Community Weaving

A framework for weaving healthy communities

"I've been considering the phrase 'all my relations' for some time now. It's hugely important. It's our saving grace in the end. It points to the truth that we are related, we are all connected, we all belong to each other.

The most important word is all. Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. It means every person just as it means every blade of grass, rock, mineral and creature. We live because everything else does."

– Richard Wagamese

If you bring people together, this is for you.

Communities are beautiful. When humans come together guided by generosity, trust and care, magic happens and life flourishes. Yet it feels increasingly like our relational webs are unraveling.

This project is an invitation to reimagine what community means in these times of transition*. And to explore a question together:
How can we weave healthy communities?

If you bring people together around a shared purpose, this is for you. If you play an active role in your community, network, neighborhood, association or other form of collective, this is for you. If your work is about helping people build trusted relationships, this is for you.

The framework we're offering is the result of a multi-year learning journey with community weavers from around the globe. We hope it will provide shared language for us to come into conversation and to strengthen the relational webs across our shared home Earth.

In community,

Erin Dixon, Fabian Pfortmüller, Michel Bachmann & Sita Magnuson

*Listen to Anishinaabe Elder John Rice speak to our times of transition and share a prophecy story.

What is community?

There are infinite ways of describing what "community" means across cultures, contexts and languages. What does it mean to you?

To us, **community is a web of mutual care around a shared possibility**. It is easy to generalize "community" as *any* group of people with shared interests, or as structures, digital tools, or events. For us, the essence of community is relationships of care, held together by a sense of kinship and mutual support. We use the language of *community weaving* to remind us that we can't *build* a web of relationships. That community is a living practice. And that our work is to weave a flourishing tapestry of reciprocity.

We are also curious to expand this definition beyond human relationships. After all, our lives are interwoven with the land, plants, waters, animals, and other beings that we share this planet with. What would it mean to include all forms of life in our communities, like our ancestors did and many Indigenous communities do today? And what would the world look like if we understood it as one big web of relationships?

Explore

different definitions of "community"

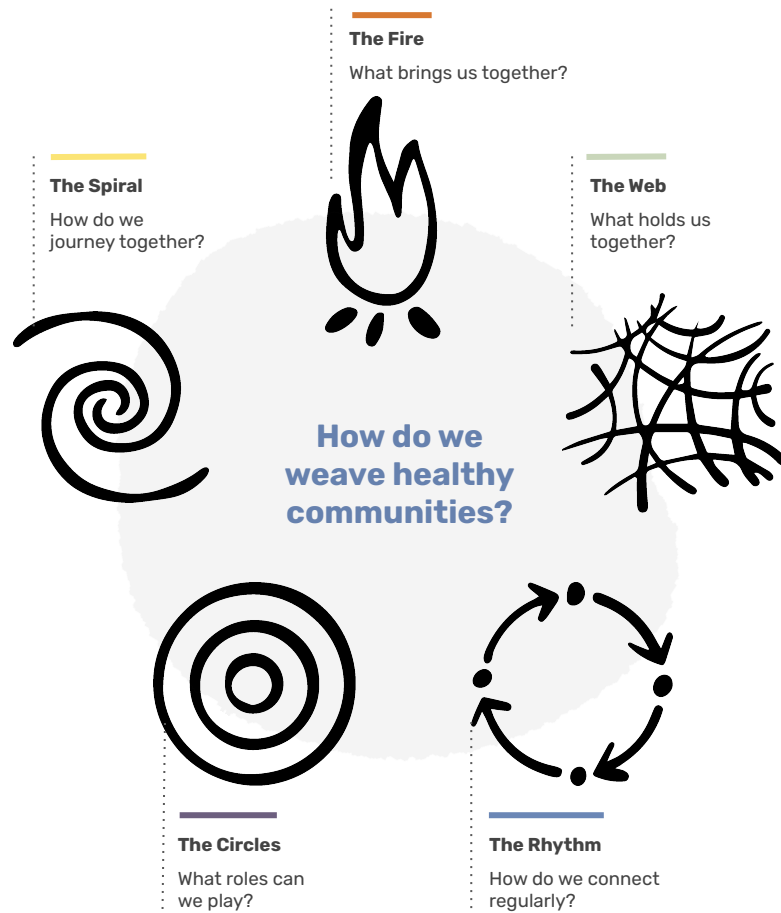*Listen to Māori change leader Evie O'Brien speak to what lies at the heart of community.

The Framework
5 elements for weaving community

We see five elements that strengthen the health of a community:

- **The Fire**: The possibility that brings us together.
- **The Web**: The relationships that hold us together.
- **The Rhythm:** The rituals that connect us.
- **The Circles:** The roles we can play.
- **The Spiral**: Our individual and collective journeys.

Each of the elements represents a different pattern. And each is a playful invitation to come into conversation.

The Spiral
How do we journey together?

The Fire
What brings us together?

The Web
What holds us together?

How do we weave healthy communities?

The Circles
What roles can we play?

The Rhythm
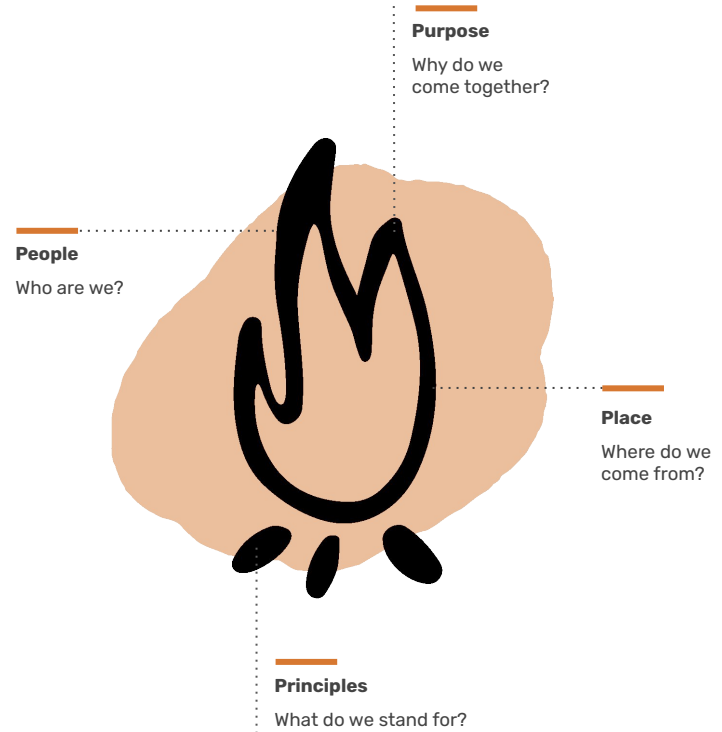How do we connect regularly?

The Fire

What brings us together?

At the center of each community we see a fire: **a source of possibility and energy that draws people in**. It is what attracts people in the first place and keeps them coming back. It's our collective identity and sense of belonging. Our shared purpose and core values. It represents the essence of the community.

At the beginning, the fire is often just a spark and we can nurture it by telling stories of who we are, where we come from, why we come together and what we stand for. When we are clear about our vision and values, it naturally attracts people who resonate with it. As the group evolves, we can strengthen the fire through conversations. Often a simple question is enough: What draws you to this community?

Learn more

about how to strengthen the Fire.

Purpose

Why do we come together?

People

Who are we?

Place

Where do we come from?

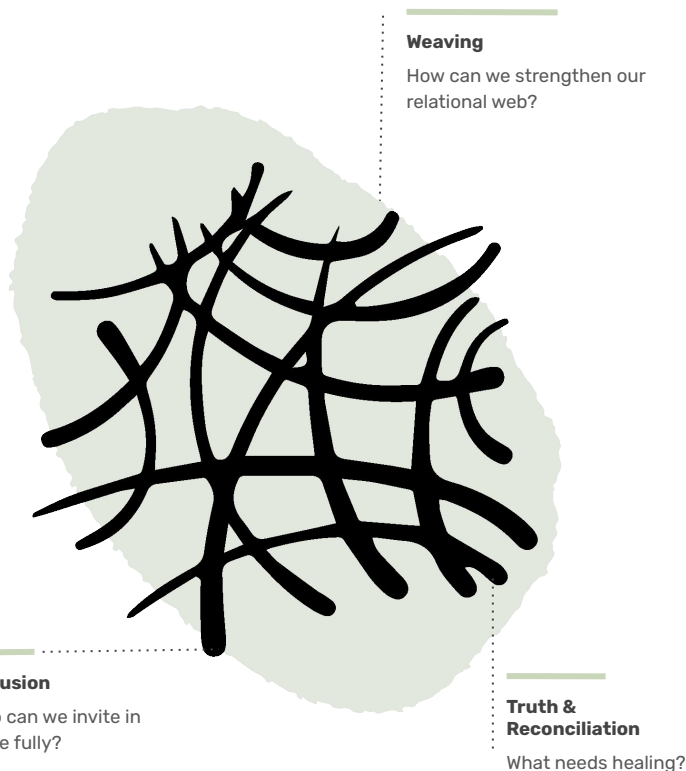**Principles**

What do we stand for?

The Web
What holds us together?

We think of **community as an invisible web of relationships**. That's the foundation underpinning every group, holding it all together. The web is strong when relationships are based on trust, respect and mutual care. When the web is fractured, relationships can be superficial, transactional or contentious, and as a result ideas, resources and energy cannot flow.

Nurturing relationships strengthens the web. By creating intentional opportunities for people to get to know each other, we strengthen the fabric of our community. When we address tensions and speak truthfully to the unstated undercurrents, we make it possible for the web to heal and restore. Groups are powerful places for transformation, however the work of collective healing needs to be approached with great care and with the support of experienced guides, especially when touching upon collective trauma. Otherwise there is potential for more harm to be done.

Learn more

about how to strengthen the Web.

Weaving

How can we strengthen our relational web?

Inclusion

Who can we invite in more fully?

Truth & Reconciliation

What needs healing?

The Rhythm

How do we connect regularly?

Healthy communities have a steady heartbeat. People come together regularly to share their gifts and support one another. Over time, healthy communities develop a set of core practices that stoke the fire and help manifest the shared purpose. These recurring practices might include gatherings, rituals, ceremonies or other ways of being, learning and acting together.

Healthy rhythms are rooted in the value we create with and for each other. Every community is made up of tremendous gifts and ideally our practices allow us to regularly express and share them, supported by easily accessible communication channels. The consistency keeps the fire going and supports others in finding their way toward the warmth. Our rhythms are also part of bigger natural cycles, including seasons of bustling activity and seasons of rest.

Learn more

about how to strengthen the Rhythm.

Rituals

What practices help us connect meaningfully? What's a healthy rhythm?
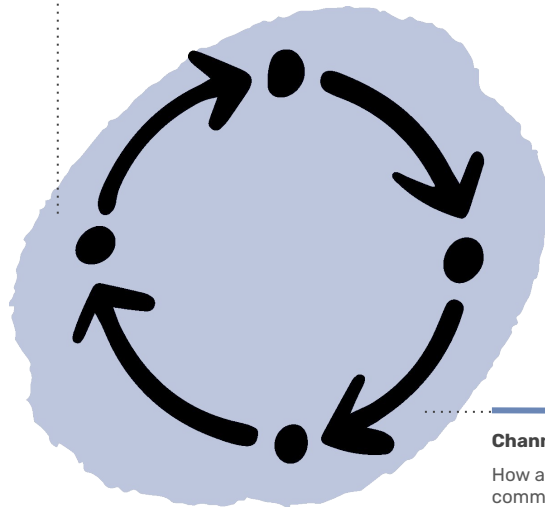
Channels

How and where do we communicate?

Listen to Māori change leader Evie O'Brien talk about rituals of place and encounter.
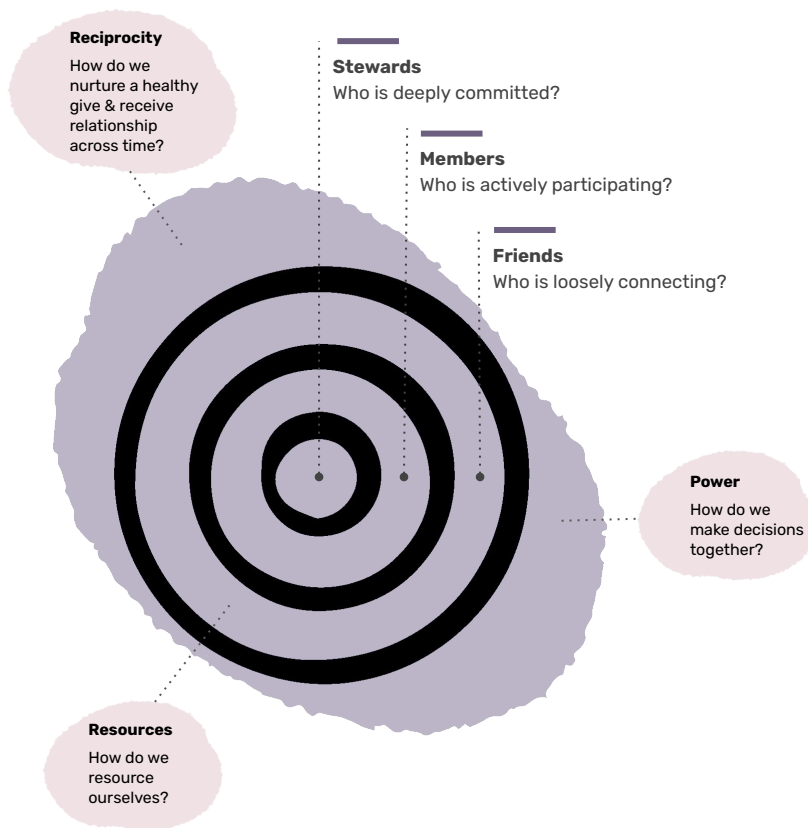
The Circles

What roles can we play?

In every community, some people contribute a lot and some very little, with many people in between. These different layers of participation are natural and change over time. However, if we leave them unnamed, they can lead to feelings of guilt, frustration and burnout. In a healthy community we **define clear roles and find ways to honor the different levels of engagement**.

In the inner circle we find people who take care of the whole (sometimes called *stewards, guardians* or *firekeepers)*. In the middle circle are people who actively participate in the community (*members* or *co-creators).* And in the outer circle are people who connect more loosely (*friends* or *followers)*. These roles are dynamic. People move between them as their lives change. A healthy community defines thresholds for joining different circles and creates agreements around reciprocity, resources and power.

Learn more

about how to strengthen the Circles.

Reciprocity
How do we nurture a healthy give & receive relationship across time?

Stewards
Who is deeply committed?

Members
Who is actively participating?

Friends
Who is loosely connecting?

Power
How do we make decisions together?

Resources
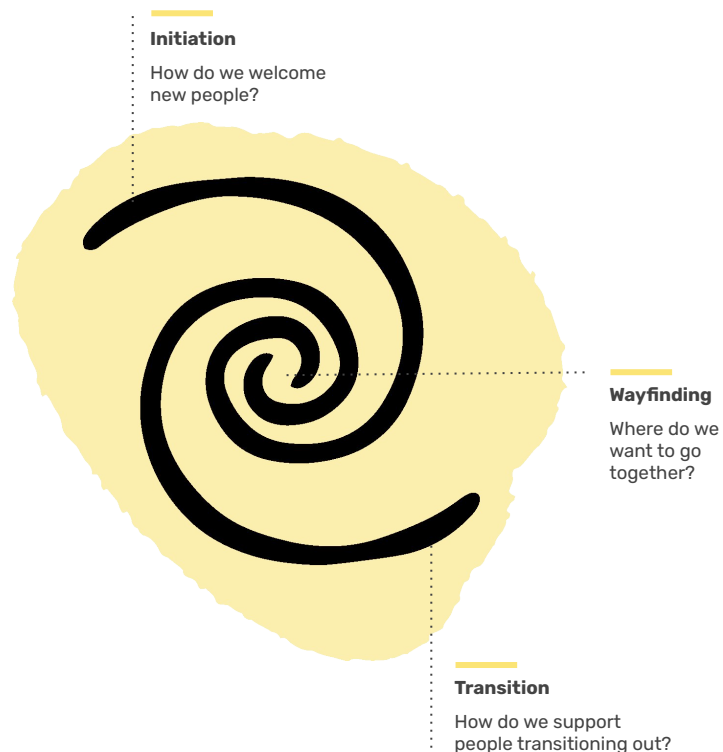How do we resource ourselves?

The Spiral

How do we journey together?

Communities are complex living organisms. Everything is in constant flow. People move in, around, and out of communities as commitments and contexts change. How do we support these moments of transition, both on the individual and collective level? And **what pathways help people move through the community consciously?**

Healthy communities honor transitional moments through ritualized activities. One way is to welcome new people with an initiation ritual, supporting them as they navigate the new environment. Another is to honor those leaving with a gratitude ritual. On a collective level, the community may need to regularly reinvent itself, coming into a conversation about what to keep or change as it continues to emerge and evolve. We are invited to continuously come back to the question: What does flourishing look like in our community?

Learn more

about how to strengthen the Spiral.

Initiation
How do we welcome new people?

Wayfinding
Where do we want to go together?

Transition
How do we support people transitioning out?

Playing with the elements and weaving them together

"All models are wrong but some are useful." – George Box

We hope that the elements in this framework will provide language for your community to come into deeper conversation and inspiration to weave a beautiful whole. And we invite you not to take this framework too seriously or literally. This is but one of infinite ways to think about community. May it serve as an initial spark to bring up the questions most relevant to your own context.

Some possible pathways you might explore:

- Deeply listen to your group and explore the questions that seem most relevant from this framework and beyond.

- Explore how the elements relate. For instance, you may find that each circle needs a different rhythm, or that the spiral is strengthened by nurturing the fire, or that the web may be fractured by a misalignment of the circles.

- Translate the framework into a form that meets the needs of your community: a drawing, a soundscape, a dance etc.

Zooming in

How do we nurture multiplicity?

Communities are naturally much more complex (and beautifully simple!) than our framework suggests. They often house **subgroups with their own sets of rhythms, spirals and circles**, frequently overlapping and interacting in dynamic ways.

The five elements of this framework are patterns that can replicate at multiple levels like fractals*, especially as communities grow in size. What is needed to support both the parts and the whole? And how can we weave our community in a way that harmonizes all the parts with each other?

Learn more

about how to work with fractals.

* A fractal is a shape that can be split into parts, each of which is a smaller copy of the whole, often repeating infinitely at different scales.

Fractals

How do we enable sub-groups?

Zooming out

How do we relate with the wider web?

Communities do not exist in isolation. While it's vital to tend to the relationships within, it's also important to care for the relationships between communities and the larger ecosystems.

What other communities, networks and movements are there? **How might we interweave and contribute to a larger whole?** And how are we relating to the more-than-human world we're all part of? These questions can lead us to harmonize rhythms between communities, create intentional pathways for learning and relating across communities, and nurture a field of mutual support for the wider ecosystem.

Learn more

about how to weave the bigger web.

Ecosystem

How do we interweave
with other communities?

Getting started

Weaving from the inside out

There are many ways to get started with a new community and weave all the elements together. One way of doing so is a process we call weaving from the inside out:

- Ignite an energizing fire: What's a compelling story to bring everyone together?

- Weave a committed core: Who feels called to be part of your inner circle to tend to the the community?

- Grow an active circle of members: What are meaningful activities to engage the community in a healthy rhythm?

- Connect with a larger group of friends: What are pathways for people to stay loosely in touch or participate more fully?

Learn more

about how to get started.

How to work with the framework?

Collaborating on the framework

[COMING SOON] We put together a **Miro board** with key questions for each element. We invite you to make a copy, choose what questions feel most relevant and bring your fellow community members to collaborate.

Capturing the essence

Do you want to capture key aspects of your community on a single page? We created a starting point with this **Community Weaving Canvas**. We invite you to make a copy and change the questions to fit your group's needs.

An invitation to learn together
From theory to practice

We hope this work will not stay theoretical, but become a living practice of community weaving. And we invite you to apply it, bend it, improve it and bring your own cultures and perspectives into it. There is so much community wisdom to re-discover!

Here are some ways to get involved:

- Check out the Community Weaving Handbook, our collection of practices and resources and add your own.

- Join our LinkedIn group to share experiences and meet other community weavers.

- Sign up for our newsletter to receive invitations for future learning opportunities and versions.

- Email us (hello@community-weaving.org) with ideas and feedback. We'd love to hear from you.
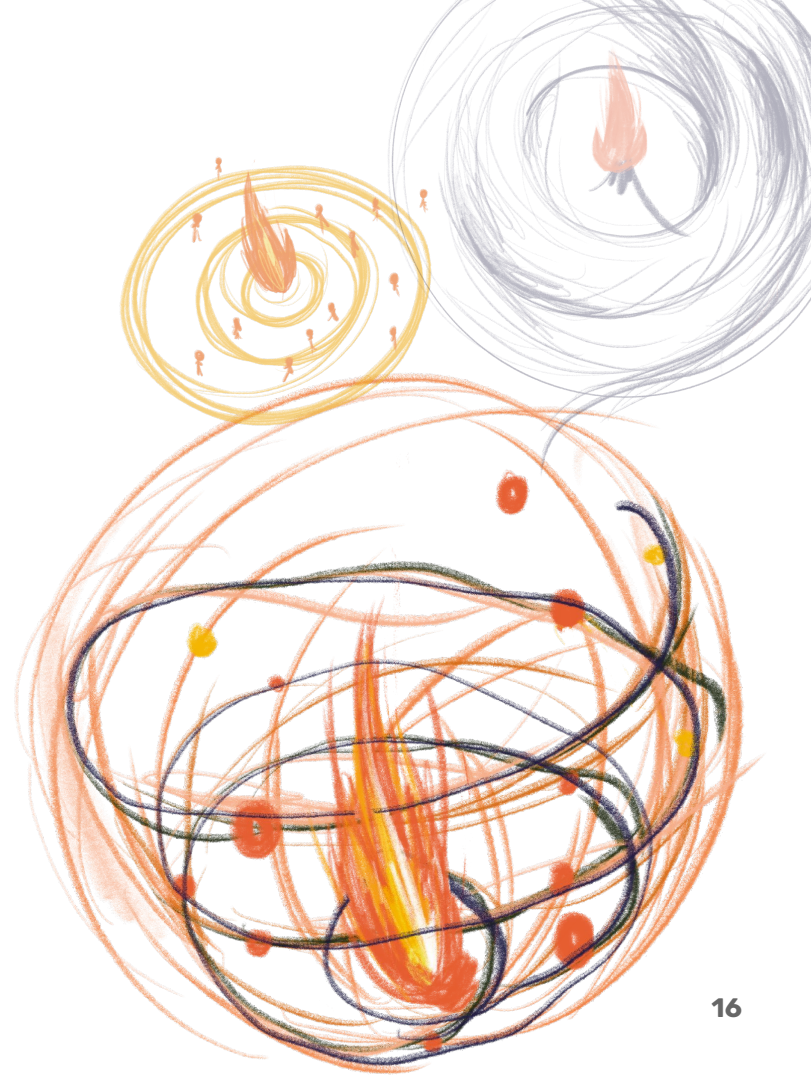
About us

Who is behind the framework?

This framework has been developed over several years with the generous support of many people. Read more about our journey and the people who shaped it. And email us (hello@community-weaving.org) to say hello.

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