

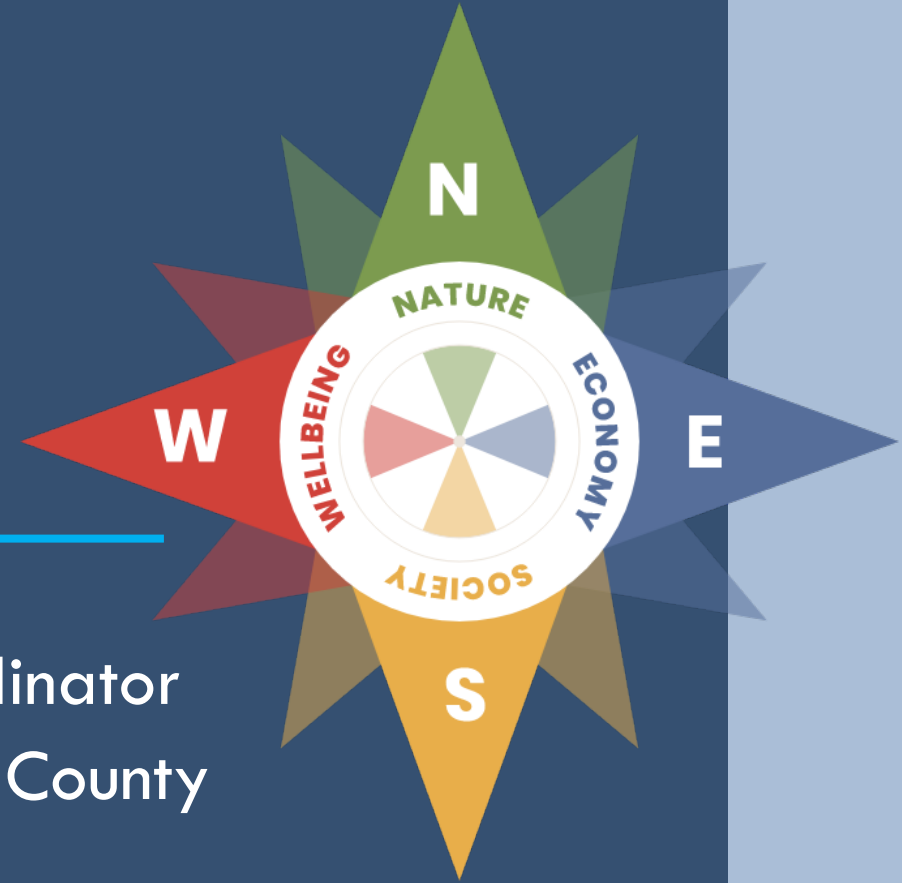
# WELCOME

Come in and Whack-A-Mole!!



## Systems Thinking For Sustainability

# Systems Thinking For Sustainability

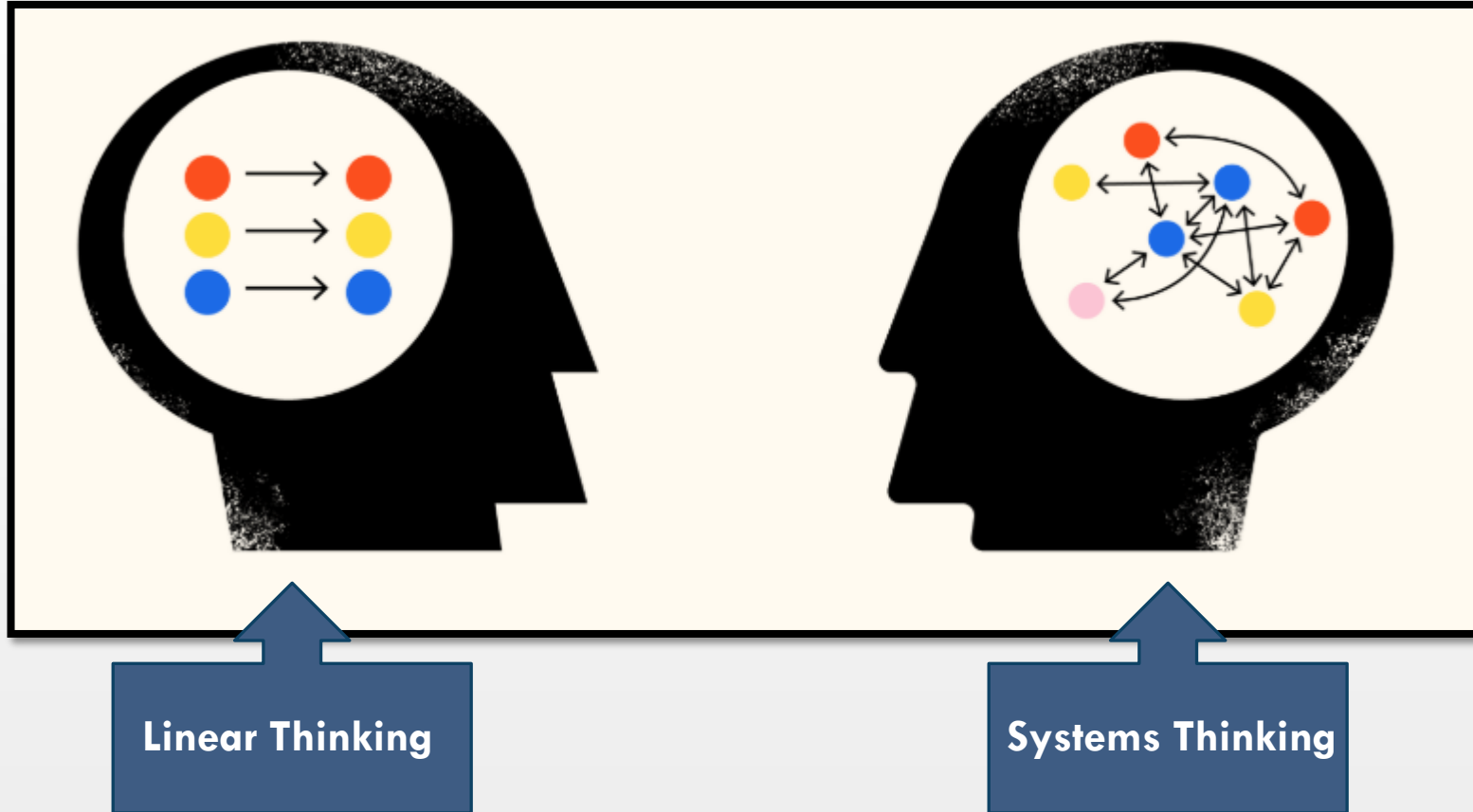


Theresa Greinig, Education Coordinator  
Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County  
(SWANCC)



2025 Illinois Circularity Conference: October 14-15, 2025, East Peoria, Illinois

# Linear versus Systems Thinking



## Linear Thinking

- If A happens, then B follows. It's logical, straightforward, and it works for simple problems.
- It can temporarily resolve issues, while often making the underlying challenge worse.

## Systems Thinking

- Systems thinking is NOT about making issues more complicated.
- It IS about making complexity more manageable by seeing the bigger picture through a new lens.

# Systems Thinking

## Taking a Step Back - Redefine Our Mindset



**Identify something specific and concrete.**

~~Why is my  
organization  
dysfunctional?~~

Why do our  
team meetings  
always run  
over time?

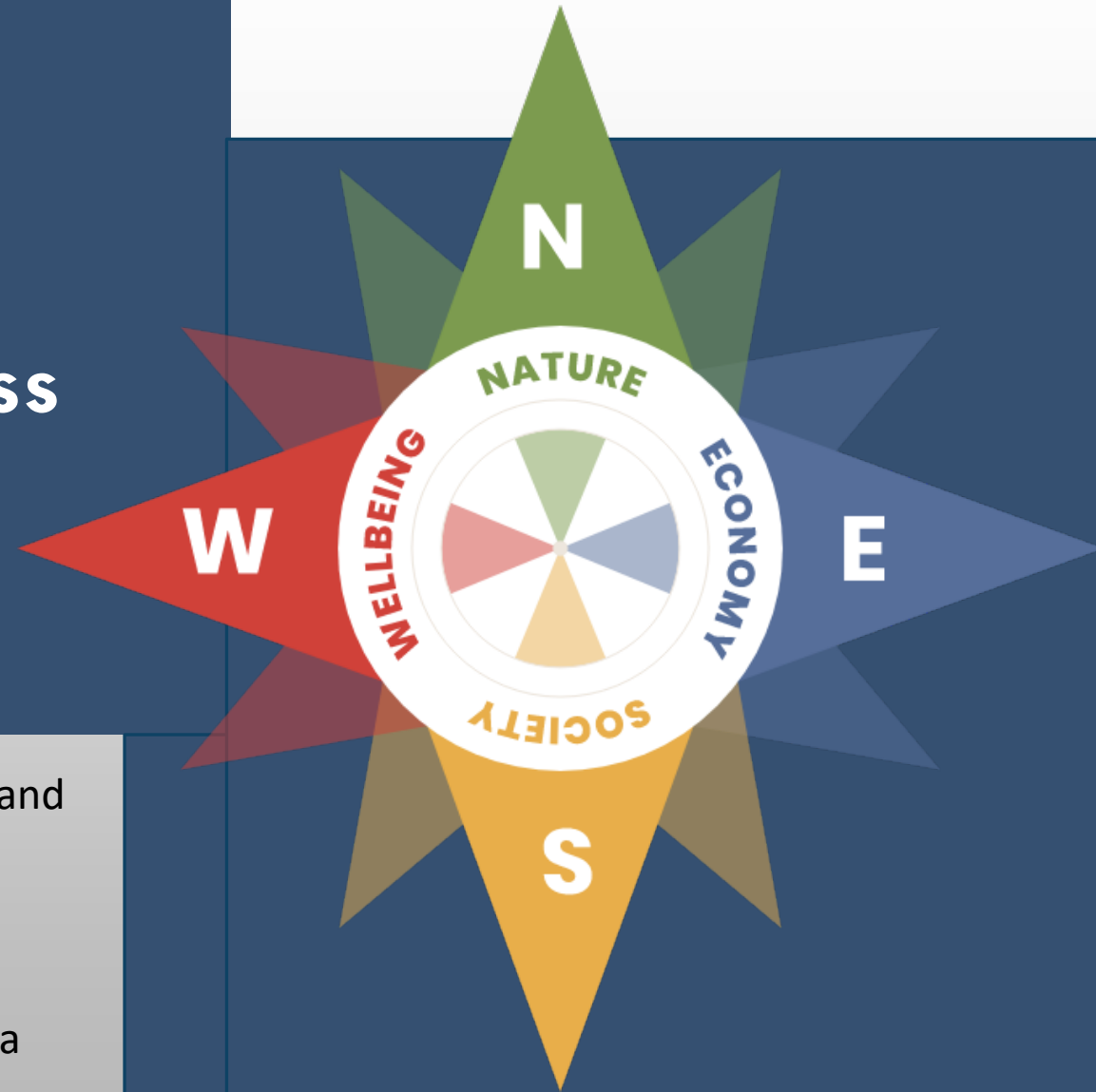
~~Why do I  
always feel  
stressed?~~

Why do I feel  
overwhelmed  
every Monday  
Morning?

# Systems Thinking Tools and The Sustainability Compass

A regular compass is a tool that helps us map territory and find our direction.

The Sustainability Compass is a tool that brings people together with a collective mission of sustainability and a shared vision for getting there.



# Building a Sustainable Habit of Mind



The sustainability compass encourages shared understanding through diverse “big picture” perspectives.



Every idea holds the potential for different interpretations, influenced by context and life experience.



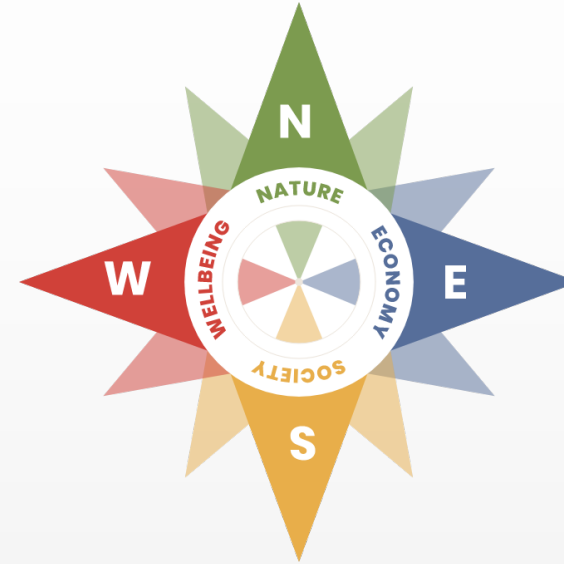
As a tool, the Sustainability Compass helps tease out different perspectives and enables us to recognize interconnections within issues.



These interconnections between ideas can encourage sustainability.



The Sustainability Compass is in alignment with the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



In 1977, the Sustainability Compass was created by Alan AtKisson. It was designed to translate sustainability frameworks into a tool that reflects systemic, diverse, and non-linear perspectives.

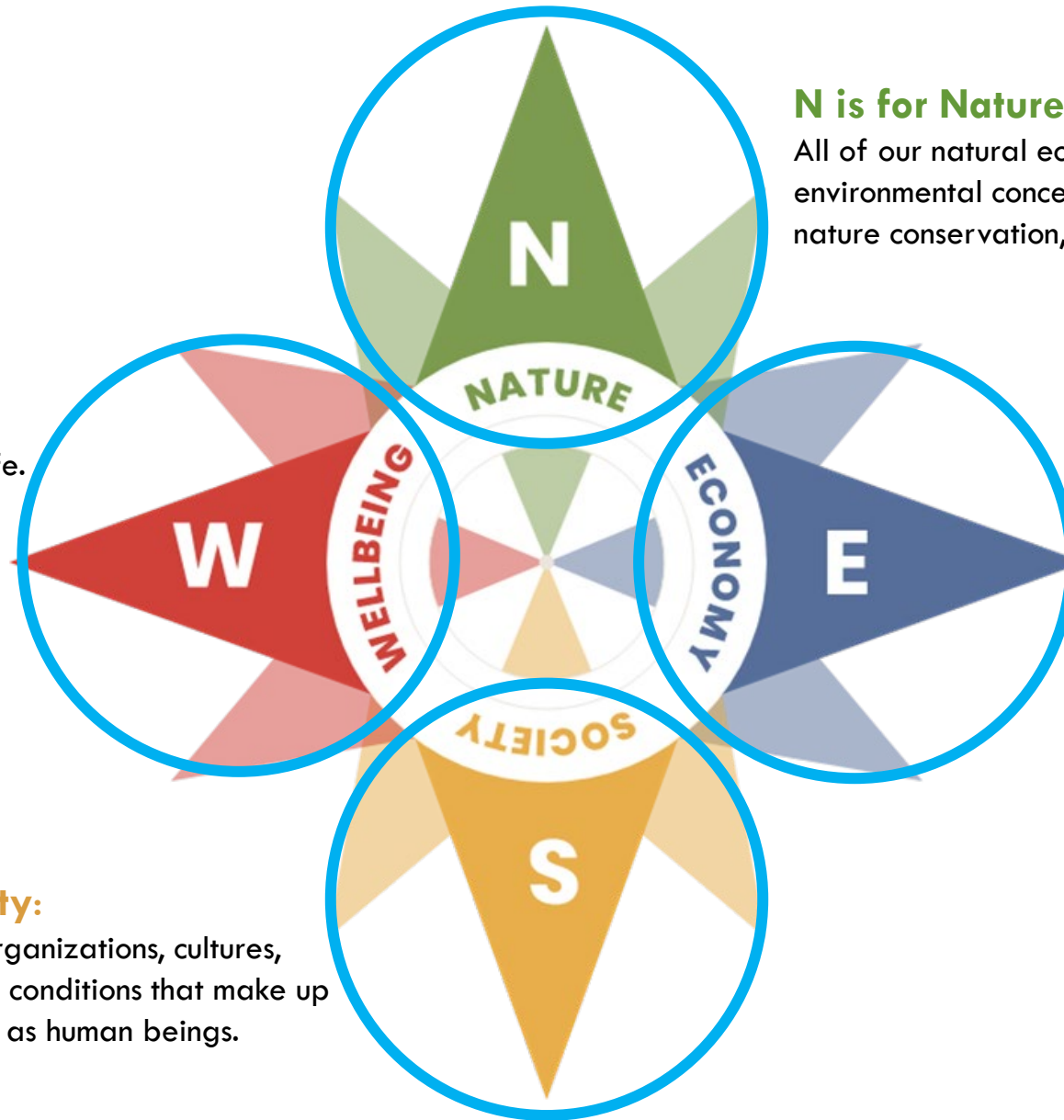
Alan AtKisson is a global sustainability leader, author, and creator of tools like the Sustainability Compass. He has advised governments, the UN, and organizations worldwide, blending science and creativity. He is a dual citizen with the U.S. and Sweeden; lives in Stockholm.

### **W is for Wellbeing:**

Our individual health, happiness, and quality of life.

### **S is for Society:**

The institutions, organizations, cultures, norms, and social conditions that make up our collective life as human beings.



### **N is for Nature:**

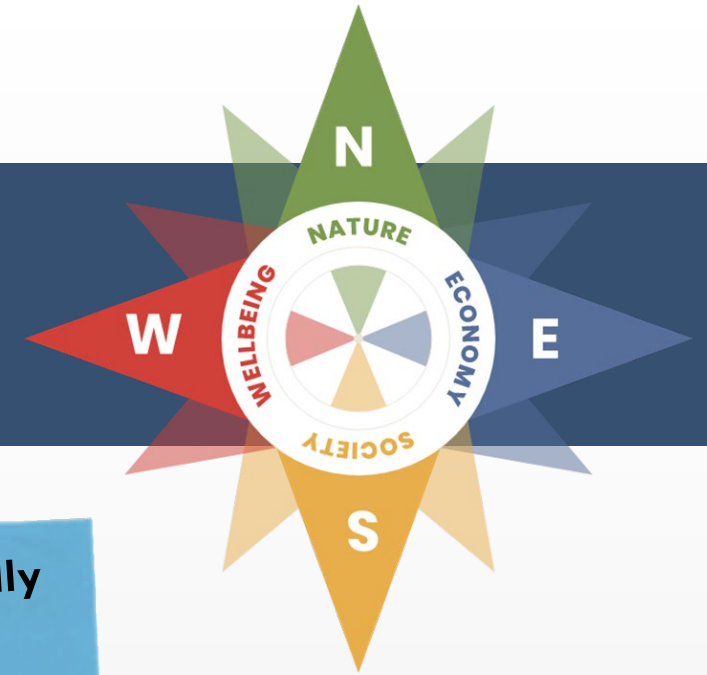
All of our natural ecological systems and environmental concerns, from ecosystem health and nature conservation, to resource use, and waste.

### **E is for Economy:**

The human systems that convert resources into food, shelter, technologies, industries, services, money, and jobs.



# How to Use the Sustainability Compass



## Pick A Focus

Place it in the center.

## Add Ideas

What impacts my topic?  
What is impacted by my topic?  
What do I still need to learn?

## Think analytically

Draw arrows to show interconnected ideas (cause and effect, relationships, stories, etc.).

## How To Make Change

Find the leverage points.  
Generate ideas to change the story.





Choose a table with a poster paper.



Quick introductions.



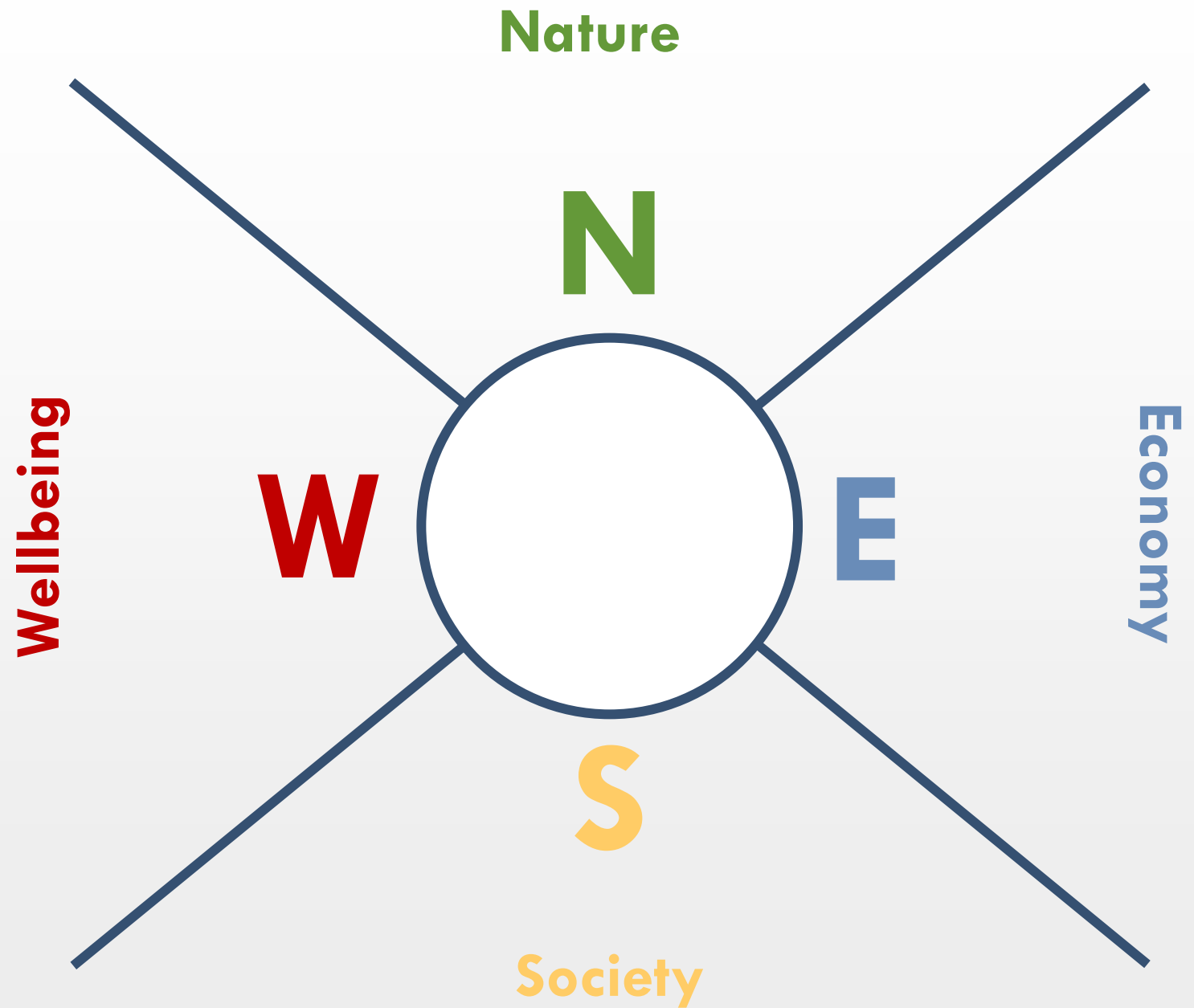
Choose a table topic, place it in the center circle.

Examples:

- Circularity
- Compost / food waste
- Climate change
- Community connections
- Energy
- Equity / equality
- Food security / insecurity
- Management of waste
- Partnerships
- Policy and planning
- Sustainable schools



Using sticky notes, add vocabulary to corresponding direction points.





Choose a table with a poster paper.



Quick introductions.



Choose a table topic, place it in the center circle.

Examples:

- Circularity
- Compost / food waste
- Climate change
- Community connections
- Energy
- Equity / equality
- Food security / insecurity
- Management of waste
- Partnerships
- Policy and planning
- Sustainable schools



Using sticky notes, add vocabulary to corresponding direction points.

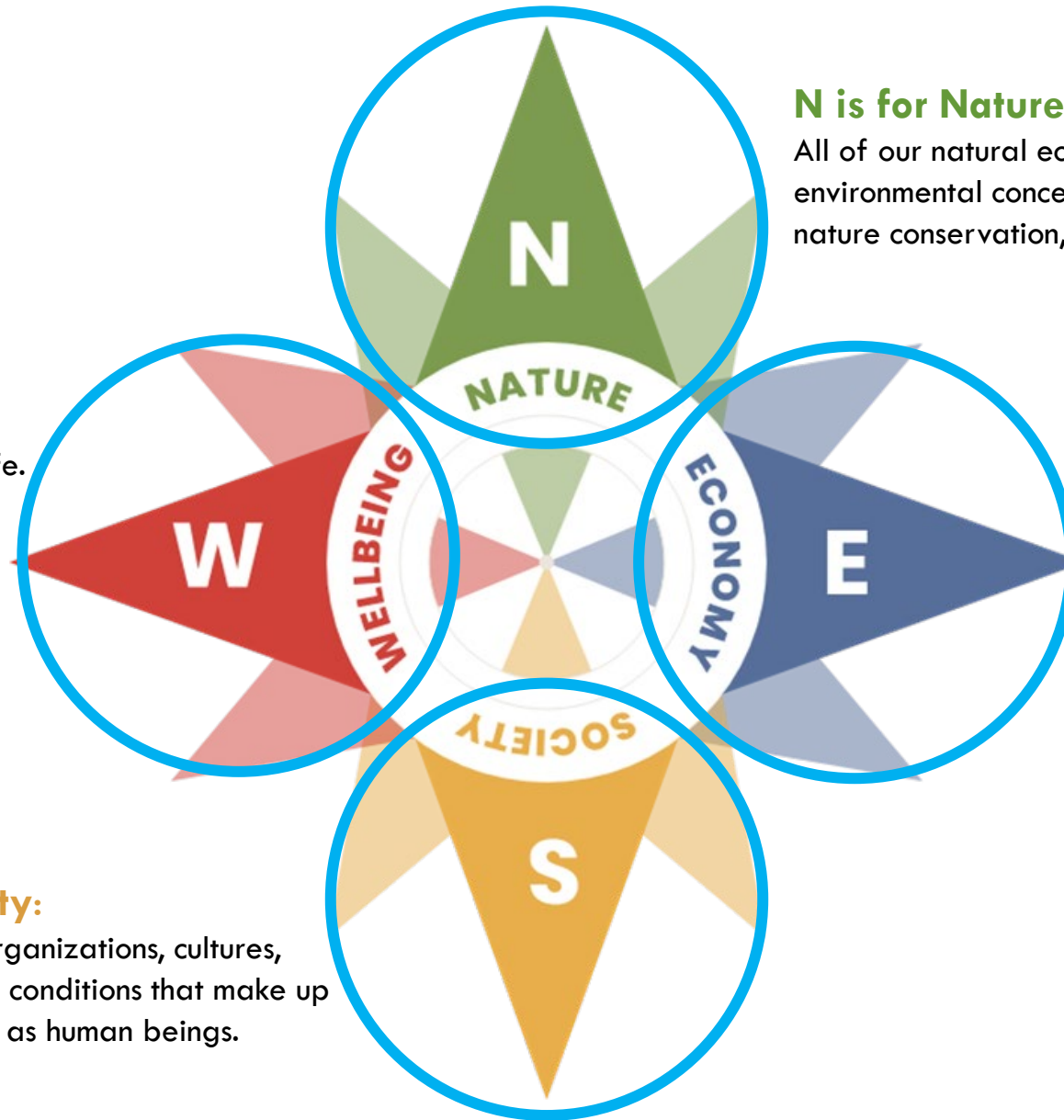


### **W is for Wellbeing:**

Our individual health, happiness, and quality of life.

### **S is for Society:**

The institutions, organizations, cultures, norms, and social conditions that make up our collective life as human beings.



### **N is for Nature:**

All of our natural ecological systems and environmental concerns, from ecosystem health and nature conservation, to resource use, and waste.

### **E is for Economy:**

The human systems that convert resources into food, shelter, technologies, industries, services, money, and jobs.



# Next Steps

## Think analytically

Draw arrows to show interconnected ideas (cause and effect, relationships, stories, etc.).



- What patterns are noticed?
- What might be causing these patterns?
- How do different parts of this situation influence each other?
- What assumptions might be shaping how people think about this?

# Share Results

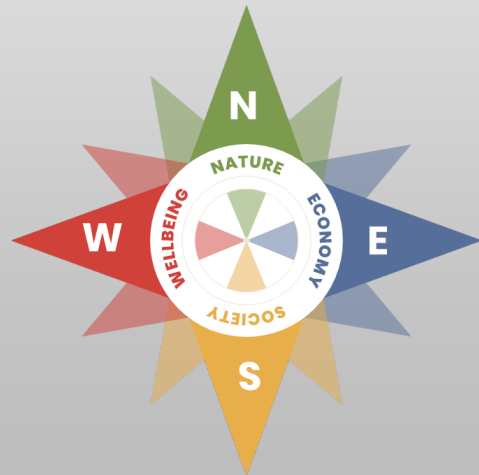
Topic chosen

Main points in each section

Connections / Patterns

Perspectives / Interpretations

Impacts



[compasseducation.org](http://compasseducation.org)

## Questions?



# Thank you!



Theresa Greinig,  
SWANCC Education Coordinator

[Theresa@swancc.org](mailto:Theresa@swancc.org)

2025 Illinois Circularity Conference: October 14-15, 2025 East Peoria, Illinois





# Enjoy Happy Hour!

