

## Introducing the Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework

### *Promoting the Ecology of Wellbeing*

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#### What is the ESF Framework?

The **Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework** is a new approach to understanding and enabling human and ecological wellbeing. It recognises that true flourishing is not an individual achievement, but a systemic outcome—emerging from the alignment of people, communities, and the natural world across generations. Unlike traditional development models focused on economic growth, ESF redefines progress through a relational and developmental lens. It asks not “*How much did we produce?*” but “*How are we flourishing—individually, collectively, and ecologically?*”

Today’s challenges—climate breakdown, rising inequality, declining trust—reflect deep systemic imbalances. Our current metrics (like GDP) don’t account for ecological health, human development, or cultural values. Nor do they reflect what really matters to people: belonging, meaning, safety, connection, and the ability to thrive across generations.

The ESF Framework addresses this gap by offering:

- A developmental perspective rooted in early childhood and life-span psychology
- A systems approach that integrates ecological, economic, cultural, and human dimensions
- A values-based foundation informed by ethics, wisdom traditions, and Indigenous knowledge

#### What Makes ESF Different?

- **Early years first:** Prioritising human development from birth—not just adult wellbeing
- **Systemic coherence:** Aligning culture, ecology, economy, and development in one model
- **Intergenerational ethics:** Embedding responsibility to future generations in every decision
- **Pluralist worldviews:** Embracing Indigenous, spiritual, and ecological ways of knowing
- **Developmentally informed governance:** Encouraging long-view leadership rooted in care

#### Who Is It For?

- Policymakers seeking holistic wellbeing indicators
- Nations and Cities seeking to understand and promote the wellbeing of their populations
- Communities designing regenerative local economies
- Networks and Movements seeking to identify and promote coherence
- Educators building future-focused schools
- Organisations evaluating social impact and moral responsibility
- Leaders who want to nurture their own wellbeing and optimise their positive impact
- Citizens who want to reconnect meaningfully to each other and the Earth

#### Future Collaboration

The ESF Framework is a new contributor to the field and the Flourish Project is currently seeking collaborative partners to help further develop and test out its ideas.

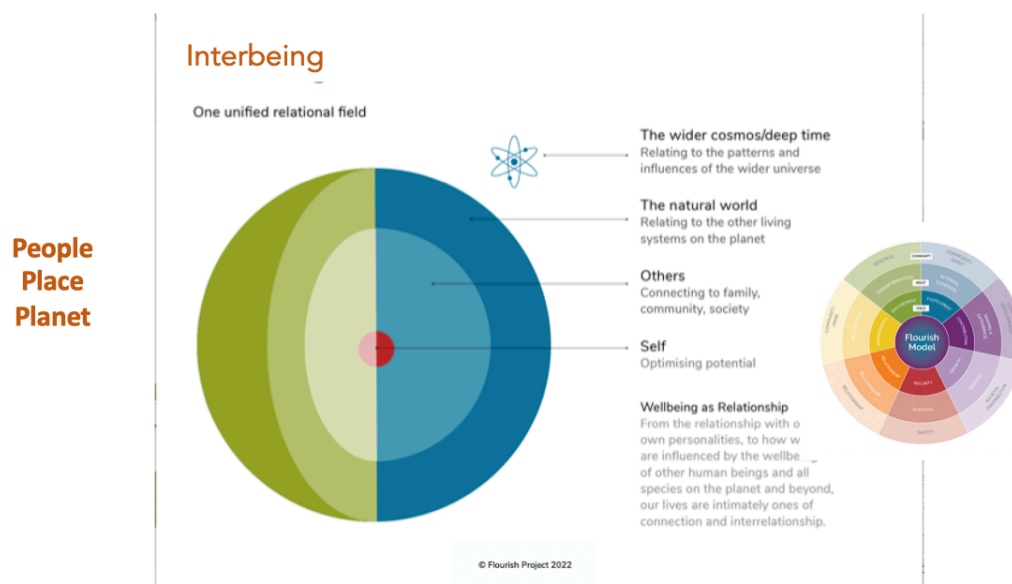
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## Foundations of the Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework

The **Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework** was developed in response to a growing recognition that our dominant development models—rooted in linear thinking, fragmented metrics, and adult-centric approaches—are no longer fit for purpose in an interconnected and uncertain world. It seeks to reframe wellbeing as a multi-layered, dynamic, and relational process rooted in human development, ecological systems, and ethical responsibility.

At its core, the ESF Framework offers a new ‘ecology of wellbeing’ that sees flourishing as emerging from the alignment of self, society, and nature across the lifespan (Eisler, 2000). It shows that a developmental lens is essential for understanding how values and worldviews are created, and for ensuring that public policy, education, and governance systems invest in the nurturing of meaningful lives where the health, wellbeing and participation of everyone matters.

### Four Domains, One Systemic Logic



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At the structural level, the ESF Framework comprises four interrelated systemic lenses:

- **Natural Environment** – assessing whether a community or initiative regenerates local ecosystems, fosters environmental awareness, and promotes nature-based design solutions.
- **Circular & Regenerative Economy** – exploring whether economic activities support community wellbeing, reduce waste, and enhance local livelihoods.
- **Cultural Values & Identity** – valuing diversity, heritage, intergenerational belonging, and the weaving of shared cultural narratives.
- **Human Capacities & Potential** – mapping the psychosocial and developmental layers of human flourishing, especially in children and young people.

This systems matrix enables communities, organisations, and governments to evaluate policies and initiatives holistically—not just by outputs, but by how well they foster coherence between ecological, cultural, economic, and personal wellbeing (Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll), 2021).

### The Seven-Level Flourish Model



The ESF Framework is underpinned by a seven-stage model of human development that integrates insights from neurobiology, child psychology, and values-based systems theory. These levels: **Security, Relationship, Independence, Engagement, Fulfilment, Contribution, and Growth** offer a scaffold for mapping individual and collective flourishing across the lifespan (Flourish Project, 2022).

Each level corresponds to a basic human need and developmental stage, with the early years playing a critical role in shaping lifelong patterns of trust, belonging, and moral agency. This resonates with neurophilosophy research, which shows that moral cognition and empathic behaviours are not merely taught but emerge from embodied experiences of safety, connection, and care in early life (Churchland, 2011; Zeedyk, 2013; Narvaez, 2014).

### Ethical and Cosmological Foundations

The ESF Framework is rooted in a unitive ethical foundation, drawing from the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**, **The World Parliament of Religion's Declaration Towards a Global Ethic (1993)**, **the Earth Charter (2000)**, **Pope Francis's Laudato Si (2015)** and **the United Nation's Peoples Pact for the Future (2024)** and **Declaration on Future Generations (2024)**. It also honours and reflects core Indigenous principles such as '*All My Relations*' and '*Seventh Generation Thinking*'. These affirm shared values of nonviolence, truthfulness, ecological stewardship, and the sacredness of all life. (Kimmerer, 2013; Narvaez and Jacobs, 2022).

Epistemologically, ESF embraces cosmological pluralism—the inclusion of multiple ways of knowing, including Indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual wisdom, and ecological science. It challenges the dominance of Euro-Western epistemologies by reclaiming relational, cyclical, and land-based ways of understanding wellbeing and governance (Currivan 2020, Wright et al., 2021).

This philosophical grounding is matched by a commitment to systems thinking, drawing on the insights of Capra, Meadows, and Maturana to recognise that flourishing is an emergent, adaptive quality of whole systems. It is never static but always in co-evolution with its context—personal, cultural, and planetary (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Meadows, 2008; Maturana & Varela, 1992).

### Towards a Practice of Intergenerational Ethics

Finally, the ESF Framework insists on intergenerational coherence—not as a metaphor but as a structural necessity for long-term flourishing. It emphasises the role of intergenerational dialogue in nurturing ecological consciousness, healing inherited traumas, and co-creating life-affirming futures (Lorimer, 2023). In this light, flourishing is not merely an individual goal, but a shared responsibility—a collective weaving of ancestral memory, present action, and future vision.

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## Practical Implementation

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### 1. Using the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework as a Wellbeing Framework Evaluation Process

The **Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework** offers a meta-evaluative lens to assess the depth, coherence, and integrative capacity of existing wellbeing frameworks. Rather than adding another metric system, ESF asks: *"What worldview is being expressed through this framework, and what deeper conditions for flourishing are being tended—or neglected?"*

This evaluation process is rooted in **four core domains** and supported by the **seven levels of human need and motivations**.

#### 1. Domain-Based Coherence Evaluation

For each wellbeing framework under review, the ESF approach asks:

##### A. Human Dimension (Inner Wellbeing)

- Does the framework acknowledge emotional, psychological, and developmental needs?
- Is **early childhood** investment or trauma-informed care prioritised?
- Are **inner capacities** (resilience, purpose, self-awareness) integrated as outcomes?

##### B. Relational Dimension (Social Wellbeing)

- How does the framework support **social trust**, participation, and equity?
- Is **care work**, community cohesion, or cultural repair explicitly valued?
- Does it embed **diverse knowledge systems**, including Indigenous or local place-based wisdom?

##### C. Ecological Dimension (Planetary Wellbeing)

- Is ecological health a **core determinant**, or a side category?
- How are **ecological limits, biocultural systems, or interdependence** represented?
- Are regeneration, circularity, or planetary boundaries embedded?

##### D. Spiritual / Transcendent Dimension (Meaning Systems)

- Does the framework reflect **worldview plurality** and purpose-orientation?
- How are **belonging, sacredness, reverence for life**, or existential wellbeing addressed?
- Are there mechanisms for integrating **story, ritual, or intergenerational wisdom**?

#### 2. Seven-Level Motivational Analysis

Each framework is further assessed on how it responds to the full spectrum of **human needs and motivations**, from foundational to transcendent:

Level of Human Need	Evaluation Criteria
1. Security	Is physical, economic, and psychological safety embedded?
2. Relationship	Are family, community, and cultural bonds nurtured?
3. Independence	Are autonomy, rights, and self-determination respected?
4. Engagement	Are people enabled to participate meaningfully in life, work, and learning?
5. Fulfilment	Are joy, creativity, and intrinsic satisfaction prioritised?
6. Contribution	Does the framework invite service, social impact, or reciprocity?
7. Growth	Does it enable personal and societal evolution, learning, and transformation?

This creates a **wellbeing resonance map** showing which levels are fully activated, underrepresented, or missing entirely.

3. Meta-Patterns and Integrative Insights

The ESF evaluation does not rank frameworks competitively. Instead, it reveals:

- **Gaps and blind spots** in prevailing wellbeing models
- Opportunities for **integrative synthesis**
- The **implicit values** and worldview each framework expresses
- Readiness for **transcontextual application** or **community co-design**.

4. Application Pathways

The ESF Wellbeing Evaluation Process can be applied to:

- National wellbeing dashboards (e.g., OECD, Scotland, Bhutan)
- City or regional wellbeing strategies
- Organisational or sectoral wellbeing models (e.g., education, care, business)
- International comparative reports (e.g., SDGs, Human Development Index)

It serves as both a **diagnostic** and a **developmental tool**, enabling frameworks to evolve toward greater ecological, relational, and spiritual integrity.

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2. Using the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework as a Community Sense-making/ Curation Process

**The Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework** offers a holistic foundation for curating individuals, projects, and practices that embody deep systemic integrity. Rather than selecting for visibility, productivity, or innovation alone, the ESF curation process is grounded in values-led sense-making: it seeks those whose presence, practice, and impact nourish the conditions for life to flourish — within and around them.

This is not a contest, but a field-tending process, attuned to subtle signals of resonance, coherence, and regenerative potential. By engaging communities in nominating through narrative prompts, and reviewing through relational integrity circles, the ESF curation mechanism honours both individual contribution and ecosystemic reciprocity. It invites us to recognise and support the quiet catalysts, the pattern-weavers,

and the wisdom-holders who are shaping more beautiful worlds — often from the margins.

## 1. Context (Why it Matters)

The awareness process is situated within a planetary transition, responding to the need for discernment amidst complexity. It recognises that the most vital contributions are often emergent, subtle, and relational—requiring deeper modes of recognition than traditional awards or status indicators.

- Anchored in planetary thresholds and human wellbeing.
  - Rooted in place-based and context-aware nominating processes.
  - Honouring storytelling and lived experience.
  - Sensitive to the relational field and timing of emergence.
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## 2. Conditions (What Enables It)

The process is not extractive or performative, but invitational—designed to foster safety, spaciousness, and resonance.

- Examples are invited through **values-aligned, narrative prompts**, surfacing lived experience rather than abstract credentials.
  - Attention to **sacred slowness**: seasonal cycles guide rhythm of review and release.
  - **Those at the edges** are nurtured—especially those working across paradigms or bridging traditions.
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## 3. Capacities (Who Is Involved)

Curators and reviewers are not gatekeepers, but stewards of the relational field.

- **Regenerative Peer Circles** act as integrity holders, trained in deep listening, pattern recognition, and systems sensing.
  - All participants are supported with **resources for discernment**, including access to relevant ESF-informed tools and reflective practices.
  - Capacities for **holding paradox, complexity, and emergence** are prioritised over technical expertise alone.
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## 4. Connections (How It Relates)

Flourishing is relational. Curation weaves a tapestry of reciprocal belonging.

- Each suggestion catalyses **reciprocal learning encounters** among nominators, nominees, and communities.
- A **narrative weaver team** translates nominations into resonant storyforms for multiple audiences.
- **Networked inter-being**: projects and exemplars are invited into curated gatherings, salons, or field inquiries, deepening relational trust.

## 5. Contributions (What Flows Back)

Recognition flows both inward and outward—offering nourishment to both the individual and the ecosystem.

- Selected exemplars receive **eco-systemic resourcing** (e.g., funding, media support, capacity-building).
- **Community co-benefit** is built into each cycle: local knowledge holders are compensated; visibility is shared.
- Emergent offerings (frameworks, rituals, media) are **gifted back** into the commons.

## 6. Cultures (What It Embodies)

The process becomes a cultural signal of the world we are co-creating.

- Embeds a **culture of humility**, where discernment arises from attunement rather than hierarchy.
- Practices **ritualised gratitude and celebration**—recognising unseen labour and collective holding.
- Embodies values of **generosity, reciprocity, integrity, and joy** at each stage of the process.

## 7. Continuities (What Grows Over Time)

This is not a one-off selection, but a longitudinal investment in relational ecologies.

- Curation becomes a **long-term tending** of the field—tracking and uplifting exemplars over time.
- **Learning loops** feed into future cycles: What's arising now? What needs tending? What no longer serves?
- Through storytelling, **fractal influence** expands—individual stories nourishing systemic possibility.

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