



Funders MEL Lab

A 6-Month Action Lab for Funders
seeking to integrate Power-Sharing
with Institutional Accountability



Funders shouldn't be forced to choose between trust-based power-sharing and rigorous board accountability.

By anchoring evaluation around how change actually happens — through people, relationships and changing contexts — we can create practical tools that make sense of complexity and turn it into clear, credible stories about what is happening, what is changing and why.

Evaluation transforms from an administrative tax into a vital strategic ally for systemic change.

Welcome to the future of MEL for funding organisations

The Three Traps Facing Funders Today

Funding organisations across philanthropy, impact investing, public funds, and participatory networks are **moving to long-term, unrestricted, and flexible funding**: shifting power back to partners on the ground and supporting genuine, systemic change.

However, when it comes to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), organisations almost universally hit an institutional wall. Lacking evaluation frameworks designed for living systems and complexity, organisations consistently fall into one of three traps:

- **Trap 1: Falling Back on Linear Paradigms.** Defaulting to conventional tracking metrics, forcing complex, relationship-driven work into fixed frameworks simply to meet reporting and board requirements.
- **Trap 2: Evidence Flattening & Friction in Translation.** Nurturing participatory, qualitative learning on the ground, but lacking the translation mechanics to communicate dynamic data to leadership, boards, and the public.
- **Trap 3: Avoiding Measurement Altogether.** Abandoning formal evaluation entirely under the banner of trust-based funding, creating strategic blindness for both funders and changemakers.

The Result: All three traps limit what evaluation can offer. They can create unnecessary reporting burdens, make it harder to learn and make good decisions, or reduce complex, relationship-driven work to a set of measures that don't tell the whole story. In each case, there is a risk that evaluation becomes disconnected from the people and the change it is there to support.

The Pathway Forward: Evaluation as an Ally

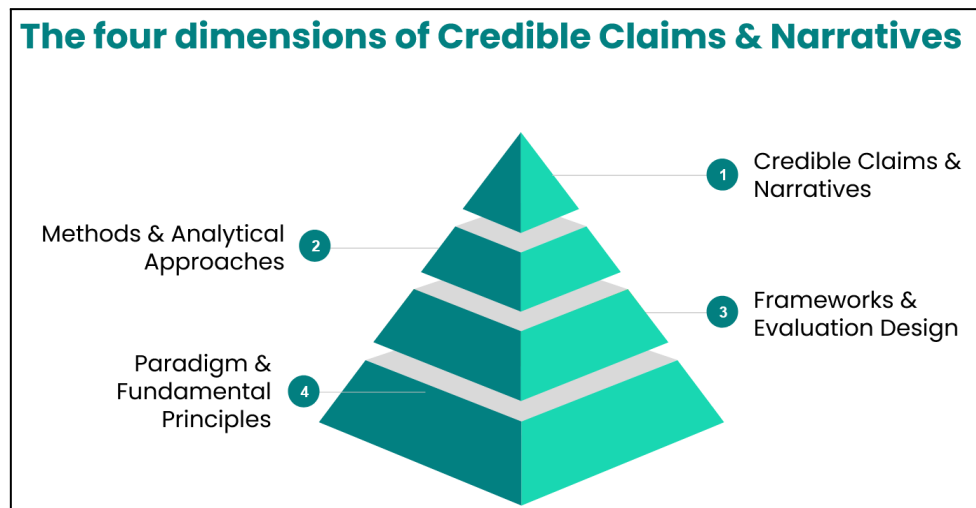
Moving beyond these traps means connecting what is happening on the ground with what funders need to learn, communicate and make decisions. This lab is built around two core pillars:

1. **Systemic & Participatory MEL:** Designing processes that capture living, relational dynamics—like network trust, local agency, and ecosystem health.
2. **Evidence Translation:** Creating practical tools and templates that turn rich, complex learning into clear insights and credible stories of change for boards and wider audiences.

By holding both sides of this equation, evaluation ceases to be a top-down compliance tax or a superficial story. Instead, it becomes a valuable tool for learning and decision-making — meeting accountability needs while staying true to the complex, relationship-driven nature of systemic change.

A Collaborative Sandbox for Field-Building

To integrate systemic and participatory approaches to MEL with accountability demands, we have developed our Methodology for Credible Claims in Complexity, serving as a shared scaffolding to align relational data with high-level governance.



Unity Effect has furthermore established a suite of open-source frameworks, tools, and diagnostic scorecards—including the *Impact Garden*, the *Capacity Compass*, and quantitative *Systemic Scorecards* (see attached PDF resource), rooted in:

- **Field-Tested Practice:** Implemented with forward-thinking ecosystems including SEND e.V. (funded by Google.org), the Network of European Foundations (NEF), and Transition Together.
- **Facilitated Peer Learning:** Backed by deep experience hosting transformational learning containers (such as The Regenerative Signal) and peer-learning spaces with international partners like GIZ and the ILO.
- **A Global Movement:** Supported by our global Community of Practice spanning 250+ active members across 39 countries.

The Invitation: What We Will Build Together

We invite a select cohort of funding organisations to step into this sandbox together. Over 6 months, we will use this open-source scaffolding to:

- **Tailor Frameworks:** Adapt these models directly to your live portfolio dynamics, grantmaking workflows, and board reporting needs.
- **Prototype Tools:** Co-design practical tools — such as board-friendly dashboards, trust and power-sharing trackers, and simple ways to capture and share stories of change.
- **Lead the Sector:** Co-author and publish our joint discoveries in a public sector report (The Future of Funder MEL) to shift the broader philanthropic landscape.

How it Works & What Your Organisation Receives

This six-month practical programme brings together up to three people from each funding organisation to learn, test and design new approaches together. . Your team will dedicate **three hours per month per person** to this transition, structured around four practical components:

1. Internal Capacity Building (*The Regenerative Signal Programme*)

Your representatives will take part in five live learning sessions, exploring new ways to think about and approach evaluation. This programme is designed to build internal fluency in systemic, complexity-aware evaluation. Your team will explore functional alternatives to linear models and learn how to track critical, qualitative drivers of impact like inner capacity, network resilience, and team vitality.

2. Tool Development & Peer Exchange (*Co-Creative Lab*)

Running alongside the training, this module provides a peer space to work through active portfolio challenges. Working with other funder teams and senior evaluation experts, we will co-create practical, ready-to-use tools and templates to measure power-sharing, trust, and systemic progress.

3. Direct Implementation Support (*Bespoke Coaching*)

To ensure these approaches successfully take root internally, your organisation is paired with a senior evaluator from our network for **3 to 4 private coaching sessions**. This dedicated support will help your team review current reporting requirements, strengthen existing approaches, and work through the specific needs of your organisation, leadership and board.

4. Wider Field Building & Leadership (*Public Report*)

Following the active learning track, the cohort's insights and developed templates will be consolidated into a **public report: The Future of Funder MEL: *Bridging Accountability, Systemic Impact, and Relational Learning***. Launching in September 2027, this co-authored publication provides the wider sector with a concrete pathway to shift their approach to evaluation, positioning your organisation as a visible leader in this transition.

An Invitation to Co-Create

Shaping the Future of Funder MEL Together

We are inviting a focused cohort of progressive funding organisations—encompassing foundations, systemic impact investors, public funds, and participatory networks—to step into this co-creation journey together. To ensure deep peer exchange, cross-institutional learning, and tailored coaching support, participation is intentionally limited.

Applications open in September 2026. Further key dates are:

- Active Cohort Journey (Feb – Jul 2027):
 - 1. Internal Capacity Building (The Regenerative Signal Programme)
 - 2. Tool Development & Peer Exchange (Co-Creative Lab)
- Synthesis & Editorial Harvest: July – August 2027 (Summer Break)
- Public Report Launch: September 2027

Participation Investment

The flat investment for full institutional participation is **€8,000–12,000 per funding organisation**. This includes:

- **3 Program Seats:** Access for up to 3 team members to the 5-session Regenerative Signal capacity building training.
- **Applied Co-Creative Lab:** Dedicated peer sandbox sessions to co-design and pressure-test tailored tools against live portfolio needs.
- **Direct Private Coaching:** 3 to 4 private coaching sessions with a senior evaluator to navigate your specific internal or board demands.
- **Field Leadership & Co-Authorship:** Co-authorship status, institutional feature, and logo placement in the public sector report (The Future of Funder MEL) launching September 2027.

Next Steps: Explore Fit & Alignment

We view enrollment as a mutual sense-making process to ensure this cohort aligns with your current institutional goals and portfolio timing.

To book a private, 30-minute introductory conversation with our team, please reach out directly:

Jannik Kaiser · Co-Founder & CEO, Unity Effect

Email: jannik@unityeffect.net

Website: www.unityeffect.net

[Book a 30-minute introductory conversation](#)