STRATEGIC PLAN

2025 - 2028

SH CF Southern Highlands Community Foundation

give where you live

HIGHLANDS HEROES

sheaf Southern Highlands | Education and Apprenticeship | Fund

WELCOME

The Southern Highlands Community Foundation is proud to present this draft strategy for consideration and further development by the Board.

This document is a flexible starting point designed to reflect the discussions, contributions and insights shared during the 2025 strategic planning meeting, held in Bowral on 18 July. It is grounded in the Foundation's renewed sense of purpose and momentum.

The strategy outlines the core role SHCF plays in the Highlands community, proposes a refreshed vision and purpose, and organises our focus around four key pillars: Financial Sustainability, Impact & Growth, People, and Operating Processes.
It is intended as a practical, living guide that helps the Foundation align its resources, structure, and community engagement toward long-term impact.

OUR VALUES

Community	Our work starts and ends with the Southern Highlands. We are proudly local – supporting initiatives that strengthen our community, reflect its diversity, and respond to real and emerging needs.
Integrity	We are trusted stewards of community giving. We operate with transparency and accountability, ensuring that funds are directed where they can have the greatest impact.
Connection	We build bridges between people, ideas and opportunity. Whether connecting donors with causes or organisations with support, we believe change happens through collaboration.
Respect	Every person and organisation we work with is valued. We recognise the experience, time and commitment of our volunteers, partners and recipients. We engage with humility and care.
Purposefulness	We focus on what matters. We make decisions guided by need, data and local knowledge, and aim to support the most meaningful outcomes we can.

ABOUT SHCF

We fund community-led initiatives that build community capacity and drive positive, transformative impact across the Southern Highlands.

The Southern Highlands Community Foundation (SHCF) is a regional funding charity dedicated to strengthening our community by supporting local organisations, programs and initiatives. As a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR2) entity, SHCF operates as a grantmaker – identifying community needs, raising funds, and distributing grants that deliver measurable benefit.

We are proudly local, governed by a volunteer board with deep ties to the region. Our directors bring experience from across business, philanthropy, government and community life, and represent a cross-section of the Highlands. The Foundation's work is shaped by our collective insight, commitment and connection to place. Our call-to-action to our community is to Give Where You Live.

Our support spans a wide range of community need.
From scholarships and youth initiatives to food relief, health, homelessness and arts, SHCF exists to support locally led solutions to local challenges. We seek to amplify the work of existing organisations and fill critical funding gaps where traditional support doesn't reach.

We believe in enabling others to do great work.
SHCF does not deliver programs itself. Instead, we partner with trusted organisations – providing funding, support and visibility to ensure more people in our region can access help, opportunity and connection.

OUR COMMUNITY

The Southern Highlands is a generous community with growing, unmet needs.
Across our region, people are experiencing rising cost-of-living pressures, housing stress, social isolation and barriers to opportunity – particularly among young people and families. While the Highlands has a reputation for affluence, the needs are real, complex and often hidden.

SHCF exists to connect resources with the people and organisations making a difference.
We support grassroots and established groups across a range of sectors – including youth, health, housing, food security, education, and social connection. Our approach is guided by both hard data and local insight, including the Foundation's own community engagement and research.

We fund with trust, proximity and purpose.
As a local organisation, we understand the rhythms, relationships and realities of community life. Our funding is nimble, responsive, and grounded in local knowledge. We aim to build capability and confidence in those working directly with community members.

We celebrate community leadership.
Through programs like Highlands Heroes and our annual scholarships, we honour individuals and organisations who are quietly making the Highlands stronger. These initiatives raise awareness, attract funding, and demonstrate the power of local action.

OUR STRATEGIC PILLARS

1. Financial Sustainability

SHCF's ability to fund local initiatives depends on strong financial foundations. This pillar focuses on building reliable income streams, managing costs, and ensuring transparency and trust with donors.

2. Impact & Growth

This pillar ensures that SHCF's work remains relevant, responsive and visible. It guides how we define focus areas, fund initiatives, and partner with others to reach more people and support long-term community change.

3. People

The Foundation is powered by its people. This pillar supports the development of our board, staff and volunteers — ensuring everyone is clear on their role, supported in their work, and aligned to SHCF's purpose.

4. Operating Processes

Good governance and well-developed systems enable SHCF to deliver on its mission. This pillar focuses on improving internal coordination, simplifying processes, and ensuring decisions are made with the right level of rigour.

PILLAR 1

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Strengthen our financial base to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.

How will we do it?

- Grow recurring and multi-year donations through improved donor engagement and relationship-based fundraising
- Expand community awareness and trust in SHCF as a vehicle for giving
- Develop clear fundraising messages, policies and target profiles
- Build a balanced revenue mix across events, partnerships, bequests and major gifts
- Ensure strong financial management, reporting and transparency
- Set and monitor expenditure thresholds, particularly administration vs grantmaking ratios
- Explore the case for an endowment or future fund as a long-term capital strategy

Indicators that we've achieved it

- Annual fundraising increases toward a $500k target within 3 years
- Multi-year pledges and donor retention rates increase
- Admin-to-grants ratio aligns with agreed benchmarks (e.g. 35% → 25% over time)
- Donors and partners understand where their money goes and why
- Fundraising and marketing activities are assessed for return on investment
- Conversations begin about establishing a capital base for future sustainability

PILLAR 2

IMPACT & GROWTH

Increase the reach & relevance of our funding to meet evolving community needs.

How will we do it?

- Refine our focus areas using local data, lived experience & community input
- Build flexible grant programs that respond to both urgent need and long-term issues
- Support a mix of small, high-impact grants and multi-year investments
- Improve visibility of SHCF's impact through storytelling, data and community reporting
- Build a strategy to strengthen partnerships with local organisations, councils and philanthropic peers
- Strengthen our positioning as the region's trusted funding partner
- Align grantmaking to a clear purpose, vision and sense of outcomes
- Leverage our relationships within the community to raise awareness of SHCF and to advocate for change

Indicators that we've achieved it

- Focus areas are clearly defined, communicated and understood
- Grantmaking is balanced across themes, towns and demographics – it is community-led
- More applications received from a diverse range of community organisations
- Stronger stories and data emerge from projects funded
- Partnerships increase SHCF's reach and co-funding potential
- Donors are able to connect giving to tangible outcomes
- Increased awareness of SHCF, our programs and initiatives

PILLAR 3

PEOPLE

Ensure the right people, support, & roles are in place for the Foundation's next phase.

How will we do it?

- Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations for board members and committee chairs
- Strengthen induction, onboarding and succession planning processes
- Build a sustainable admin and support model with clear responsibilities and capacity
- Define what support the Foundation needs to grow — and how that will be resourced
- Maintain a board culture that is inclusive, collaborative and action-oriented
- Make it easy for board members to contribute meaningfully based on life-stage, skills, availability and depth of community relationships
- Continue to bring in new voices while valuing experience and continuity

Indicators that we've achieved it

- Board and subcommittee roles are documented, understood and regularly reviewed
- Induction process is consistent, rigorous, and thorough
- Resourcing model reflects organisational needs, with clarity between admin and strategic functions
- Skills matrix guides board renewal and succession planning
- Chairs meet regularly and coordinate between subcommittees
- Board members report feeling engaged, useful and connected to the Foundation's purpose

PILLAR 4

OPERATING PROCESSES

Strengthen internal systems & governance to support effective decision-making & accountability.

How will we do it?

- Improve coordination between subcommittees and streamline board reporting
- Review internal systems and workflows to reduce duplication and complexity
- Establish consistent policies across fundraising, grantmaking and communications
- Introduce fit-for-purpose impact measurement and storytelling
- Clarify and document processes that support rigour without unnecessary complexity
- Use data and feedback to inform strategic decisions
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Indicators that we've achieved it

- Board meetings run smoothly and effectively
- Subcommittees work cohesively and share relevant insights
- Systems for grantmaking and funder & community engagement are fit-for-purpose and defensible
- Policies are reviewed, accessible and understood
- Donors and stakeholders see the measurable outcomes & impact of SHCF's work
- The Foundation's impact is measured and communicated in ways that are proportionate and meaningful

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ACTION PLAN

1. Financial Sustainability

Item	Action	Who	When	Discussion	Status
1.1	Develop a fundraising strategy, including donor profiles, messaging, and engagement approach			Several directors highlighted the importance of formalising SHCF's fundraising efforts. While past success has come through relationships and events, there was strong interest in building a more deliberate strategy — including identifying donor types, clarifying SHCF's ask, and tailoring messaging to different funding audiences.	
1.2	Confirm admin-to-grants ratio target of 40% and tracking method			The balance between fundraising costs, administration, and grants was a recurring theme. Directors agreed on the need to set an internal benchmark for admin spend and track it transparently, including adopting a 40% admin-to-grants ratio as an initial target, monitoring performance over time, and moving toward a more efficient cost base as the Foundation grows.	
1.3	Review return on investment (ROI) for all fundraising and marketing activity			Directors expressed concern about the cost-effectiveness of past fundraising and marketing efforts. There was a shared desire to evaluate ROI of events and campaigns, ensure funds are raised efficiently, and use data to guide future decisions on donor engagement and promotion.	
1.4	Confirm financial targets (5 year goal = $600K funds raised and $240K expenses)			The board discussed setting financial targets to guide growth and sustainability. A five-year goal was proposed to raise $600K in donations and aim for expenses to represent ~40% of funds raised ($240K), aligning with best-practice benchmarks across the sector (40–50% of income). The Finance and Audit Committee is to draft a budgeting policy, including financial modelling for the next 3–4 years.	

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ACTION PLAN

2. Impact & Growth

Item	Action	Who	When	Discussion	Status
2.1	Define core focus areas and funding themes for the next 3 years			The board discussed how SHCF could refine its focus areas and develop a more consistent approach to community campaigns and donor alignment. Ideas raised included giving days tied to specific issues (e.g. youth mental health, homelessness), approaching aligned foundations for program-based support, and offering matching donation opportunities to drive donor engagement.	
2.2	Review grant types and amounts (e.g. microgrants, partnerships, multi-year grants)			The board discussed the need to evolve SHCF's grant offerings beyond one-year, small-value grants. Key considerations included introducing microgrants for emerging groups, offering multi-year grants to provide stability for proven initiatives, and exploring collaborative or partnership-based funding models.	
2.3	Map potential partners and co-funders in the region			Several directors highlighted the need for stronger collaboration with local organisations and philanthropic peers. There was agreement to map potential partners and co-funders across the Highlands, take a more proactive and strategic approach to partnership building, and strengthen SHCF's role as a connector within the region.	
2.4	Provide Katie with a clear brief from the Board			The board discussed the need for clearer direction and expectations for SHCF's part-time marketing resource, including aligning Katie's work with SHCF's strategy and fundraising goals, ensuring her brief reflects board priorities rather than only operational tasks, and avoiding role ambiguity by documenting scope and expectations.	
2.5	Explore our approach to communicating transparent % cost breakdowns to funders			There was agreement to clarify how SHCF communicates its administrative cost percentage to funders, including framing admin as an enabler of impact rather than overhead, providing transparent breakdowns in annual reporting, and benchmarking against other community foundations.	
2.6	Consider how we should honour our donors – draft approach to be prepared and taken to the next board meeting	Emma, Jenny, Amy		There was agreement that SHCF should honour its donors more intentionally. Directors proposed developing a light-touch recognition approach (e.g. named tiers, annual acknowledgements) and including this in the future fundraising strategy.	
2.7	Offer a range of scholarship options to expand our reach			The board discussed how SHCF's scholarship program could have broader reach by providing more, smaller scholarships to more people. Suggestions included offering a tiered range of scholarship amounts (from $1K to $50K),	

Item	Action	Who	When	Discussion	Status
				prioritising smaller scholarships to support more recipients, and maintaining a clear link between scholarships and SHCF's broader impact strategy.	
2.8	Strengthen and leverage our relationships with Council, and explore opportunities to support or run some of their community programs			There was agreement that SHCF should work more closely with local councils where strategic alignment exists, including supporting or co-delivering council-run community programs, leveraging council networks and infrastructure for visibility, and contributing funding to complement existing service delivery.	
2.9	Audit organisations we sponsor to ensure that cross-promotion is prominently displayed on their websites			The board discussed how SHCF can strengthen its sponsorship relationships and brand visibility, including auditing whether sponsored organisations visibly acknowledge SHCF support on their websites and materials, and using findings to strengthen cross-promotion expectations in future agreements.	

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ACTION PLAN

3. People

Item	Action	Who	When	Discussion	Status
3.1	Refresh induction and onboarding process for new directors			There was agreement that SHCF's onboarding process should be refreshed, as newer directors shared that the current approach lacks structure and clarity. Areas for improvement included providing an up-to-date induction pack with recent board papers and bios, introducing a one-on-one welcome meeting with the Chair or a nominated director, and clarifying committee roles and expectations early.	
3.2	Review admin & marketing roles (e.g. Katie/Amy) and define core responsibilities			The board discussed the evolving needs of SHCF's admin and marketing functions. Directors noted some ambiguity in current roles and flagged the importance of defining core responsibilities for both Katie and Amy, ensuring alignment with strategic priorities, and avoiding inefficiencies and role duplication.	
3.3	Seek to double the level of marketing and administration support in the short term			There was agreement that current resourcing levels may not be sufficient for the Foundation's ambitions. Directors expressed a desire to double the level of admin and marketing support in the short term, build internal capacity without overloading existing roles, and explore flexible arrangements as income grows.	
3.4	Clarify the Foundation's expectations for directors, acknowledging different strengths and capacity			The board discussed expectations for director contribution, noting the importance of flexibility. Key themes included recognising varying capacity and strengths across the board, encouraging all directors to contribute meaningfully through time, skills, networks or fundraising, and avoiding rigid requirements while maintaining shared accountability.	
3.5	Review and update board skills matrix and succession plan			There was agreement that a well-structured, up-to-date skills matrix and succession plan is essential for good governance. Directors supported updating the matrix to reflect current board composition and skill gaps, using it to inform future recruitment and committee roles, and embedding succession planning into board culture.	
3.6	Prepare a code of conduct document for the Board, based on the Board's input from its July Strategy meeting	Board Partners		There was agreement to prepare a code of conduct for the board. The July strategy session included discussion about board culture, values and expectations, and it was agreed that these should be captured in a clear, shared document. Board Partners has prepared a draft board paper to be shared with the board at its next meeting.	

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ACTION PLAN

4. Operating Processes

Item	Action	Who	When	Discussion	Status
4.1	Review committee structure and reporting cycles			The board discussed whether the current committee structure remains fit-for-purpose. While committees have helped reduce operational noise in board meetings, directors noted opportunities to clarify committee remits and reporting expectations, streamline cycles to better align with board agendas, and reduce duplication and improve efficiency.	
4.2	Improve internal coordination (e.g. chairs meeting between board cycles)			There was agreement that internal coordination could be improved, particularly between committees. Directors proposed establishing regular meetings between committee chairs, sharing insights across committees ahead of board meetings, and encouraging better visibility of work in progress.	
4.3	Simplify policies for grants, fundraising, and sponsorships			The board discussed the need for simpler, more accessible policies. It was noted that policies related to grants, fundraising and sponsorships should be consolidated and easy to navigate, clear enough to support consistent decision-making, and proportionate to SHCF's size and risk profile.	
4.4	Develop a proportionate impact measurement and reporting approach			There was agreement that impact measurement should reflect SHCF's role as a funder, not a service provider. Directors suggested using light-touch reporting tailored to grant size, collecting qualitative stories as well as quantitative data, and ensuring reporting does not burden small community groups.	
4.5	Trial more efficient board communication tools and norms (e.g. email protocols, consideration of use of WhatsApp). Document a proposed approach to the use of WhatsApp and present to the Board at its next meeting			The board discussed the need for more efficient communication, in particular reducing email traffic and clarifying when group emails need replies, and considering tools like WhatsApp for informal communication.	
4.6	Undertake a review of our IT systems, seek a 'reverse brief' from Amy to the Board			There was agreement that SHCF's systems and processes need review. Amy noted gaps and inefficiencies in current workflows. Next steps include asking Amy to provide a 'reverse brief' on current systems and pain points, and identifying opportunities to streamline processes and reduce admin load.	
4.7	Each board meeting should comprise 30% strategy discussion			There was agreement that strategic conversations should be prioritised in board meetings. Directors discussed structuring agendas so that at least one-	

Item	Action	Who	When	Discussion	Status
				third of each meeting is focused on strategy, moving operational or update items to written reports or offline channels, and using deep dives or thematic discussions to strengthen board engagement.	