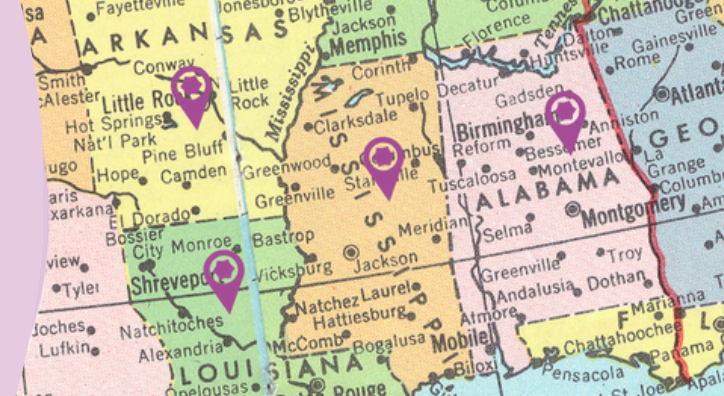


EXPANDING
the Bench
REGIONAL



OVERVIEW OF EXPANDING THE BENCH (ETB): REGIONAL

MAY 2026

INTRODUCTION TO ETB: REGIONAL

ETB: Regional (ETB:R) is a new effort under the ETB initiative that centers and prioritizes the unique histories, strengths, and needs of Indigenous and racially and ethnically diverse evaluators in various regions/states in the United States. Rooted in the principles of culturally responsive and equitable evaluation (CREE), ETB:R serves as a catalyst to strengthen local evaluation microsystems* through co-created, regionally tailored strategies for connection, capacity-building, professional development, and resource sharing.

This place-based approach recognizes that context matters, and that CREE practice must be grounded in authentic relationships and responsive to regional realities. By working deeply within regional microsystems, ETB:R generates learnings and practices that inform and strengthen the broader evaluation ecosystem.

This initiative launched in early 2025 as a pilot in the Southern U.S. (Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana), a region historically underrepresented in evaluation funding, leadership, and infrastructure. Learning and knowledge generated from this pilot will set the stage for replication in other regions nationally, allowing for the adaptation of successful strategies and the broader implementation of promising practices — still deeply rooted in local wisdom, CREE, and guided by the lived experiences of those historically excluded from shaping and thriving in the microsystem and/or ecosystem.

ETB: Regional Mission

To **connect and strengthen relationships between Indigenous and racially and ethnically diverse evaluators and their partners within their local evaluation microsystems** by advancing culturally responsive and equitable evaluation practices, expanding access to resources and opportunities, building capacity, and cultivating inclusive networks that shift power and drive systemic and community transformation.

ETB: Regional Vision

ETB: Regional **envisions a robust national evaluation ecosystem with thriving local evaluation microsystems** where Indigenous and racially and ethnically diverse evaluators and their partners are fully resourced, deeply connected, and leading work that, transforms inequitable structures and advances equity in their communities.

US South Pilot: Activities Conducted in 2025

- 1:1s with community members in the microsystem
- Building an ETB:R Advisory Team
- State scans to identify key contributors in the microsystem
- Microsystem Mapping (mapping survey)

*Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (2000), we think of Microsystem as a smaller but critical system or environment where the interactions within the environment are influenced by the geographic, cultural, and community factors unique to that place and it has a significant impact on the functioning or well-being of the larger ecosystem it is a part of.

LEARNINGS FROM THE U.S. SOUTH PILOT THUS FAR

Geographical & Historical Trauma:

The Southern region's histories of oppression, displacement, and divestment continue to shape trust, opportunity, and engagement with systems, requiring evaluation approaches grounded in CREE that acknowledge harm, honor resilience, and prioritize healing, relationships, and accountability to place.

Impact of Current Political Climate:

The current political climate across the South is creating additional barriers to advancing CREE, increasing the urgency for protective, adaptive, and community-rooted evaluation approaches that can persist through socio-political constraints while meaningfully advancing equity.

Acknowledgement of "Accidental" Evaluators as Microsystem Contributors:

Many people across the region are already carrying out evaluation functions without formal recognition, yet the exclusion of these "accidental evaluators" from traditional systems limits their access to funding, training, and professional networks.

Structural Inequities in the Evaluation Microsystem in the South:

Funding Inequity: Limited regional funding for evaluation, coupled with externally controlled funding decisions that often prioritize outside firms and approaches, leaves local evaluators and "accidental evaluators" under-resourced and limits investment in place-based expertise.

Opportunity Inequity: When evaluation priorities are defined externally, local evaluators and "accidental evaluators" are often positioned as implementers rather than leaders, limiting their access to leadership opportunities, professional growth, and decision-making spaces.

Pay Inequity: Evaluators and "accidental evaluators" in the region are often under-compensated or expected to take on evaluation responsibilities without equitable pay, creating challenges for sustainability, retention, and recognition of their contributions.

Academic Centralization: The concentration of evaluation work within academic institutions contributes to a fragmented microsystem in which community-rooted evaluators and small firms are often excluded from collaboration, networks, and decision-making.

LEARNINGS FROM ENGAGING DIVERSE VOICES

- Start with relationships by investing in connection, community trust, and local wisdom. Lead with values and partner with those who remain committed to equity and community-centered work.
- Build from what already exists by strengthening local expertise, networks, and community assets rather than recreating the wheel.
- Identify and invite local champions already nurturing the evaluation microsystem into this work, including those with strong regional roots who no longer reside in the area.
- While holding true to our North Star of serving Indigenous, racially, and ethnically diverse evaluators, being flexible to expand some activities to encompass white evaluators is important.
- Establishing sustainability hub/s in the microsystem and will be key to driving this work long-term with local contributors.
- Creating a roadmap helps to maintain momentum as new pathways of interest emerge based on learnings and needs.

Capacity Building and Resource Needs

Overall, through our 2025 activities, the following needs were identified: (a) increased access to resources that support locally-led evaluation work, (b) equitable compensation for evaluation-related labor, (c) expanded opportunities for professional growth, leadership, and recognition, (d) stronger networks and spaces for collaboration and shared learning, and (e) long-term investment in building individual capacity.

To learn more about ETB: Regional and the Southern Pilot, scan the QR code!

Connect with our team & get involved at team@expandingthebench.org.

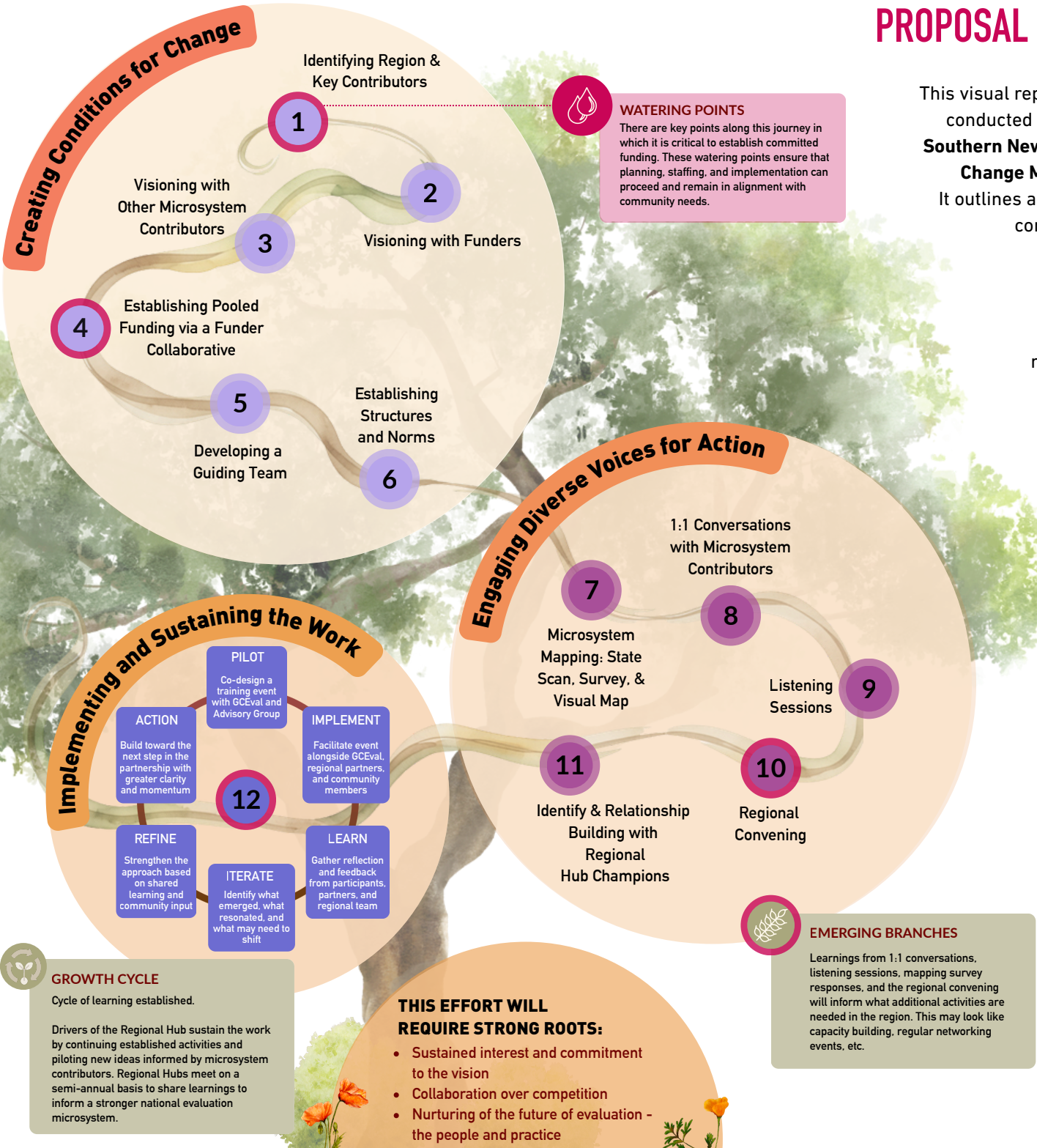


PROPOSAL FOR U.S. SOUTH ETB: REGIONAL

This visual represents ETB: R's approach, informed by the activities conducted in the **U.S. South pilot** thus far and the **California and Southern New England Regional Incubator** work, and grounded in **Change Matrix's Leading Through Change Framework (LTCF)**. It outlines a **collaborative, ecosystem-based process** that brings contributors* together to strengthen regional evaluation microsystems.

Centered on deep engagement with community, this work prioritizes listening to understand the unique needs, histories, and dynamics of each region through the perspectives of those who live and work there. Through relationship-building and shared learning, contributors envision and co-create the conditions for sustainable change and more equitable access to evaluation opportunities and practice. These insights inform adaptive, region-specific activities, while emerging partnerships help identify champions to sustain the work through locally led Regional Hubs, with support from ETB as needed. In turn, these Hubs continue the activity cycle to support long-term microsystem growth and sustainability.

***ETB'S WORKING DEFINITION OF CONTRIBUTORS:**
Evaluators: individuals who conduct evaluation (e.g. deep listening by conducting informal qualitative data collection and analysis, baseline data entry, synthesis of themes) in their professional role [i.e., 'accidental' evaluators]; funders: nonprofits; academic institutions; local, state and federal government agencies)



PHASES OF THE WORK

- INCUBATOR
- REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION
- REGIONAL HUB