trust in the emergent possibilities that arise when we work in harmony with complex systems.

The seeds are in your hands. What will you plant?

### Your Journey Continues

This playbook is a map, not the end of the journey. We have two primary pathways to support you in bringing this practice to life, whatever your context may be.

#### 1. Go Deeper at Your Own Pace

For individuals and teams who want to explore the framework's applications in more detail, our free online course is the perfect next step. It provides guided modules, practical examples, and a self-paced environment to deepen your understanding.

→ Access the free online course here: <https://impactgardencourse.sutra.co>

#### 2. Collaborate and Co-Create with Us

For organisations ready to apply the Impact Garden to a specific challenge, we'd love to explore a collaboration. We support partners with:

- Bespoke team training and facilitation
- Co-designing regenerative evaluation (MEL) frameworks
- Facilitating strategic planning and ecosystem-building processes

→ Schedule a [free consultation with us](#)

→ Reach out to us at: [info@unityeffect.net](mailto:info@unityeffect.net)

We'd love to hear from you!