



2025 - 2027

STRATEGIC PLAN AND  
THEORY OF CHANGE

(FEB 2025)

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SETTLEMENTS  
AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES (IFS)

## 2025 - 2027 Strategic Plan Draft

### The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centers (IFS)

#### Who are we?

The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS) is a global movement of more than 11000 member associations, including multi-purpose, community-based organisations worldwide.

We believe in empowering the people who work for social justice by connecting, inspiring, and supporting an inclusive global community. Together, we build vibrant communities and social justice where people are respected and contribute to their full potential.

With a focus on building vibrant communities and promoting social justice, the IFS has a strong value proposition that guides its global movement. This value proposition is based on the belief that empowering individuals and communities can create a more inclusive world where everyone's contributions are valued.

Our member's settlements and neighbourhood centres provide opportunities for participation, inclusion, belonging and contribution to their wider community and the world. As community-based, non-profit organisations, they leverage local resources, strengths, and knowledge to create stronger communities. They provide tangible support and assistance to millions of people across the globe and contribute to improvements in community wellbeing, public health, social connection, disaster preparedness and resilience.

The IFS values collaboration as an essential tool in achieving its mission. By connecting member organisations worldwide, the IFS fosters community and encourages sharing ideas, resources, and best practices. Members can learn from one another through this collaboration and develop creative local solutions to global challenges.

Our model is one of working together to tackle global issues with local solutions. As a network, we identify emergent issues and voices from communities and elevate those, supporting people to speak for themselves and organising opportunities for them to do so

#### Our History

The movement started with the foundation of Settlements in large cities in the United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries in the late 19th century. The key idea was that people concerned about social issues could only be influential in working for improvements if they have direct experience with the existing problems by living among people in need and 'settling' into their neighbourhoods.

In 1873, Samuel Augustus Barnett, a 30-year-old curate in the Church of England concerned with the causes of poverty, proposed the establishment of a University Settlement in his

parish so that privileged students and disadvantaged residents could live as neighbours and improve their local conditions together.

In 1884, the University Settlement in London was established and named Toynbee Hall. The same year, another Settlement, Oxford House, opened in London to promote social justice through Settlements in deprived areas. The importance of the mutuality of the relationship between people from diverse backgrounds within the Settlement framework cannot be overstated. Through direct personal encounters, people were enabled to go beyond appearances and preconceptions and to get to know and value the individuality and humanity of other people, thus leading to tremendous respect for others and for themselves and a stronger sense of community. Several Toynbee Hall residents and visitors came from abroad, and the Settlement idea spread to other industrialised countries.

In 1886, Stanton Coit founded the "Neighborhood Guild", later renamed University Settlement in the lower East Side of New York and Jane Addams and her friend Ellen Starr established "Hull House" in Chicago in 1889 to specifically provide services for immigrants and refugees from other countries and societies.

The IFS was established in 1926. As we approach our centenary, we can reflect on our history and how the network has survived, developed, and thrived in diverse contexts. The IFS conference hosted by Locality in London/Liverpool, UK, will be an opportunity to endorse this theory of change and strategic approach and develop the connection between IFS members globally.

Today, IFS members represent thousands of local organisations in more than thirty countries, ranging from small self-help groups to large agencies. They are active across their communities' full range of social, economic, cultural, educational, and environmental needs. This diversity of practical skills is critical in tackling the complex problems facing communities and individuals today.

## Our Shared Mission

We strive to build an inclusive global community by empowering, inspiring and connecting people working locally for social justice.

## Our Shared Vision

A network of thriving local communities united and connected to nurture social justice, global wellbeing, and human rights.

## Our Shared Values

- Social justice
- Inclusivity
- Empowerment
- Collaboration
- Community building

- Respect for diversity
- Human rights
- Elevating the voices of our local community

## Our Theory of Change and Approach

### Our Context

IFS is built as a membership network. Our work is based on the contributions, needs, and opportunities we find within our global membership base. Our work must focus on this network and provide members with tangible impact and benefit.

We are responsible for widening the participation of settlements and neighbourhood centres in our network. Providing a platform for international relationships, we endeavour to reach areas and organisations not engaged in the IFS. We are committed to continuous quality improvement. We are equally committed to strengthening our collective voice to influence policy and decision-making in any area our members are in.

Although we have a small staff team and a host office to coordinate our activity, our work is voluntary. Our ambition is to build our income base to develop a stronger core function. Still, our theory of change needs to recognise the reality of where we are now. We cannot do everything, and we need to focus on where we can make an impact for our members.

### Our Outcomes

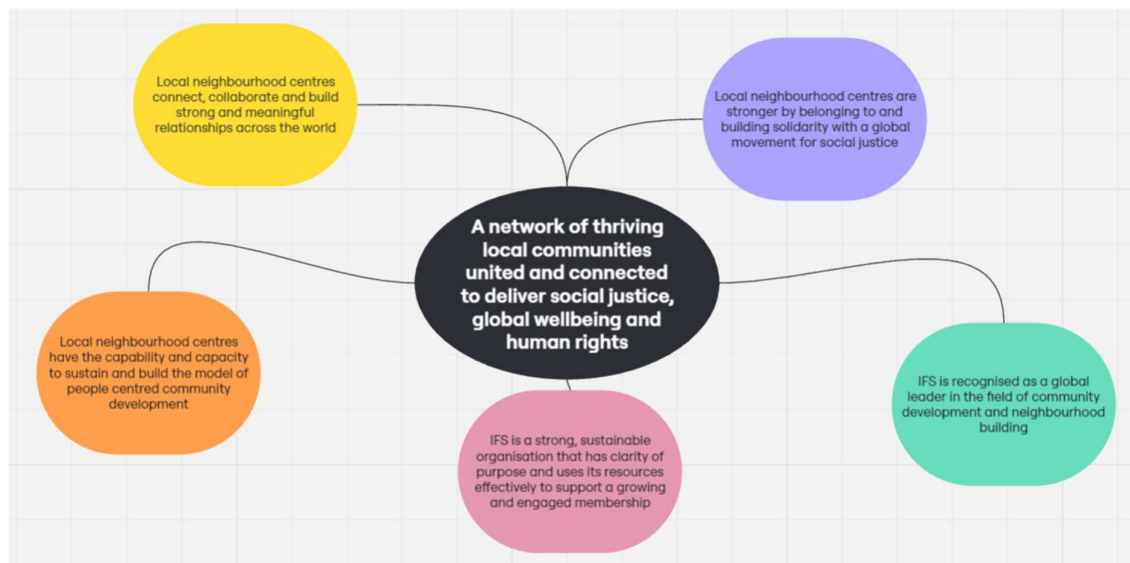
In September 2024, we agreed on our theory of change, which sets out our approach as a global network and our key outcomes.

Our overall goal:

**A network of thriving local communities united and connected to Nurture social justice, global wellbeing, and human rights.**

To achieve this, we have the following key outcomes:

- Local neighbourhood centres connect, collaborate, and build strong and meaningful relationships at all levels—staff, volunteers, and local communities—across the world.
- Local neighbourhood centres are stronger by belonging to and building solidarity with a global movement for social justice.
- Local neighbourhood centres have the capability and capacity to sustain and build the model of people-centred community development.
- IFS is recognised as a global leader in the field of community development and neighbourhood building whose members elevate the voice of local communities.
- IFS is a strong, sustainable organisation that has clarity of purpose and uses its resources effectively to support a growing and engaged membership.



## **Local neighbourhood centres connect, collaborate, and build strong and meaningful relationships at all levels—staff, volunteers, and local communities—across the world.**

### **Why did we agree on this outcome?**

As a global network of local community organisations and national membership bodies, we need to be clear about the added value we bring to these organisations globally. The starting point for all our work- our unique and specific contribution – is to support building relationships and connecting members globally. This is why this is our first outcome- it is the building block of our approach. If we achieve this, it will enable other things to become possible.

### **What needs to be in place to achieve this outcome? (Enabling factors)**

A strong and stable IFS which is clear about its priorities and has the right capacity.

Members need to understand what IFS is all about, how to engage and our shared vision and goals.

There needs to be time and space for people to get to know each other and develop relationships that foster meaningful engagement, trust and collaborative action. We need to build our international community with intention and focus.

### **What does this tell us about our strategic priorities?**

Time and space means focusing on a programme of events to bring members together- this could include online sessions and face-to-face events. It is a clear priority for IFS and could consist of knowledge-sharing sessions, training and development, collaborative workshops on research, affinity groups and local and regional gatherings.

We also need to focus on finding funded opportunities to bring members together, e.g., exchange programmes, job shadowing, etc.

We need to maximise attendance at our IFS conferences and ensure that this turbo charges ongoing relationship building.

We need to examine how global and regional groups/networks can support this outcome.

**Local neighbourhood centres are stronger by belonging to and building solidarity with a global movement for social justice.**

**Why did we agree on this outcome?**

Global solidarity is a fundamental part of movement building. By building this solidarity, we can strengthen the impact of local community organisations by giving them confidence in their practice, bolstering their work through exchanging ideas and benchmarking and providing practical support and knowledge sharing. As a global membership network with a small central office, we cannot rely on an extensive list of members' "benefits," providing a cash return on becoming a member. We offer and need members to participate in our network based on mutual solidarity, which needs to be woven into our strategic priorities.

**What needs to be in place to achieve this outcome? (Enabling factors)**

Members need to be aware of the IFS's vision and goals and committed to movement building.

Members need to be able to participate in IFS activities.

Members need to know each other and be able to interact easily with each other and with IFS.

Members need to be able to input into IFS priorities and have shared ownership of our strategy.

**What does this tell us about our strategic priorities?**

Effective communication with and between members is critical and must be a significant priority. This means ensuring the right messaging, content, and communication channels for members. Communication materials need to be developed, available and accessible. Members must be engaged and know where to find the right information, resources, and contacts. What online tools can support this goal?

We also need to make sure our membership processes are fit for purpose. What does it mean to be an IFS member? What is expected of a member, and what can they expect from IFS? How does signing up for membership differ from being an affiliate member? We need to answer these questions.

We need to use our assets more to build a movement- our history, practice, impact, and power as a global movement.

**Local neighbourhood centres have the capability and capacity to sustain and build the model of people-centred community development.**

**Why did we agree on this outcome?**

As a global network, we want to help improve the capacity and capability of local neighbourhood centres. Our model- local community-led multi-purpose organisations at the heart of community life- has enormous power, and we need to support it, strengthen it and expand it to new places. People working or volunteering with neighbourhood centres have a difficult job- working on often complex issues, with challenging circumstances such as underfunding and insufficient resources to meet demand. We aim to help members deal with these pressures while continuing to impact their communities positively.

**What needs to be in place to achieve this outcome? (Enabling factors)**

A collective understanding of our neighbourhood model with a clear articulation of what it means.

In-person and online opportunities to visit and study

Opportunities for people to learn and increase knowledge and skills.

Accessible information and resources that are translated as required.

**What does this tell us about our strategic priorities?**

We need a programme of learning and development opportunities and our events programme to reflect these priorities.

We need to agree on a narrative, with evidence and case studies, on our model and how it impacts us. Using the centenary as framing for this would allow us to use our collective and individual heritage and resources to point to the present and future of our movement and how the model has adapted and thrived, as well as the challenges and barriers. We need a clear plan for promoting the model- e.g. in our activities and events.

We need to partner with allies and potential supporters to further our model.

We need a straightforward approach to resources- we need to use existing resources better and ensure we are signposting members' existing work more. Where possible, we may need to develop added resources.

**IFS is recognised as a global leader in the field of community development and neighbourhood building whose members elevate the voice of local communities.**

**Why did we agree on this outcome?**

We have power in our global network and need to use our influence effectively. We can maximise our reputation and our contribution to policy development at an international level, we can use this to effect change to support our movement and our members. In addition, we can also help members to use their influence more effectively at a national or local level.

**What needs to be in place to achieve this outcome? (Enabling factors)**

Strong practice, case studies and evidence

Connections with key allies, including existing research.

Visibility of IFS and our members with key stakeholders

Through providing platforms that enhance the voice of those we work with

**What does this tell us about our strategic priorities?**

The dual focus of our influencing work- playing an active role with international audiences and supporting local and national members to be effective influencers at that level- means that we must be clear about our influencing priorities and use our resources efficiently. Reports, research, and projects should be developed to influence priorities.

We need to ensure that we have an agreed and shared understanding of our models and approaches, our influencing priorities and the values we bring to our influencing work.

We will need to build this priority into our events and knowledge development programme. We will need to consider how to develop our policy and public affairs capability at a global level, collaborating with our members who will be ahead of us in their skills and knowledge.



**IFS is a strong, sustainable organisation that has clarity of purpose and uses its resources effectively to support a growing and engaged membership.**

**Why did we agree on this outcome?**

This is a supporting outcome and the platform for all our work. We must build up our organisational capacity and capability to achieve more. We need to build a growing network of members, particularly in areas where we have not traditionally had a strong footprint.

**What needs to be in place to achieve this outcome? (Enabling factors)**

Stable finances and a balance between income and expenditure

Solid staffing and resources that can deliver our plans.

Clarity of roles, strategy, and purpose

Strong member engagement

**What does this tell us about our strategic priorities?**

Organisational development is a critical success factor in delivering our strategic plan. Investing time and resources into building a stronger organisational platform for our work must be a top priority.

The transition of the IFS office to Sydney is an opportunity for all IFS members to review all our processes and decision-making and focus on how we can be more effective as an organisation.

Income generation is one of the prominent and early priorities. This has come up as one of the most significant priorities, which should take precedence over most other activities for our limited staff resources and board resources.

## Our Strategic Plan 2025 – 2027

### Getting from a Theory of Change to a Movement of Change

We have developed a strategic plan to guide our actions and initiatives from 2025 to 2027, recognising that meaningful change requires collaboration.

One of our main objectives in this strategic plan is to mobilise the settlement/neighbourhood centre movement for change, involving IFS members and partners. We believe that by bringing together our global community of member organisations, we can amplify our impact and drive meaningful progress towards building vibrant communities and promoting social justice.

We envision this movement as a collaborative effort where each member actively promotes our values and achieves our goals. Together, we can create a ripple effect of positive change that extends beyond our communities and reaches all corners of the world. Through this movement for change, we hope to inspire and empower individuals from all levels of society to act towards creating a more inclusive and just society. We invite everyone to join us on this journey.

### Methodology for Strategic Planning

At IFS, we believe effective planning requires a thorough understanding of internal and external factors. Therefore, in developing our strategic plan, we will use various traditional tools and theory of change methodologies to ensure a comprehensive and well-informed approach.

This Strategic Plan was developed based on initial discussions by the IFS Board in Romania (2023), culminating in a Theory of Change. In the lead-up to the IFS Board meeting in Cleveland, USA, in September 2024, a survey was prepared for IFS Board members to give input into the strategic priority discussions.

The result of a three-day planning session with the IFS Board is below. Our strategic plan outlines our goals, objectives, and potential strategies for the next four years as we achieve our mission and vision. In transitioning the IFS Office from Helsinki to Sydney in 2025, the first year is dedicated to laying the foundations for the years ahead.

### IFS Board Aspirations

The IFS Board's aspirations for the next four years include securing internal clarity and cohesion and building a solid foundation for our network to achieve more impact. At the heart of our strategy up to 2027 is building connections between our members and making the work of IFS relevant to them. We will also work in partnership with others, including other influential global stakeholders. Working together can increase our influence in promoting social justice and creating positive change in communities worldwide. Our strategic plan will guide us towards achieving these aspirations.

## Our Strategic Approach

At the Strategic Planning sessions in Cleveland, Ohio, in September 2024, the five key outcomes of our theory of change were agreed upon, as set out above. To guide our work towards achieving these goals, we have set out four key strategic priorities:

**Relationship building:** We will focus on strengthening relationships within our global community, fostering collaboration and solidarity between member organisations.

**Knowledge and capacity building:** We will facilitate sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices. We will also provide training and capacity building among members to support their development and impact.

**Advocacy:** We will advocate for social justice, human rights, and inclusivity on a global level, amplifying the voices of our members and communities. We will support members to advocate effectively at a national and local level.

**Organisational development:** We will build income streams and strengthen the organisational foundations of the IFS to achieve a more significant impact.

We will review our progress against this plan annually, update it accordingly, and conduct a complete evaluation to inform the following strategy in 2028.

## Strategic Approach 1

**Relationship building:** We will focus on strengthening relationships within our growing global community, fostering collaboration and solidarity between member organisations.

### Priorities for the next three years

2025

1. **Clarity of purpose:** Refresh key narrative and communications about IFS, our purpose, and our membership to enable better membership engagement
2. **Enhance Communications:** Implement robust outward-facing communications and use channels to share knowledge and connect.
3. **Launch Marketing Campaigns:** Promote new membership through marketing campaigns.
4. **Events:** Agree on a plan for a series of webinars and organise ongoing themed and regional working groups to involve more members—plan for future events such as IFS socials and affinity learning groups.
5. **Conference:** IFS conference to be held in the UK, hosted by Locality to involve at least one hundred people from non-UK IFS members

2026

1. **Events:** Continue and develop a programme of webinars and events to connect members, including IFS socials and affinity learning groups.
2. **Support projects to connect members:** Develop and support collaborative projects to connect members (e.g. social justice initiatives, twinning, and exchange programmes).
3. **Publish and Share Knowledge:** Publish reports, feature members in publications, and maintain an open database with a yearly report.

2027

1. **Events:** Continue and develop a programme of webinars and events to connect members
2. **Celebrate Community:** Organise an International Day celebrating all settlement and neighbourhood centres.
3. **Continue Enhancing Communications:** Focus on evidence-based solutions highlighting our member's impact.
4. **Conference:** The IFS conference is to be held to involve at least one hundred people from non-host country IFS members

### Performance Indicators

- Engagement metrics, i.e., from webinars and workgroups.
- Increase in social media and communication channel reach.
- Growth in membership numbers

## Strategic Approach 2

**Knowledge and capacity building:** We will facilitate sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices. We will also provide training and capacity building among members to support their development and impact.

### Priorities for the next three years

2025

1. **Develop a knowledge-sharing programme: Build key priority sessions on global interest issues into** events with processes in place to maximise attendance, with early invitations and time and budget allocated.
2. **Promote community development models:** Develop a paper on neighbourhood centre approaches around Community Development models to be included in the events programme; collaborate with academics, policymakers, and partners.
3. **Simple online resource hub:** Record and share webinars for virtual engagement; signpost key documents from IFS and members and links to key partners.

2026

1. **Programmes and projects:** Seek funding and partnerships to develop projects focused on learning, development, and best practices.
2. **Continue programme of knowledge sharing:** Regular opportunities for people to participate; Conduct regular training and webinars for peer groups; consider the role of regional groups.
3. **Review online resources:** Examine current resources and commission further resources, collaborating with members to ensure we build the capacity of their staff.
4. **Explore the viability of Creating an Inclusive IFS Nation:** Develop *ideas for an inclusive IFS nation led by young people*.

2027

1. **Develop Open-Source Library:** Build an open-source library of specialised member programs.
2. **Continue knowledge sharing programme:** Regular opportunities for people to participate; Conduct regular training and webinars for peer groups—long-term knowledge and learning plan in place, including future conferences and events.
3. **Provide Evidence and Resources:** IFS provides evidence, resources, and research for neighbourhood centres to aid them in attracting investment and maximising impact.

### Performance indicators

- Number of successful partnerships and collaborations formed.
- Usage statistics of the open-source library
- Increase in staff competency and knowledge.
- Number of training sessions and webinars conducted.

## Strategic Approach 3

**Advocacy:** We will advocate for social justice, human rights, and inclusivity on a global level, amplifying the voices of our members and communities. We will support members to advocate effectively at a national and local level.

### Priorities for the next three years

2025

1. **Support Local influencing:** Develop a plan to support members to influence effectively within a global lens; including considering future research, resources, reports, and events bringing together policy and public affairs leads.
2. **Global advocacy plan:** Agree on key priorities and plans for supporting Advocacy and a global and local level with international bodies. Continue to engage and have a presence with UN bodies.
3. **Events:** Build policy and Advocacy into event programmes (e.g. training and workshops on community organising, policy development, specific policy issues).

2026

1. **Support Local influencing:** Continue providing opportunities for members to enhance their local community's influence; Share, promote and support member research efforts, reports, and best practices.
2. **Global Advocacy:** Amplify our presence in the UN and other platforms and encourage members to engage in international advocacy work.
- **Strengthen IFS Working Groups:** Review working groups and encourage members to join IFS working groups. Emphasising the importance of strengthening institutional and structural capacity across all six continents, balancing regional and international approaches. Respecting each region's different needs and approaches and regional self-determination should be supported without stifling it.
3. **Foster Partnerships:** Establish partnerships between members and research institutions.

2027

1. **Support Local influencing:** Continue providing opportunities for members to enhance their influence; Undertake/ promote research, reports, and best practices.
2. **Global Advocacy:** Amplify our voice in the UN and other platforms and encourage members to engage in international advocacy work.
3. **Ongoing Training:** Maintain and expand training and workshops on community organising and Advocacy.

## Performance Indicators

- Usage statistics of communication materials.
- Member engagement and feedback.
- Feedback on impact from key partners
- Number of reports published annually.

## Strategic Approach 4

**Organisational development:** We will build income streams and strengthen the organisational foundations of the IFS to achieve a more significant impact.

### Priorities for the next three years

2025

1. **Successful office transition:** Define roles and responsibilities clearly and communicate key priorities and budget plans.
2. **Secure and Manage Resources:** Efficiently manage finances, staffing, and resources, reviewing where improvements can be made to membership processes (e.g. recruitment, fee payment, etc.)
3. **Establish a Strong Structure:** Build a supportive and facilitating structure.
4. **A call to action for members:** Establish a clear set of principles and specific reasons to join and remain in IFS, with a straightforward and agreed approach to membership categories.

2026

1. **Build income:** Build and strengthen ties with relevant institutions such as the UN, EU, and others to secure funding with at least one new funding partner.
2. **Expand Global Footprint:** Increase membership and activities in underrepresented areas and agree on an approach to supporting and working with regional groups.
3. **Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion:** Develop a DEI plan for all IFS activities (e.g. use of language and approaches to maintain cultural sensitivity and relevance; consider a values statement for all members of DEI).
4. **Use Digital Tools:** Review the use of digital tools to improve communication, training, and networking

2027

1. **Continue to build income** with core and project funding to support IFS activities to increase paid staff capacity for the IFS office.
2. **Provide Translation Facilities:** Support democratic participation with translation facilities and, if done well, consider the development of a social enterprise model.
3. **Growing membership and engagement:** Growing membership and review to ensure all members can participate regardless of financial capacity and highlight the value of global networks.

### Performance Indicators

- Financial Health and Sustainability: Track financial health and sustainability metrics.
- Member Satisfaction and Engagement: Review member satisfaction and engagement levels
- Resource Efficiency: Monitor efficiency in resource allocation and usage.



## Appendices

- IFS STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY RESULTS
- Transitional plans for the host office
- Year 1 plan - simple version

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