



Strategic Plan

2026–2031

Navigating our changing world





We recognise the important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.

The Commonwealth Charter

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Introduction

We are at a pivotal moment in history where the convergence of global challenges necessitates transformative cooperation and action across all nations. The Foundation’s new strategic planning cycle provides a timely opportunity to reassess the changing multilateral and geopolitical landscapes, to build on our experiences from the past five years, and harness new and emerging ways of working.

← Commonwealth Poet Laureate, Selina Tusitala Marsh, at the 2025 High Commissioners’ Festive Poetry Evening

We have refreshed our vision and mission, refined our priorities, and adapted our structure, to strengthen our commitment to advancing the interests of the people of the Commonwealth. In doing so, we have sought to develop a strategy that positions us to better address the pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities that the Commonwealth and its civil society and citizens face: ensuring that our work remains relevant, impactful and aligned to our collective goals.

Article 16 of the Commonwealth Charter recognises the ‘important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.’ Our new strategy strives to capture the spirit of that declaration, ensuring that the Commonwealth of

Nations remains a ‘Commonwealth of the People’ whose collective purpose is driven by the aspirations of its citizens, and where member countries are committed to processes that are responsive to civil society.

Our work focuses on empowering the active and constructive participation of Commonwealth citizens in governance, fostering vibrant and free civil societies, and advancing the shared principles and ideals that unite us. We are steadfast in our commitment to standing in solidarity with the people of the Commonwealth, leveraging our resources, expertise, platforms, and partnerships to amplify their voices and advance their interests. The Foundation’s unique positioning enables us to connect citizens and civil society with intergovernmental processes at scale, supporting democratic renewal grounded in legitimacy, integrity, and accountability—achievements that neither traditional multilateral institutions nor isolated civil society actors can fully realise.

A Peer Review Committee was convened to provide steering and expertise throughout the strategic planning process, which unfolded in three phases. The Committee comprised the Chair of the Foundation, Chairs of the Executive Committee and Grants Committee, select members of the Foundation’s Board

of Governors and Civil Society Advisory Governors, and representatives from across the Commonwealth system.

The first phase began in October 2025 with an independent external review of the Foundation’s 2021–2026 strategic plan, including interviews with key stakeholders and an analysis of environmental trends, culminating in our **Strategy Review Report**. The second phase, from January 2026, focused on drafting and defining priorities, underpinned by consultations with civil society partners across all Commonwealth regions to ensure the strategy is firmly grounded in the realities of the people we serve. In May 2026, we moved into our final phase where we further refined the strategic plan by listening to feedback and aligning budgets and workplans, ready to launch on 1 July 2026.

The Foundation extends its thanks to all those involved for dedicating their time and expertise to guide the development of this strategic plan, ensuring a robust and inclusive process that reflects our collective vision for the future.

→ Participants at an agricultural workshop in Sierra Leone





1 Our changing world

The Foundation embarks on this new strategic plan against a backdrop marked by threats to the global ‘international rules-based order’ and its multilateral architecture, through fundamental geopolitical shifts, economic pressures, and the increasing challenges of a changing climate.

These threats offer a strategic opportunity for the Commonwealth to leverage its unique position as a values-based multilateral system that stands for, and defends, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, and inclusive governance, and that helps its member countries achieve their ambitions of ***economic, environmental, and democratic resilience***.

The Commonwealth system, guided by the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, plays a crucial role for ***middle and small powers*** to build on common strengths and beliefs within a ***trusted multilateral community*** in which ***all states have an equal vote and all people are considered equal***.

Previous page: Workers planting mangroves at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica (UNEP / CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

→ Vishal Prasad, Director of the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change, at the International Court of Justice, Netherlands



1.1 Macro trends relevant to our work

While the pressures that are transforming the landscape for civic participation, governance, and development are not entirely new when considered individually, their simultaneous and mutually reinforcing nature creates a vastly different operating environment for Commonwealth civil society. Our *Strategy Review Report* identified five converging structural trends that highlight the value of trusted intermediaries like the Foundation and reinforce the need for sharper strategic focus.

1 Deepening and expanding intersectional inequalities

Discrimination linked to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, and migration status is no longer experienced in isolation but increasingly through intersecting forms of inequality and exclusion. Social polarisation is intensifying everywhere, with social media platforms having transformed from tools of mobilisation into the means for disinformation to spread at scale and speed. Within this trend, backlash against women's rights and gender equality is rolling back hard-won gains with those facing multiple inequalities bearing the heaviest burden.

2 Widening wealth gaps and constrained economic opportunities

Rising living costs and shrinking opportunities for decent work are deepening the widespread perception that economic systems protect and reward the already privileged. With the erosion of government protection and redistribution systems, these pressures are now felt more directly in everyday life—well beyond traditional marginalised groups—fueling frustration, polarisation, and growing distrust in governments and institutions across societies worldwide.

3 Intensifying contestation over freedoms, rights, and civic space

Recent evidence from Freedom House and CIVICUS shows a continued global decline in political rights, media freedom, and civic space, including in nearly half of Commonwealth countries. What is different now is the convergence of legal, political, and digital tools that restrict civil society and associations, often justified in the name of stability or anti-terrorism and increasingly targeting independent voices and diaspora communities. Moreover, the trend is amplified by Big Tech data colonisation, normalising digital authoritarianism and enabling populist leaders to weaponise 'freedom of expression' and fuel polarisation, violence, and democratic erosion.



← Students inside a floating classroom, designed to keep children learning during flood seasons in Bangladesh

4 Growing constraints on civic engagement

Redirected international aid towards national interests—such as defence, trade, and migration control—has led to immediate shocks and severe disruptions within civil society ecosystems. This redirection has resulted in rapid reductions in programmes and staffing, jeopardising initiatives that support marginalised communities, independent media, rights advocacy, and basic service delivery. Meanwhile, the pressures to address socio-economic, climate-related, and environmental challenges continue to escalate. These mounting constraints fragment collective action and make civic achievements increasingly reliant on individual champions rather than fostering resilient civic ecosystems.

5 Climate-accelerated displacement, environmental stress, and conflict

Climate change is widely recognised as a risk multiplier, interacting with conflict and displacement dynamics and exacerbating vulnerability. Chronic disruption from extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and slow-onset environmental degradation compound resource scarcity, intersecting with poverty, fragility, and exclusion. Grassroots organisations are increasingly bearing the brunt without sufficient resources, acting as first responders and community anchors, supporting displaced people, protecting livelihoods, and easing local tensions.

→ Volunteer firefighter on the deck of a migrant rescue boat in Malta





1.2 Time for collective action

In 2024, Commonwealth Heads acknowledged that democratic backsliding, social fragmentation, economic instability, and environmental crisis together constitute a polycrisis that threatens shared prosperity, inclusion, and the values of the Commonwealth.

The 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Declaration, *One Resilient Common Future*, affirms the need for inclusive governance, protection of civic freedoms, and meaningful engagement of civil society and all citizens—notably women and young people—in shaping adequate responses to these challenges.

The Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025–2030 situates these same pressures at the centre of its strategic direction, calling for a strengthened Commonwealth built on democratic, economic, and environmental resilience. The plan recognises declining trust in institutions, shrinking civic space, increasing climate vulnerability, youth exclusion, and persistent gender inequality as systemic risks that cannot be addressed through state action alone.

← Community members dancing together to raise awareness of the National Cancer Control Plan in an event organised by grant partner, Uganda Cancer Society

This renewed emphasis on inclusive governance and civil society engagement sharpens the Foundation's strategic mandate. As the Commonwealth's agency for civil society, the Foundation is uniquely positioned to strengthen the capacity, voice, and connectivity of civil society and creative actors, ensuring that the perspectives of the people of the Commonwealth—particularly those from underrepresented and grassroots communities—influence decision-making processes. Through an integrated approach that supports grassroots action, enables dialogue and convening spaces, and amplifies diverse perspectives in multilayered policy process, the Foundation contributes to more responsive governance systems and stronger relationships between citizens and institutions and better policies.

Central to this approach is the conviction that inclusive governance and constructive engagement are indispensable to the peaceful transformation of societies. When the voices of people across the Commonwealth are enabled through civil society, they enhance the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of institutions. Dialogue, grounded in shared values and mutual respect, provides a pathway to bridge divides, address systemic inequalities, and foster collective solutions to complex global challenges.

1.3 Building on what we've learned and achieved

Our *Strategy Review Report (SRR)*, written by external consultants Collaborative Impact, was developed as a critical tool for assessing the Foundation's past performance and achievements, while also identifying limitations that must be addressed to sustain and deepen impact in the next strategic period.

Progress and contributions

The SRR found that the Foundation has made strong and measurable contributions to strengthening civil society capacity, voice, and engagement across the Commonwealth, particularly in the intersecting areas of climate justice, health justice, and freedom of expression. These contributions were especially significant for actors from small and vulnerable countries, women, and youth. Support for creative and cultural initiatives contributed to building confidence, relationships, and civic identity among communities, particularly in contexts of constrained civic space.

Lessons and areas for improvement

The SRR highlighted that gains in capacity, voice, and responsiveness often remained uneven and fragile where they depended on short-term platforms, informal coordination, or individual champions. Limited resources were available for institutionalising inclusive engagement practices and sustaining follow-up beyond individual grant cycles.

This reduced the durability and cumulative impact of otherwise strong interventions. Creative and cultural initiatives, while delivering significant upstream cultural influence, often lacked pathways to sustained engagement or direct policy influence.

Comparative advantage

The SRR identified seven distinct roles that the Foundation plays within the Commonwealth system, suggesting that where these were combined, the Foundation achieved influence and reach beyond expectations:

- **Translator and amplifier** of citizen perspectives on critical and sensitive issues into policy-relevant forms.
- **Trusted interlocutor** between civil society and governments, building bridges and enabling constructive engagement.
- **Soft power broker** leveraging intergovernmental diplomacy and securing civil society input on sensitive issues in policy spaces.
- **Convener** of platforms facilitating civic engagement in policy dialogue.
- **Connector** of grassroots civil society and creative actors enabling collective action and empowerment.



↑ A meeting convened by grant partner, Visual Voices, to foster dialogue and understanding between emerging artists, cultural institutions and local authorities in Cyprus

- **Niche funder** supporting grassroots advocacy and creative expression to strengthen civic ecosystems.
- **Cultivator** fostering Commonwealth 'belonging' grounded in the diversity of cultures and the values of the Commonwealth Charter.

The SRR concluded that the Foundation should hone its comparative advantage for the new strategic period; to consolidate and institutionalise what already works with a sharper strategic focus, extended engagement timelines, and stronger collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and other Commonwealth institutions.

2 Guiding principles

The Foundation’s positioning for the next strategic period will be guided by *six interlinked priorities* that leverage our comparative advantage in response to the trends we have identified:

.....

1 Protect and convene trusted, non-adversarial dialogue spaces

We will create and protect trusted spaces where civil society and governments can engage constructively on politically sensitive issues. These spaces should enable listening, synthesis, amplification, and early influence; even where shared norms and trust cannot be assumed.

.....

2 Treat culture and creativity as core civic infrastructure

We will position culture and creativity as a critical pathway for sustaining civic agency, community cohesion, and democratic participation, recognising this vital mode of civic voice and participation, especially where formal avenues for civic engagement are constrained.

.....

3 Anchor young people in future-facing policy debates

We will ensure that youth perspectives shape future-facing debates within the Commonwealth, informing responses to inequality, exclusion, climate risk, and democratic erosion.

.....

4 Double down on strengthening grassroots-level civic and creative ecosystems

We will position the Foundation as a strategic supporter of grassroots ecosystems rather than individual organisations alone, with particular attention to small states and in contexts where civic space is diminishing.

.....

5 Position the Foundation as the role-model of Charter-aligned civic engagement

We will redouble efforts to inspire a culture of respect and shared values, designing platforms that promote good governance and rule of law, fostering transparency and encouraging active citizen participation in contexts of shrinking civic space and polarisation.

.....

6 Focus on intersecting areas aligned with the Secretariat’s strategic plan

We will concentrate our engagement on intersecting areas where we can foster an effective and efficient Commonwealth system approach that optimises resources and amplifies impact by advancing our common agendas.

↓ The Hon Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, former Prime Minister of Samoa, at the 2024 People's Forum

Strategic collaboration within the Commonwealth system

The strength of the Foundation ultimately stems from the Commonwealth brand and the unity of its institutions. Alignment with the Commonwealth Secretariat has the potential for significant synergies and, as such, the Secretariat's new strategic plan has been a key reference throughout the Foundation's strategic planning process.

Our points of connection will continue to be relevant throughout this strategic period as all Commonwealth institutions work towards the following shared goals:

- 1 **Democratic resilience** through inclusive and participatory governance
- 2 **Economic resilience** through equitable access and stronger market participation
- 3 **Environmental resilience** through climate, oceans, and energy initiatives and sustainable natural resource management



3 Strategic direction

Our vision

The Foundation’s vision is of a Commonwealth of equal, just, and inclusive societies where everyone can live in dignity and freedom.

Our mission

To contribute to that vision by supporting civil society, grassroots communities and creative practitioners to turn dialogue into action; to connect people and governments and strengthen their capacity to protect and advance democracy and human rights.

High-level results

Efforts towards our mission will be guided by three *high-level results (HLR)* that articulate the specific and measurable changes we will seek in the capabilities and behaviours of civil society, creative actors, and public institutions:

HLR 1

Commonwealth civil society, particularly grassroots groups, are equipped and empowered to engage constructively to influence policy and public dialogue in line with Commonwealth Charter values and principles.

HLR 2

Commonwealth member countries enable consistent participation for civil society and particularly grassroots groups in decision-making processes and are responsive to their inputs and priorities.

HLR 3

Cultural and creative actors, particularly grassroots groups, are connected and equipped to advance Commonwealth Charter values and principles by influencing public discourse and decision-making processes.

→ Hospital staff in Nairobi engaging with the public to support access to healthcare, facilitated by grant partner, Undugu Society



4 Strategic impact areas

The *Strategy Review Report* validates our approach that focus is important for impact. In this strategic period, we will take this further: our strategic impact areas offer feasible pathways for the Foundation to make a valued contribution by working at its nexus - an essential mode to leverage our resources in order to optimise our impact over the strategic period.

Building on our lessons of the past five years, the Foundation's strategic impact areas respond to the trends faced by Commonwealth civil society and are closely aligned with the Commonwealth Secretariat's strategic priorities. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have been an important reference point and will continue to guide our work.

→ Domestic workers learn how to sew in downtown Singapore (UN Women / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. The Sustainable Development Goals strive for inclusive, people-centred decision-making with a particular focus on marginalised voices.



4.1 Freedom of expression



16: Peace, justice & strong institutions



The Foundation stands firm on civic freedoms and voice by placing freedom of expression at the heart of our mandate. Creative expression is the corollary to freedom of expression: it cements transparency and trust between governments and their citizens and determines how citizens can contribute to debates that shape the future.

The Commonwealth Charter explicitly recognises freedom of expression as a key value, stating that ‘we are committed to peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information, including through a free and responsible media, and to enhancing democratic traditions and strengthening democratic processes.’ In response to the escalating challenges to open discourse and the global decline in civic space, the Foundation will explore new and diverse approaches to advancing and protecting freedom of expression.

In the age of misinformation and disinformation, we will continue to counter unquestioned narratives and promote a plurality of ideas that can flourish in open spaces, driven by a vigilant, informed

society. Central to all of this is the recognition of the interconnected rights of freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and meaningful participation in governance.

The Foundation will act as a vital platform for civil society, enabling organisations and individuals to amplify their voices and engage effectively in advocacy. We will support civil society in their efforts to promote robust national and international legal frameworks that align with international standards for freedom of expression and access to information, to challenge laws used to stifle dissent, and to promote self-regulatory mechanisms for the media to ensure professionalism and independence.

Creative expression will remain an integral aspect of freedom of expression; the Foundation is committed to providing platforms and initiatives for creative expression that reach diverse communities, provide a vehicle for complex issues, amplify grassroots and marginalised voices, and support the growth and development of creative economies. We will leverage our creative programme to empower artists and storytellers in exercising their right to creative expression, whilst also promoting the rights of others through their work. Through our support and platforms, we aim to inspire compelling narratives that not only reflect personal experiences but also advocate for social justice and human rights. Through these initiatives, we will foster vibrant

← An art student in Malaysia works on a painting (World Bank / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

artistic communities that amplify diverse voices and encourage meaningful dialogue around important issues.

Our focus on freedom of expression intersects with our other priorities and is fundamental to the Foundation's work. We will build on our strengths and achievements from the previous strategic period and leverage our comparative advantage to empower citizens with the freedoms to express their views on the important issues of our time.

Alignment with the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025–2030 ↓

Pillar 1: Democratic resilience

The Secretariat acknowledges the inadequate inclusion of civil society as a contributing factor to weakened democratic governance in many Commonwealth countries, and sets out to expand civic space, especially for marginalised groups. In order to strengthen democratic resilience and restore trust in political systems, the Secretariat aims to improve opportunities for Commonwealth citizens, particularly women, young people, civil society and the media, to speak freely and engage in governance at all levels.

↓ Dancer at the 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa



4.2 Economic inclusion

The Foundation understands that access to basic services, including healthcare, food and shelter, is not merely a goal but a fundamental right. Socio-economic inequality remains one of the most pressing issues of our time, with vast populations across the Commonwealth lacking access to basic resources, opportunities, and rights, stunting economic growth and social cohesion and leading to declining trust in institutions.

Our response will be anchored in tackling deep-rooted inequalities that hinder equitable access to economic and social opportunities. Interlinking these critical areas will contribute to sustainable

growth and fostering resilient communities across the Commonwealth. We will make use of the Foundation's unique role as a soft power broker with government and a connector amongst civil society to highlight the economic concerns of marginalised communities and promote their engagement in policy dialogue.

Younger generations are acutely affected by rising living costs and dwindling employment prospects, further compounded by the climate crisis. The emergence of the 'Precariat class' (first identified by economist Guy Standing in 2011) is marked by instability and uncertainty and poses threats to social stability and democratic processes. We will advocate



SDG1: No poverty
SDG8: Decent work & economic growth
SDG9: Industry, innovation & infrastructure
SDG10: Reduced inequalities

for policy reforms that prioritise inclusive growth and support entrepreneurial ecosystems to create jobs and stimulate economic activity, particularly in emerging markets.

We will prioritise issues on economic inclusion for our grant-making and creative programmes. Through our platforms we will facilitate civil society engagement in policy dialogue and amplify voices of marginalised and disadvantaged communities on key economic issues. We will target multilateral forums and appropriate Commonwealth spaces to communicate civil society priorities and positions.

As we navigate the complexities of a post-pandemic landscape marked by heightened socio-economic inequalities, persistent health challenges across the Commonwealth have come to the forefront. The CHOGM 2024 Communique emphasised that *'national health systems must be reinforced to ensure that no one is left behind.'* In response, we will embed health justice into our commitment to economic inclusion, amplifying the voices of those living in precarity. Our approach highlights the urgent need for systemic reforms that prioritise health and wellbeing as an integral component of inclusive



← Market vendor in Port Victoria, Seychelles (UN Women / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

economic policies, ensuring that health inequalities are addressed within the broader framework of socio-economic equity.

Our focus on economic inclusion is a vital component of our efforts to advance democratic rights and freedoms. We recognise that these areas are deeply interconnected, and we will leverage this understanding to address systemic barriers to rights and services, particularly for the most vulnerable Commonwealth communities. Promoting freedom of expression is essential for fostering a vibrant civil society that can advocate for economic opportunities and equitable resource distribution. Simultaneously, the pursuit of climate and environmental justice underscores the urgency of mitigating impacts that disproportionately affect marginalised populations and hinder their economic prospects.

The Foundation recognises the creative economy—music, film, fashion, digital content, literature, and cultural heritage—as an undervalued but transformative pathway to economic inclusion, particularly for women, young people, and marginalised communities across the Commonwealth's small states. Talent is widely distributed across the Commonwealth, but access to the skills, policy frameworks, financing, and platforms needed to convert creative practice into sustainable livelihoods is not. In this strategic period, we will work to close that gap: engaging governments to treat the creative sector as economic infrastructure, supporting

creatives from excluded groups to formalise and scale their enterprises, and convening civil society, governments, and private investors around the shared goal of building sustainable creative ecosystems that reduce grant dependency and generate lasting economic resilience.

Alignment with the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025–2030 ↓

Pillar 2: Economic resilience

The Secretariat acknowledges that many Commonwealth countries face the challenge of generating sufficient economic growth to meet their citizens' needs and expectations. In order to build more prosperous and resilient economies, particularly in small and vulnerable countries, the Secretariat aims to strengthen access to socio-economic systems and opportunities, with a focus on the needs of young people and especially girls.

→ Artisanal lagoon fisher in Mauritius
(© Stéphane Bellerose)



4.3 Climate and environmental justice

The Foundation recognises that climate change is the defining challenge of our time, and that the health of our planet directly influences human wellbeing. As the landmark International Court of Justice advisory opinion confirmed in July 2025, climate change is not just an environmental crisis but a matter of justice, rights, and international law.



Climate change is increasingly seen as an injustice multiplier, with disproportionate impacts on women, young people and marginalised communities within the Commonwealth's small states. Climate-related displacement, food and water insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and loss of ocean life and biodiversity are identified as escalating threats to wellbeing and democratic participation. The climate crisis is a fundamental threat to human health, exacerbating inequalities in access to basic services and increasing risk of disease.

Access to climate finance and energy resources remains unequal: civil society in affected countries is increasingly under-resourced and yet widely seen as leaders of community responses to the challenges and risks of the climate crisis. It is often those least responsible for environmental destruction, particularly small island nations and vulnerable communities, who bear the heaviest burden.

Our response will prioritise strengthening and amplifying the voices of grassroots civil society as central agents of climate and environmental justice. We aim to support the development of stronger global frameworks, enhanced governance capacity,

← *A farmer transforms water hyacinth into nutrient-rich mulch for sustainable seed planting in his village courtyard in Bangladesh (ILO / CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)*



SDG13: Climate action
SDG15: Life on land

efforts to access climate finance and improved technological solutions to address urgent climate and environmental challenges and to promote a just, clean energy transition. This includes investing in grassroots organisations and community driven solutions that are at the forefront of climate action, ensuring those most affected by environmental change have resources, agency and platforms to shape the responses that impact their lives. Sustainable solutions require greater accountability and shared responsibilities among member countries, international funders, and investors, to assist grassroots actors in shaping migration and mobility conditions for displaced communities, while ensuring equitable access to basic services.

“Our response will prioritise strengthening and amplifying the voices of grassroots civil society as central agents of climate and environmental justice.

We will leverage our unique position as a connector and convener to facilitate knowledge sharing among civil society, particularly where climate-accelerated displacement, conflict, and inequality intersect. We will utilise the Foundation's intergovernmental position to bring together public and private sector actors to mobilise catalytic funding for climate-

related issues, particularly those affecting Indigenous Peoples and other marginalised communities across the Commonwealth.

The Foundation will continue to prioritise climate and environmental justice through our grants and creative programmes, supporting organisations and individuals who champion initiatives that promote ecological sustainability and social equity. We will encourage collaboration across borders and sectors to advance collective efforts to address environmental challenges sustainably and equitably. We will promote localised knowledge and indigenous environmental practices as an integral part of Commonwealth cultural identity, offering insights at a global scale to influence sustainable practices and environmental policies. We will work with a range of grassroots civil society, including indigenous communities to facilitate knowledge exchange, promote best practice and enhance collective adaptive capacities on a wide range of issues such as sustainable land use, biodiversity conservation and resilience in the face of climate change.

Alignment with the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025–2030 ↓

Pillar 3: Environmental resilience

The Secretariat acknowledges that Commonwealth countries are highly vulnerable to the erosion of social, ecological, health and economic resilience as a result of climate change, pollution and unstable resource use. The challenges are greater for many small island states, with many facing weakened institutional capacity leading to challenges in policy design and implementation. In order to help small and vulnerable countries better protect their people and environments from climate change and resource degradation, the Secretariat aims to strengthen governance, improve access to climate finance and amplify the voices of youth, women, and marginalised communities to ensure that global solutions are fair, inclusive, and sustainable.

→ *Solar engineer in rural India (UK DFID / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)*





5 Cross-cutting priorities

Learning from our *Strategy Review Report* affirms that the Foundation’s cross-cutting priorities made strong contributions towards equality and inclusion of marginalised voices over the previous strategic period.

The SRR highlights the need for a sharpened and sustained focus on ‘small states’ and ‘gender and intersectionality’ and further emphasises the importance of ensuring that our approaches resonate with young people’s vision for the future of the Commonwealth. We will continue to prioritise these themes throughout our programme delivery; from civil society capacity development to amplifying civic and creative voices in national and global policy processes.

→ *Nurse and midwife in Zambia who educates local people about waterborne diseases.*

Previous page: Children learning about mangroves at a wildlife club in Seychelles (UN Women / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)





5.1 Gender and intersectionality

The Foundation's commitment to inclusive participation is grounded in the recognition that social structures and systems are not neutral; rather, they are shaped by and operate within power dynamics that often reflect and perpetuate inequality and discrimination. These power dynamics create the environments in which people live, impose constraints on their lives, and influence how they are able to engage, as well as broader societal implications.

Gender equality is a core value of the Commonwealth, recognised in the Charter and reaffirmed in the CHOGM 2024 Communique, acknowledging the equal rights of all women and committing member countries to addressing discrimination and disadvantage in all their forms.

In recent years, we have witnessed a troubling backlash against women's rights and the rights of marginalised communities, manifesting in various forms, such as restrictions on reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and the erosion of protections against discrimination. The regressive movements that threaten progress necessitate the reinforcement of gender equality across our portfolio of work.

“In recent years, we have witnessed a troubling backlash against women's rights and the rights of marginalised communities, manifesting in various forms, such as restrictions on reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and the erosion of protections against discrimination.”

Critical to the Foundation's vision of a Commonwealth characterised by equitable, just and inclusive societies is an understanding of how gender intersects with other bases of exclusion and oppression. By recognising the multifaceted nature of identity, we can better appreciate how different groups face unique barriers to participation and agency, and strengthen our work to expand the capabilities of individuals and communities to lead lives of value. Through cross-portfolio monitoring, evaluation, and learning, we will identify barriers to inclusion across our work and adapt our approaches to strengthen the participation of marginalised voices in public dialogue and policy processes.

← *A child and her grandmother at a centre that treats children and adults with physical and mental disabilities in India*

5.2 Small states

The Commonwealth Charter commits member countries to advance the interests of small states, recognising the unique needs and distinct challenges of the Commonwealth's small island developing states and most vulnerable countries. At CHOGM 2024, held for the first time in a small island state of the Pacific region, leaders reaffirmed that the challenges facing small states, particularly climate change, economic vulnerability and environmental degradation, are shared Commonwealth concerns requiring collective action.

Civil society in small states is often comparatively less developed, particularly in terms of capacity conducive to civic engagement. We are committed to tailoring the Foundation's approaches through targeted grant-making and creative engagement, to ensure that individuals and civil society organisations in small states can actively participate in our projects and programmes.

More generally through our outreach and advocacy, the Foundation is well-placed to amplify issues disproportionately affecting small states: from the impact of climate change, access to vaccines and medicines to the problem of growing sovereign debt. At the same time, we will ensure system-wide connections are forged to enhance the impact of our work.

We will ensure the Foundation's work integrates a tailored approach to the varying needs of small states within our efforts to represent the interests of all member states in advancing sustainable development across all regions of the Commonwealth. Through targeted responses to strengthen capacity where it is most needed, we will help foster collaboration, solidarity and shared progress in order to expand civic ecosystems for the benefit of all.



5.3 A note on young people

The Commonwealth Charter recognises young people as a critical constituency in shaping the future relevance and legitimacy of the Commonwealth; however, many face structural inequalities and barriers to meaningful engagement.

The Foundation's youth engagement efforts will be oriented towards empowering young people as agents of change in shaping future-facing Commonwealth debates. We will foster opportunities for youth perspectives to meaningfully inform responses to pressing issues such as inequality, exclusion, climate risk, and democratic erosion, moving beyond mere representational inclusion. By emphasising the agency and leadership potential of youth, we will harness their unique insights and lived experiences to drive transformative change. The Foundation will engage youth through capacity-building initiatives, leadership support and collaborative platforms that elevate their voices in decision-making processes. This shift in emphasis will encourage contributions rooted in real-world challenges while also enhancing the potential to influence institutional responses.

← *The Institute of Commonwealth Studies leading a side event at the 2024 People's Forum on human rights-based approaches to criminal law*



6 Making it happen

Delivering on this vision requires a focused and integrated approach that brings together the Foundation's core roles: translating citizen perspectives, bridging civil society and governments, convening spaces for dialogue, connecting grassroots and creative actors, and supporting advocacy through targeted funding.

The Foundation's programmes in the new strategic period will be designed to embody these principles, aligning its convening power, partnerships, and funding to strengthen civic ecosystems and ensure that citizen voices shape policy outcomes.

Our work will be organised as five programmes that utilise the Foundation's comparative advantage and are guided by its strategic impact areas. Art and creative expression will be central to how the Foundation enables dialogue, shapes narratives, and influences policy. Through this approach, the Foundation will support constructive engagement between civil society and governments, strengthen grassroots action, and ensure that diverse civil society voices, especially those less often heard, inform public debate across the Commonwealth.

→ *Participant at the 2024 People's Forum in Samoa*

Previous page: A marine research officer mapping coral reefs in the waters in Seychelles (UN Women / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



6.1 Grants programme

Through grant-making, the Foundation acts as a ‘niche funder’, supporting structurally marginalised and under-resourced civil society advocacy and creative initiatives at a grassroots level.

Through a combination of open call grants to civil society organisations and creative actors that seek to advance the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter, and capacity-strengthening grants that provide flexible and tailored assistance to less well-established grassroots organisations, our grants will support Commonwealth civil society to secure space for constructive engagement in governance and public discourse. In doing so, our grants will support citizens’ aspirations across the Commonwealth within our strategic focus areas.

Our approach to grant-making is grounded in four core principles:

1. **Flexibility:** recognising that one size does not fit all.
2. **Proportionality:** adapting reporting requirements to the size of the grant and the organisational capacity of the grant partner.
3. **Creativity:** leveraging voice, art, and storytelling to influence policy and public discourse.
4. **Integrity and transparency:** ensuring public funds are managed fairly and transparently.

Open call grants

Collective action is emphasised throughout the strategy: placing priority on strengthening networks, grassroots communities, and creative collectives rather than individual organisations. In response, the open call will become a multi-faceted grants approach, structuring funding through two lenses:

1. **Grants to promote the power of collective action: strengthening coalitions and supporting small and less well-established organisations and creative actors in advancing strategic civic infrastructure.**
2. **Project-based funding: supporting competitive, inclusive, and accessible projects aligned with the strategic impact areas. These grants will combine flexible funding with targeted capacity development to enhance organisational effectiveness and policy influence.**

Capacity strengthening grants

These invitation-only grants will continue to address the limitations of open competition, which can exclude smaller and less well-established organisations despite their potential to achieve strong local impact. Capacity strengthening grants recognise the value of the work of small organisations and pledge to help make it sustainable through a combination of funding with tailored assistance grounded in local ownership.

We will deepen our engagement with civil society organisations through targeted outreach and sustained support for grant partners. Employing a mix of direct engagement, digital outreach, and open dialogue, our approach will focus on reaching a diverse range of organisations, particularly in underrepresented regions. We will provide tailored support, including practical guidance and learning opportunities, to help smaller and less well-established organisations design and deliver impactful work.

Advancing impact and innovation

The Foundation strives to continually expand and innovate its grant-making approaches, subject to increased and diversified funding. Potential developments include rapid response grants for time-sensitive civic engagement, civic innovation labs to test new participatory approaches, fellowship-linked grants to strengthen leadership pipelines, and policy impact grants focused on influencing legislation and public policy outcomes.

Through these opportunities, the Foundation’s grant-making has the potential to become more than a funding mechanism and act as a network builder, a policy accelerator, or a platform for civic innovation. This approach reinforces the Foundation’s comparative advantage as a convenor, connector, and trusted interlocutor within the Commonwealth system.

6.2 Advocacy and Creative programme

The Foundation recognises that creative expression is a powerful tool for amplifying marginalised voices and translating complex issues into accessible forms that open dialogue and spark collective action.

Through creative storytelling, multimedia dialogues, and co-creation, we will embrace innovative approaches across our programmes, embedding creativity to amplify citizens, connect communities, and promote open civic space and free expression.

The programme will facilitate connections between civil society and policy-makers, and creative actors and communities, through well-curated platforms, policy forums, and Ministerial spaces, including the **Commonwealth People's Forum**, which provides a unique opportunity for citizens to engage directly with one another, celebrate shared values and diverse cultures as well as contribute to discussions that shape Commonwealth priorities and actions. Through our **Critical Conversations**, we convene panel discussions and roundtables that bring together dynamic and diverse speakers to address pressing issues, strengthen government accountability, and contribute to the development of evidence-based outputs, practical tools, and shared knowledge that strengthen civil society's capacity to participate in

→ *Members of denotified tribes and nomadic communities in Rajasthan participating in creative work facilitated by grant partner, World Comics India*

and influence policy processes, ensuring that people's voices are not only heard, but acted upon.

Our **Commonwealth Short Story Prize** provides a platform for new and emerging voices to share lesser-heard narratives. It is open and free to writers across the Commonwealth in a variety of languages. As a cultivator of creative talent, the Foundation will continue to nurture a global creative community, bringing visibility to the richness of the diverse voices and alternative narratives within the Commonwealth. We will explore ways to promote shortlisted authors to enhance their access to livelihood pathways and multi-media story telling. We will seek opportunities to expand its accessibility and reach in order to

build confidence among aspiring storytellers as they develop their craft in writing, translation and illustration.

Through workshops, collections and anthologies, the Foundation provides opportunities for growth and mentorship, showcasing creative responses to pressing issues that might otherwise go untold. Fostering creative ecosystems is integral to the sustainable development of vibrant civic space. Initiatives such as creative open calls and the appointment of the **Commonwealth Poet Laureate** extend the reach of our creative platforms and invite both artists and non-artists to participate and share their voice in creative ways.





6.3 Communications and Outreach programme

Cross-Commonwealth connectivity is critical for enabling collective action among activists, journalists and other civil society actors. Both within and between networks, the Foundation will continue to act as a ‘connector’ of grassroots civil society and creative actors, as well as a ‘cultivator’ of identity and belonging, rooted in Commonwealth values.

Through myriad connections, the Foundation aims to strengthen relationships, reduce isolation, and foster peer learning, mutual support and collaboration supported by the potential of digital communication. This is especially important for people working in diverse and often constrained contexts, reinforcing shared values of solidarity and a collective commitment to equal, just and inclusive societies.

Our relationship strengthening work will be underpinned by a proactive communications strategy that promotes inclusive platforms, prioritising accessibility and extending our reach to diverse audiences. The strategy will foster an environment that encourages voices from all corners of the Commonwealth to contribute to dialogue and solution identification to shape our common agendas.

Through targeted outreach and a strong digital presence, the Communications and Outreach programme will raise awareness of the Foundation and its mandate, attract new and diverse participants, and leverage flagship moments such as CHOGM 2026 and the Commonwealth People's Forum to mobilise audiences before, during, and after



↑ Speakers at an event promoting improved health outcomes for LGBT Jamaicans, organised by grant partners Equality for All Foundation Jamaica and TransWave Jamaica

events. Strategic messaging and branding will ensure that opportunities are visible, accessible, and relevant to diverse audiences, amplifying Commonwealth values and ensuring that civil society perspectives reach the widest possible audience.

The communications strategy will be guided by a commitment to inclusive platforms that encourage voices from all corners of the Commonwealth to engage with the Foundation's work and contribute to dialogue, grounded in the conviction that when people's voices are enabled, they enhance the legitimacy and accountability of institutions, bridge divides, and foster collective solutions to complex challenges.

6.4 Knowledge and Learning programme

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning will be a major focus for this strategic period. We will strengthen our knowledge and learning systems, improving our ability to transform data into meaningful insights and ensuring that frameworks are closely aligned with the priorities and objectives of the new strategy.

We will embed more structured reflection and synthesis of evidence, enabling insights to be applied in real time and fostering a culture of adaptive management across all of the Foundation's programmes.

The Knowledge and Learning programme will instil a systematic, organisation-wide approach to knowledge capture, ensuring that learning is documented, shared, and used effectively. Strengthened feedback mechanisms with civil society participants and partners will ensure that the perspectives of those the Foundation works with and for are continuously integrated into our work; consolidating the Foundation as a learning organisation that listens, adapts, and grows in its ability to deliver meaningful and lasting impact across the Commonwealth.

6.5 Functional Support Division

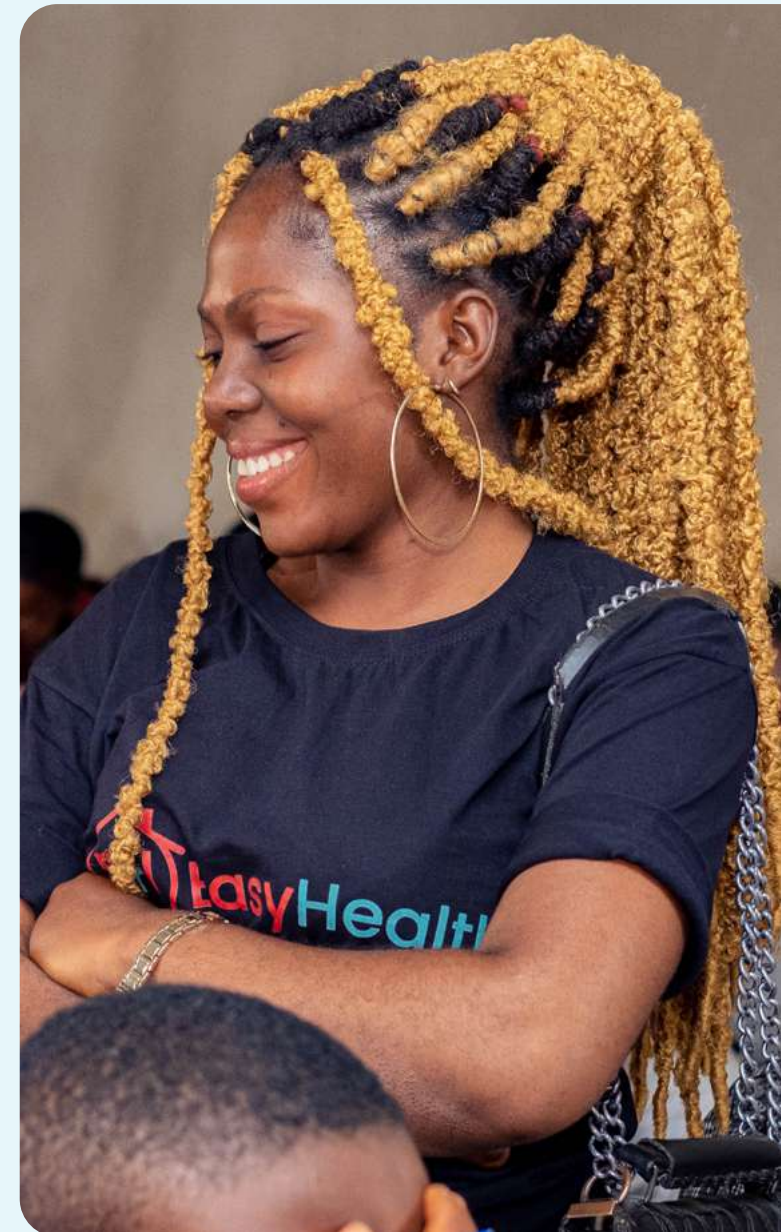
The Functional Support Division—while not technically a programme—plays a vital role in ensuring the Foundation operates with efficiency, integrity, and care. Overseeing key functions across finance, operations, and people, the division offers a dedicated support role to enhance the ability of all programmes to function effectively in pursuit of shared organisational goals.

The division's work reflects the Foundation's commitment to maintaining high standards of staff performance and wellbeing, recognising that a motivated, supported, and capable team is fundamental to achieving the Foundation's mission.

Central to the division's role is a commitment to transparency and accountability in the stewardship of public funds. As custodians of public resources, the Foundation holds itself to the highest standards of financial governance and operational integrity, ensuring that resources are managed responsibly, effectively and in service of the communities and partners it exists to support.

Previous page: Speaker at an event to strengthen press freedom and journalist protection in Lesotho, organised by grant partner Sesotho Media and Development

→ Grant partner, Easy Health, leading a session on enhancing young women's participation in health governance structures in Cameroon



7

Our understanding of change

↓ Brianna Fruean, activist and environmental advocate, speaking at the 2024 People's Forum in Samoa



The Foundation’s theory of change unites our strategy elements in a single diagram that sets out an institutional pathway for achieving our ambition during the strategic period. It articulates how change can happen and the contributions the Foundation hopes to make.

The theory of change further builds on the following hypothesis:

- **If**, as a direct or indirect result of our support, civil society and particularly grassroots groups are better equipped and empowered to engage constructively to influence public policy and dialogue in line with Charter values and principles, **and** Commonwealth governments involve civil society, and particularly grassroots groups, more consistently in decision-making, showing increased responsiveness to their inputs and priorities, **then** the conditions for more meaningful interaction between citizens and governments are strengthened.
- In parallel, **if** cultural and creative actors, and particularly grassroots groups, are better connected and equipped to influence public discourse and decision-making, advancing Charter values and principles, **then** this further reinforces the space for dialogue and engagement.
- Taken together, these changes constitute the Foundation’s distinct contributions to supporting civil society and creative communities to turn dialogue into action and to connect people and governments in ways that protect and advance democracy and human rights. These contributions are expected to result in tangible benefits and impacts in the strategic impact areas of freedom of expression, economic inclusion, and climate and environmental justice, particularly for people experiencing intersectional exclusion and especially in small states.
- Over time, cumulative change will contribute to the Foundation’s long-term vision of a Commonwealth of equal, just, and inclusive societies where everyone can live in dignity and freedom.

7.1 Theory of change



Strategic impact areas

- Freedom of expression
- Economic inclusion
- Climate and environmental justice

Cross-cutting priorities

- Gender and intersectionality
- Small states



7.2 Pre-conditions and assumptions

We have identified various preconditions and assumptions for change, which acknowledge emerging trends and contexts that may affect successful implementation of the strategic plan.

Pre-conditions for change

- Civic space remains sufficiently open in Commonwealth countries for civil society and cultural actors to engage in governance processes and public dialogue.
- Member countries remain committed to the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter and maintain the willingness to interact with civil society.
- Legal and political conditions allow civil society and creative actors to operate, organise, and communicate without systematic repression.
- Governments and institutions at all levels maintain willingness to interact with civil society, allowing engagement channels to exist.
- Commonwealth values and principles remain a meaningful normative framework influencing civil society and government action.

Assumptions about change

- Civil society engagement can influence governance processes and public discourse. Constructive participation has the potential to shape policies, priorities, or institutional practices in shifting, complex and even unsafe and chaotic contexts.
- Perspectives of grassroots actors remain legitimate and relevant in governance discussions in shifting, complex and even unsafe and chaotic contexts.
- Cultural and creative connections can help counter fragmentation and strengthen collective identity, purpose, and influence, stimulating constructive civic engagement in shifting, complex and even unsafe and chaotic contexts.

← Speaker at the 2024
People's Forum in Samoa

7.3 Interventions

We will pursue our high-level results across our strategic impact areas through the following collective efforts and combined roles:

- Support grassroots civil society and creative initiatives to address intersecting challenges.
- Strengthen the capacity, visibility and reach of civil society and creative advocates.
- Convene dialogue and safe spaces between civil society, creative actors and policy-makers.
- Create and sustain platforms that enable dialogue, knowledge exchange and collective advocacy.
- Expand civil society access to Commonwealth policy spaces and decision-makers.
- Forge strategic partnerships with Commonwealth institutions, regional intergovernmental organisations, UN agencies and financial actors.
- Enable evidence, storytelling and advocacy to influence policy debates.
- Facilitate cross-Commonwealth networks and knowledge exchange.

→ A training initiative for agricultural workers, organised by grant partner, Southern African Alliance for Youth Employment



7.4 Organisational enablers

Our people

Our team are one of our most valuable resources for driving change. We will invest in talented and highly motivated staff, offering opportunities for development and growth. Our organisational culture will nurture inclusivity, equity, and collaboration; we will encourage power-sharing and leadership at all levels in order to optimise our efficiency.

Our goal is to foster a sense of belonging within the broader Foundation family and create a strong platform for collective action by enhancing the connections between our staff, governors, partners and supporters. We will continue to challenge ourselves to rethink how we support our members and partners to tackle traditional power dynamics and strive to ensure equal opportunities to contribute to priority agendas.

Our brand values

To strengthen our visibility and extend our reach, our communications strategy will harness the compelling power of storytelling, effectively capturing the impact and change highlighted in our reports. Through targeted outreach via carefully crafted social media campaigns, we will continue to attract new and diverse civic voices from all Commonwealth regions, significantly enhancing our relevance and reach, and strengthening connectedness amongst our audience.

Our approach will also contribute to bolstering the broader Commonwealth brand while actively leveraging partnerships to amplify our own messages.

Our focus will be on purposeful engagement, drawing in individuals who have a genuine interest in Commonwealth ideals and the opportunities we offer. By establishing strategic pathways for dialogue, collaboration, and shared leadership, including partnerships that extend beyond our own funding, we will strengthen civil society networks and reaffirm the Commonwealth as a valued platform for principled cooperation. We will encourage partners, writers and civil society organisations to share their stories, videos and reflections to ensure impactful communications that are grounded in authentic voices and the rich diversity of contexts we serve.

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, we will maintain agility in our approach, ensuring our communications align with our strategic intent to expand civic space, elevate underrepresented voices, and model integrity, transparency, and inclusivity across all channels.

Digital technology

Our approach to digital technology will balance innovation with institutional responsibility. Digital development will be guided by clear purpose: strengthening civic participation, safeguarding



↑ *Jemilah Mahmood, Executive Director of Malaysian-based Sunway Centre for Planetary Health (World Economic Forum)*

data, ensuring equitable access, and reinforcing the integrity of our processes.

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems raises important questions around operational efficiency and broader implications related to fairness, accountability and inclusion. Over the strategic period, the Foundation's leadership will work with relevant Commonwealth institutions and partners to assess the potential benefits and risks of developments in AI. Where appropriate, we will pilot applications that improve efficiency and access, while maintaining strong ethical safeguards and human oversight, including ensuring relevant AI policies and data protection frameworks are in place.

Strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships play a central role in how the Foundation delivers its mandate. To optimise our modest financial and human resources, we will work with partners to extend our reach, draw on locally grounded knowledge, and mobilise the expertise and influence required to address complex challenges. In this strategic period, we will take a more intentional approach to partnership, moving beyond project-based engagement towards longer-term, trust-based collaboration.

We will work with effective and relevant multilateral mechanisms across the Commonwealth ecosystem, specifically engaging with the Commonwealth Secretariat which plays a vital role in supporting member states and promoting democratic governance. By collaborating closely with the Commonwealth of Learning, we aim to leverage educational resources and expertise to enhance our initiatives and promote inclusive learning opportunities across the Commonwealth.

Additionally, we recognise the importance of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations that are strongly positioned to advance collective goals with their grassroots reach. The Foundation will act as a trusted interlocutor, connecting civil society, creative communities and international partners while engaging governments to strengthen civic voice, shape agendas and support more integrated, collective action.

The Foundation will adopt a differentiated approach to partnerships. Strategic and system-level partnerships will focus on influence, alignment and resource mobilisation, while grassroots partnerships will strengthen our legitimacy and reach with locally rooted civil society and creative networks and ensure diverse voices are included in policy and decision-making spaces. This includes expanding creative partnerships to amplify civic voice and shift narratives. Across all partnerships, we will prioritise mutuality and shared purpose, support local leadership and ensure partnerships are inclusive, credible and effective.

The Foundation is committed to working in greater unison with its Board of Governors, and to strengthening partnerships with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth of Learning, and Commonwealth Accredited Organisations. These relationships are fundamental to increasing our efficiency and effectiveness and to shaping the Foundation's role within the wider Commonwealth system.

→ Participant at the 'World Cafe' event for civil society, convened by the Commonwealth Foundation alongside the 2026 Caribbean Development Bank Conference in Jamaica





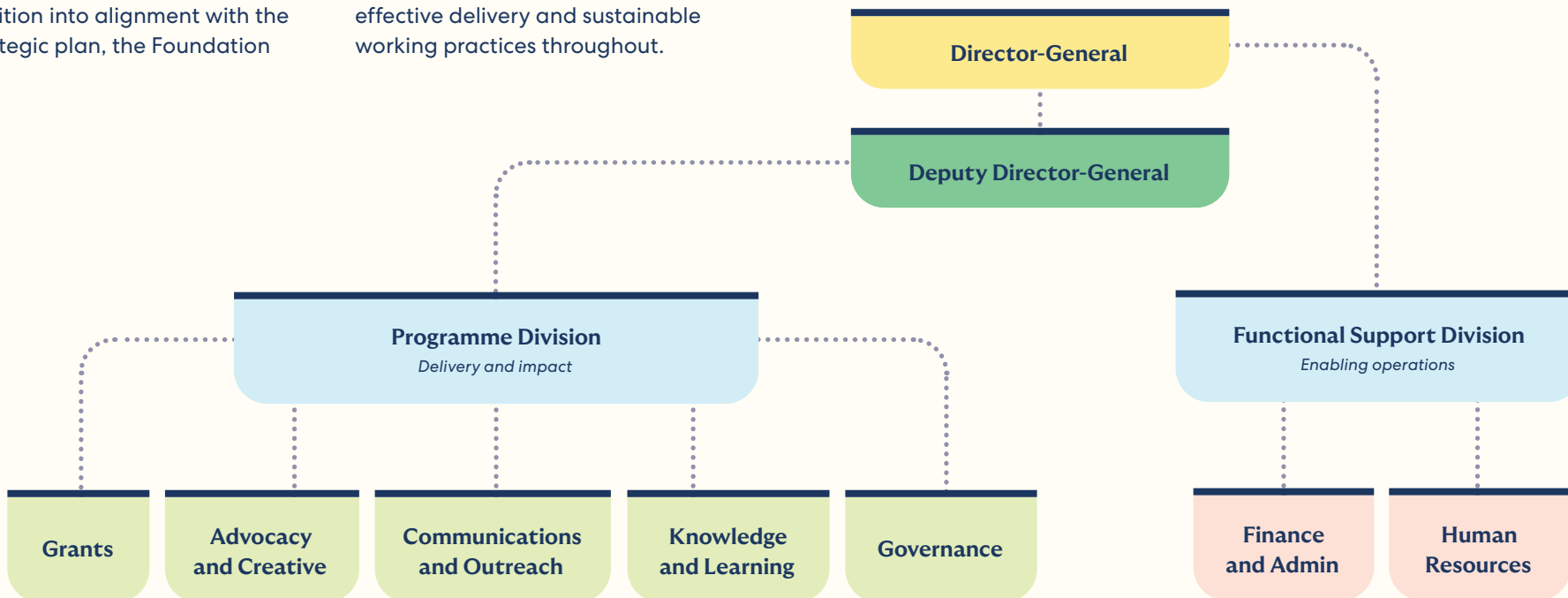
8 How we will organise and deliver

Previous page: Participants of a 'life skills' health training programme in Malawi

8.1 Organisational structure

We will propose the implementation of a revised organisational structure to support the effective delivery of the Foundation's strategic ambitions. As we transition into alignment with the new strategic plan, the Foundation

will introduce several organisational changes intended to bring greater clarity, coherence and alignment across the organisation, while supporting effective delivery and sustainable working practices throughout.



8.2 Governance

Our drive towards universal membership was a defining feature of our previous strategic period and we are proud that almost all Commonwealth countries are now members of the Foundation. Our members are central to the success of the Foundation's mission and provide guidance through active participation in the Foundation's Board of Governors, Executive Committee, and Grants Committee.

Our governing bodies serve as a 'strategic accelerator' for our mission by providing essential thought leadership, oversight and financial integrity. The wealth of experience, influence and political capital held by our governors has the potential to facilitate vital access to governmental spaces and policy processes, and to shape outcomes that support the Foundation's mandate.

This strategic plan outlines an enhanced role for governors as champions and ambassadors for our work at national level, including promoting grant opportunities and supporting outreach efforts, leading to broader participation across Commonwealth regions. This strategy calls on governors to take on an enhanced role in supporting the Foundation's programme of work through their technical expertise, skills and experience. This could

← *Razmi Farook, Commonwealth Foundation Director-General, speaking at the 2026 Caribbean Development Bank Conference in Jamaica*



↑ *Victoria Rutter, CEO of the Commonwealth Pharmacists Association, and HE Ambassador Leslie Ramsammy, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guyana to the United Nations at the 2026 Commonwealth Health Coordination Forum, in Geneva*

include sharing insights as a speaker or moderator on a Critical Conversation panel, or accompanying the Director-General at an external event to position the organisation at the governance and management level.

Another core component of our governance mechanism is the active involvement of Civil Society Advisory Governors in outreach and advocacy initiatives aligned with the Foundation's strategic impact areas.

We will continue to strengthen our internal systems and ways of working to support a strong, effective and engaged governance body.



8.3 Funding and finance

We are committed to ensuring the Foundation remains financially sustainable, including the sustainability of core funds (zero nominal growth versus zero real growth), and operates to the highest standards of accountability and financial stewardship throughout the new strategic period and beyond. To maximise value for money, we will continue to ensure our systems and processes are fit for purpose and will optimise our resources in the delivery of our ambitious strategic aims.

The Foundation's principal source of income is annual assessed contributions from member countries. We will double down on our engagement with member countries to promote ownership and responsibility for the Foundation's work, and to impress the importance of timely payments of assessed contributions to protect the longer-term financial stability of their organisation.

The recovery of current accumulated arrears is critical to the financial health and sustainability of the Foundation and is accordingly a high priority. The Foundation's leadership will continue to take a proactive approach to current and accumulated arrears through a programme of targeted outreach, tailored payment plans and meeting with member countries. The support and active involvement of all governors is essential to the success of arrears recovery.

We will adopt a prudent risk-based approach to budgeting, such that the Foundation's annual work

plan is fully deliverable from the expected income, without having to draw down on general reserve funds. We recognise that we are operating in an environment of rising fixed costs that continue to constrain programme spend, exacerbated by the impact of aid withdrawal creating greater demand. To increase our impact and reach, we will explore both new and existing avenues for securing additional funds for specific initiatives within our work plans and in accordance with guidelines set by governors.

We will demonstrate our commitment to transparency and accountability by continuing our practice of publishing our independently audited annual financial statements on the Foundation's website within six months of each financial year end.

Our 'value-for-money' model

The Foundation is committed to delivering the greatest possible impact for the people of the Commonwealth by making disciplined, strategic choices about where and how we invest our financial and human resources. Our strategic plan builds on evidence from previous strategic periods and our understanding of new opportunities to refine our ways of working and demonstrate best value for money.

By focusing on our strategic impact areas, we avoid fragmentation, reduce duplication and ensure that our investments are coherent and sustainable. Building on our unique position within the Commonwealth family, we will identify and

prioritise those partnerships and interventions where our convening power, legitimacy and Commonwealth-wide reach enable us to complement and strengthen the work of others, deepening collaboration and increasing collective impact.

Through this approach, we will ensure that the financial contributions of our member countries are used to advance our mission effectively and responsibly, delivering sustained benefits and the widest possible impact for the people of the Commonwealth.



↑ *The 'Agora', a hub for free expression and meaningful exchange in Cyprus, created by grant partner, Urban Gorillas*

9 Demonstrating progress and learning



9.1 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) will serve four interrelated purposes during the strategic period:

.....

1 Strengthen learning

Systematically track and capture behavioural change across the main actors in the theory of change. This enables the Foundation to assess its contribution to impact and make timely adjustments throughout.

.....

2 Reinforce accountability

Consolidate lessons from both successes and failures. This includes addressing challenges and applying lessons identified in previous strategic periods to improve programme design and delivery.

.....

3 Support fundraising

Generate credible evidence on effective innovations and value for money. This evidence will underpin efforts to attract investment and mobilise resources.

.....

4 Contribute to mobilisation

Demonstrate the added value and continued relevance of the Foundation's work. This is particularly important for strengthening perceived credibility among citizens and civil society, particularly young people.

Improving our MEL framework

We will revise our existing MEL framework to align with the new strategic plan. Monitoring roles and responsibilities will be clarified and aligned with the organisational structure to ensure coherence and accountability.

We will strengthen the Foundation's operational MEL through the development of monitoring tools to improve consistency and comparability of data across initiatives. Operational key performance indicators (KPIs) will be included in our workplans to measure progress against desired outcomes in our spheres of control and influence in the theory of change. The KPIs will be simple, manageable, and useful in line with our MEL principles.

An institutional MEL matrix will be developed to clarify how evidence needs differ across stakeholders. This matrix will specify which internal and external stakeholders require MEL products, the type and level of rigour of evidence required, and how, when, and by whom this evidence will be generated, analysed, and translated into relevant MEL products. This will support more targeted and efficient evidence generation.

We will continue to invest in rigorous data analysis and adaptive learning, including geographic and thematic targeting and performance evaluation, to ensure that our messaging remains relevant, resonant and accessible. This approach allows us to

deploy resources where they are most effective, while balancing ambition with institutional capacity and budgetary discipline.

Learning and adaptive management

A learning and adaptive management strategy will provide a clear architecture for both internal and external learning processes.

Internally, structured outcome reflections will take place every six months, with the option of quarterly reflections where appropriate. These will be conducted in small, cross-unit teams to make sense of the evidence they gathered and consolidate this into coherent contribution syntheses that can inform decision-making, MEL products, and communication.

Externally, learning will be strengthened through biannual stakeholder feedback processes, including global surveys and regional focus groups. These will provide insight into how the Foundation's contributions interact with those of partners and other stakeholders to generate sustainable results and impact. This supports a more grounded assessment of contribution in complex systems and enables continuous refinement of strategies and partnerships.

Previous page: Grant partner, Eco-Sud, showcasing their work to protect the natural ecosystems of Mauritius

→ Participants at the 'World Cafe' event for civil society, convened alongside the 2026 Caribbean Development Bank Conference in Jamaica



9.2 Results framework

Our theory of change provides the architecture for our strategic results framework and sets out our indicators of change that track the effectiveness of our interventions with reference to our high-level results.



Strategic impact areas

- 1 Freedom of expression
- 2 Economic inclusion
- 3 Climate and environmental justice

Cross-cutting priorities

- 1 Gender and intersectionality
- 2 Small states

Impact assumptions

Even in difficult contexts:

- Civil society can influence policy and public discourse
- Grassroots perspectives remain relevant for governance and decision making
- Creative expression and connectivity can foster civic engagement

Desirable conditions

- Sufficient safe civic space
- Sufficient political will and government commitment
- Constructive participation
- Sufficient contextual stability

Inputs and enablers

- Staff Expertise
- Systems and resourcing
- Funding and finance
- Governance and mandate
- Partnerships and networks
- Reach and visibility
- Digital Technology
- Institutional MEL

Programmes and outputs * = Key indicators

Grants ●◆■

Grants and tailored support delivered

- * % of grants awarded to less well-established and under-resourced grassroots initiatives, particularly in small states.
- * % of grants awarded to initiatives targeting marginalised groups.

Advocacy and Creative ●◆▲

Dialogue, policy and convening spaces for civil society, creative actors and policy-makers developed.

Civil society and creative stories and perspectives gathered and synthesised.

- * # of dialogue, policy and convening spaces and creative platforms opened or strengthened.
- * # and diversity of civil society and creative actors actively participating in convened spaces and platforms.
- * # of Foundation-supported civil society and creative voices and perspectives synthesised.

Knowledge and Learning ◆■

Knowledge and learning products, platforms and tools created and used.

- * # of knowledge and learning products, platforms and tools created and used to amplify voices.
- * Reach and engagement rate of knowledge, learning and communication products, platforms and tools.

Communications and Outreach ◆▲

Communications products, platforms and tools created and used across channels.

Communication campaigns delivered.

- * # of communication products, platforms and tools created and used to amplify voices.
- * Reach and engagement rate of knowledge, learning and communication products, platforms and tools.

Outcomes * = Key indicators

Relationships Direct outcome

Grassroots civil society and creative actors are better connected for peer learning and collective action.

- * # of cross-Commonwealth connections and collaborations catalysed.
- * # of grants with an explicit perspective on strengthening civil society ecosystems.
- * # of creative actors progressing into wider Commonwealth or international networks/platforms.

Access Direct outcome

Civil society access to, and influence in, policy spaces is enhanced.

- * # of Commonwealth / multilateral policy spaces with secured civil society and/or creative actor participation.
- * # of communication and evidence products that enabled civil society and/or creative actors to directly engage with Commonwealth or multilateral policy processes.
- * # of civil society organisations, particularly grassroots groups, that successfully influenced decision-making processes, with priority asks adopted, partially adopted, or under active consideration.

Voice Direct outcome

Civil society demands and creative perspectives are amplified in public discourse.

- * # of instances of Foundation-amplified voices and perspectives in media, publications, and public policy documents.
- * # of instances when creative expression contributes to public engagement on civic issues and public discourse.

Capacity Direct outcome

Grassroots civil society and creative actors are better equipped to engage in public policy and dialogue.

- * % of grassroots civil society and creative actors reporting strengthened capacity.

Responsiveness Indirect outcome

Governments are more responsive to civil society priorities and enable more consistent participation in decision-making processes.

- * # of documented government responses or commitments referencing inputs from Foundation-supported actors.

High-level results

High-level result 1

Commonwealth civil society, particularly grassroots groups, are equipped and empowered to engage constructively to influence policy and public dialogue in line with Commonwealth Charter values and principles.

High-level result 2

Commonwealth member countries enable consistent participation for civil society and particularly grassroots groups in decision-making processes and are responsive to their inputs and priorities.

High-level result 3

Cultural and creative actors, particularly grassroots groups, are connected and equipped to advance Commonwealth Charter values and principles by influencing public discourse and decision-making processes.

Impact

Our vision

A Commonwealth of equal, just, and inclusive societies where everyone can live in dignity and freedom.



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The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation mandated by its member countries to advance civil society participation as a source of legitimacy for democratic governance and sustainable development across the Commonwealth. Established by Commonwealth leaders in 1965, the Foundation is uniquely positioned between governments and the people they serve.

The values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter guide our strategic direction and shape our work, defining the crucial role that civil society plays in the protection of democratic rights and freedoms, through which people can influence the decisions that shape public life.