

2025 - 2030

STRATEGY REPORT

GLOBAL
CITIZENSHIP
PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

In a world facing social and economic challenges, including polarisation and rapid change, our focus on intercultural learning is more relevant than ever.

When conflict, inequality, and disconnection are on the rise, our work – that brings together people of different background to learn from one another – stands as a vital source of hope. It provides practical pathways to a better future.



Intercultural understanding is not a ‘nice-to-have’ – it is essential for peace, sustainability, and progress. We believe that by helping people live, learn, and connect across cultures, we empower them to become active global citizens. People who have taken part, become more empathic and resilient to deal with life’s challenges.

This strategy is the result of a thoughtful and inclusive process with external facilitators, Caplor Horizons.

We explored where we are now, where we want to go, and how we will get there. Through workshops, that included reflective exercises and shared learning, we shaped a strategy to 2030. This is true to our values and beliefs. And it is bold in its aspirations. We were pleased by the way that our organisational strengths were surfaced and celebrated – our resilience, our people, and our purpose-driven and strong culture all shone throughout the process.

“It has given me the opportunity to travel the world, converse with likeminded individuals as well as learn from those who live in culturally diverse and different places.”

On behalf of the Board, I want to thank everyone for working with us to bring this strategy to life. Whether you are a participant of one of our programmes, staff member, volunteer, or partner, we are very grateful for the role you play in our shared story. The work is very challenging, but we face it with optimism and clarity – knowing that, together, we can make a lasting, meaningful and positive difference.

Kate O’Brien, Chair



OUR STORY

Based in Cork, Ireland, our journey began with a powerful belief: that lived experience is a catalyst for lifelong learning, empathy, and peace.

Since 1989, we've proudly served as a recognised UN Peace Messenger Organisation, inspiring people of all ages to take part in immersive intercultural experiences that foster deep personal growth and greater global understanding.

Our programmes range from week-long cultural tours to full-year secondary school exchanges. But no matter the length, each experience plants seeds of connection that continue to grow, shaping careers, communities, and worldviews long after the journey ends.

What truly sets us apart is not just what we offer, but the way we deliver it. As a mission-driven, not-for-profit social enterprise, our focus is on service, not sales.

Surplus income is reinvested into scholarships, making our programmes accessible to those who might otherwise miss out.



Over the years, we've built trust through our values, resilient structure, and decades of collaboration. Our strength lies in the dedication of our staff, volunteers, alumni, and global partners, people bound by a shared commitment to creating meaningful impact.

We hold consultative status with both the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Council of Europe. Our designation as a UN Peace Messenger Organisation remains a proud recognition of the work we continue to do. With Ireland as our home and springboard, we remain devoted to nurturing cross-cultural relationships, fostering understanding, connection, and peace in an ever-changing world.

"The Global Citizen Award helped me to think critically about my experiences as a volunteer overseas and gave me more confidence in discussing and championing global justice issues that I'm passionate about."

OUR STORY IN NUMBERS



80+

We operate in 80+ countries worldwide

€2M+

Fully funded explore travel awards



1000+

Irish residents awarded scholarships since 1994

1500+

Participants annually



100+

Host families across Ireland



1500+

Hours contributed by volunteers annually

1964

First programme in Ireland



100%

All programmes linked to United Nation's SDGs



100%

Participants feedback personal development



100%

of Explore participants facilitate "Actions at Home"



60+

Active volunteers



9

Local host communities across Ireland



WHAT MAKES US DISTINCTIVE?



We are purpose driven, not profit driven

Everything we do is rooted in our commitment to intercultural understanding and social impact – not commercial gain. Our programmes are designed to serve individuals and communities by nurturing empathy, curiosity, and global citizenship. By staying focused on mission over margin, we ensure that integrity and inclusion are always at the heart of our decisions.



We develop global citizens

We offer not just travel, but transformation. Through immersive, experiential learning, participants gain the skills, awareness, and confidence to navigate a diverse and interconnected world. When people return home, they are changed. And they are inspired to create change in their own communities. This impact has a lifelong ripple effect that sets our approach apart.



We are part of a global movement

We belong to trusted international networks committed to intercultural exchange and peacebuilding. With partners in many countries, we leverage global expertise while staying locally grounded. This unique combination gives participants access to world-class support. It ensures that the experiences we provide contribute to a broader and shared mission of greater global understanding.

“It is rare that a program with such a full itinerary can evoke such lasting memories, but this one did.”

OUR COMMUNITY

Our Board, Staff and Volunteers

At the heart of our mission are the board, staff, and volunteers – drivers of change who turn vision into action. Their unwavering passion fuels transformative intercultural journeys, empowering individuals and shaping a more connected, compassionate world.



Our Alumni and Host Families

Our alumni, host families, and sending families are the living legacy of our mission – ambassadors of change who carry our impact far beyond borders. Through their stories, support, and advocacy, they ignite new journeys and keep the spirit of intercultural exchange alive and thriving.



Our International and National Partners

Our national partners bring our programmes to life – these collaborations, built on trust, shared purpose, and mutual growth. They provide the springboard for our global impact with educational institutions, leading youth development organisations, and grassroots community projects, along with trusted providers.



OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

FEDERATION OF EIL



Founded in 1932, the International Federation of the Experiment in International Living (Federation EIL) has been a trailblazer in intercultural exchange around the world – pioneering the homestay model and championing global citizenship through immersive cultural experiences.

As the Irish office, we are proud to have carried this mission forward for over 60 years, creating life-changing cultural immersion programmes that connect people, foster empathy, and build a more understanding world.

AFS INTERCULTURAL PROGRAMS

AFS (American Field Service) is a global movement born out of World War I, built on a vision of intercultural understanding and peace. As proud members since 2018 after years of collaboration, we serve as the Irish office, AFS Ireland – connecting local communities to a worldwide network of organisations committed to transformative learning.

As AFS Ireland, we connect Irish youth to a global movement for intercultural learning and peace. We offer study abroad and cultural immersion opportunities that open hearts, expand horizons, and empower young people in Ireland and beyond to become active global citizens.



ROAD SCHOLAR



Road Scholar is a not-for-profit leader in educational travel, offering enriching experiences for lifelong learners through immersive journeys around the globe. Often called a 'university of the world,' it brings together curious minds to explore culture, history, and human connection.

As Road Scholar's partner in Ireland, we create transformative learning journeys facilitating a combination of cultural depth, expert insight and authentic Irish experiences for lifelong learners.

EUROPEAN FEDERATION FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING (EFIL)

The European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL) is the umbrella organisation for AFS partners across Europe and the Mediterranean, working to shape a more inclusive and interconnected continent. Through advocacy, intercultural education, youth mobility, and volunteer empowerment, EFIL advances active global citizenship and lifelong learning.

As proud members since 2017, we contribute to this mission by engaging in student exchange, staff and volunteer training, and vibrant international networks that connect people and ideas across borders.



OUR STRATEGY SUMMARY



Our Vision

A just world where all cultures thrive together in peace and understanding



Our Mission

To inspire active global citizenship and personal development through intercultural learning and travel



Our Values

- Diversity – We embrace diversity in people, culture, and perspectives and nurture these differences to enrich our organisation
- Curiosity – We are always eager to learn, and we empower others to follow their curiosity about the world
- Collaboration – We are stronger together and build relationships that support our mission
- Integrity – We choose what is right and ethical over what is fast and convenient

What makes us distinctive?

- We are purpose driven, not profit driven
- We develop global citizens
- We are part of an international movement

Our Strategic Goals

- **Goal 1:** Renew Organisational Identity
- **Goal 2:** Inspire Lasting Change
- **Goal 3:** Enhance Internal Capabilities

Our Envisaged Future

By 2030, EIL/AFS will be widely recognised as Ireland's leading values-driven organisation for intercultural learning.

Our programmes will have grown in both scale and diversity, supported by a sustainable income model and strengthened through national and international partnerships. These will include new cross-sector collaborations and a continually expanding global network.

At the heart of our work will be a cohesive and empowered community of staff, volunteers and alumni, united in purpose and working together to advance our mission.

Our operations will be grounded in strong governance, reliable systems and a commitment to continuous learning, ensuring we remain resilient and effective.

The impact of our work on individuals, communities and society will be clear, meaningful and steadily growing.

Above all, we will be recognised not only for what we do, but for the way we lead, as part of a global movement dedicated to peace, understanding and genuine connection across cultures.

Our Beliefs

- We are all global citizens, and our choices impact others
- Learning is a life-long process
- Everybody has the capacity to create positive change in the world

GOAL 1: RENEW ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY

This goal anchors our future in greater clarity and purpose.

A rebranding process will enable us to strengthen the core of who we are and how we communicate this to others.

It will mean that our external voice matches our internal strength.

When renewing our identity, we will ensure that everything we say and do reflects our mission.

We will prioritise action toward: conducting a rebranding process; strengthening external engagement, marketing and communications; improving internal engagement.



Conduct a rebranding process

- Secure external support to facilitate the process
- Manage the rebranding process effectively
- Agree an action plan at the end focused on external and internal engagement

Strengthen our external engagement, marketing and communications

- Establish toolbox of marketing and communication templates
- Enhance stakeholder engagement and connection
- Grow our base of engaged stakeholders and sustain their involvement

Improve our internal engagement, embedding our new identity

- Ensure shared understanding of our new identity with our network partners
- Identify and support advocates of our organisation
- Consistently express our new identity

“I have not only learned so much about Mexican culture from the amazing people in this country, I have also learned a huge amount about myself and my capabilities in my short time here.”

GOAL 2: INSPIRE LASTING CHANGE

This goal drives us to grow with intention.

It is about increasing the difference we make through programme innovation, partnerships development, and proactively diversifying our income streams to boost long-term sustainability.

Inspiring lasting change involves reaching more people, in more ways, with experiences that transform lives.

We will prioritise action toward: developing our services; renewing our partnerships; improving our approach.



Develop our services

- Ensure we maintain high quality delivery of our current offerings
- Establish new services – innovate to develop something fresh, remarkable and relevant
- Increase levels of grant and donation income – diversifying sources, focusing on strategic funding

Deepen and expand partnerships

- Renew existing partnerships – collaboratively finding ways to improve current relationships
- Establish new partnerships – explore and develop new relationship opportunities
- Strengthen networks – taking steps to revitalise and grow our wider network

Enhance our approach

- Improve our processes for monitoring, evaluation and learning, ensuring they are rigorous, responsive and insightful
- Strengthen the way that we assess and articulate our impact, making it more compelling and evidence based
- Rethink how we bring about change, continually re-aligning it to remain effective in a fast-changing world

“Doing the Global Citizen Award was at times hard work; the reflective posts, the Action at Home projects and the 40 hours volunteering at home has made me realize we need to inspire more people to consider volunteering to learn first hand experience of sustaining the 17 SDGs for the future.”

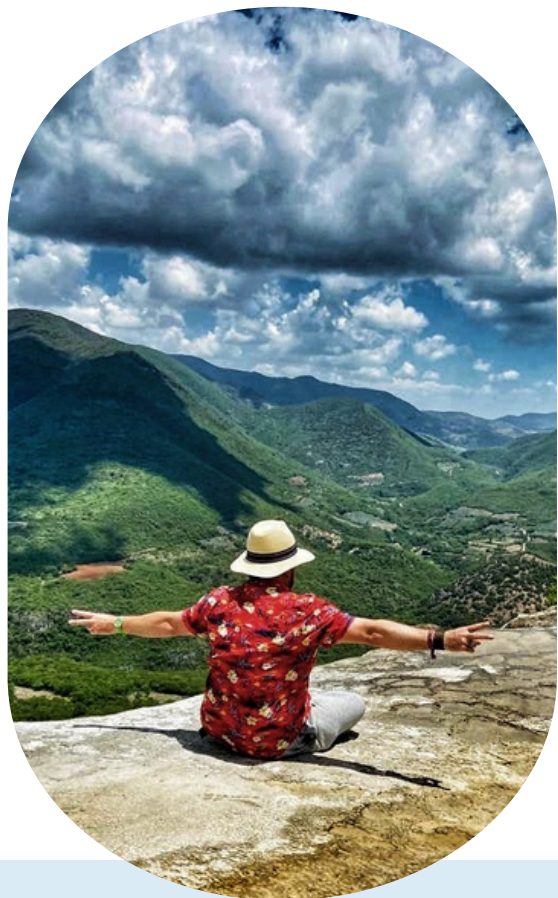
GOAL 3: ENHANCE INTERNAL CAPABILITIES

This focuses on building the capacity and cohesion needed to thrive in the future.

It will enable us to move forward with greater confidence and effectiveness.

To deliver on our mission, we must continue investing in what makes us strong.

We will prioritise action toward: developing our people; ensuring our governance is effective; strengthening our systems.



Grow our volunteer and staff teams

- Develop a clear volunteer strategy and build capacity, including establishing a 'volunteer co-ordinator' role
- Improve staff strategy and capacity to support sustainable growth and impact
- Create an alumni engagement strategy, exploring opportunities such as short programmes to strengthen the network

Ensure effective governance

- Conduct board review process, including a focus on staff-board engagement, roles and responsibilities
- Strengthen board capacity, including improving succession planning
- Ensure appropriate policies are in place and maintain compliance practices

Strengthen systems

- Improve financial and administrative operations, with a focus on streamlining processes
- Strengthen data management and analysis to better inform decision making
- Integrate and co-ordinate systems, including exploring effective uses of emerging technology to boost efficiency and insight

“Great choice of experiences; informative, personable instructors, excellent well-informed and inspirational leader.”

OUR ENVISAGED FUTURE: BY 2030...

- We will be seen as a leader in intercultural education in Ireland and as an influential part of a global movement for peace and understanding.
- Our renewed identity will be clearly understood and widely recognised as a trusted, values-led intercultural learning organisation.
- Participation in our programmes will grow in scale and diversity, with more people from underrepresented backgrounds accessing life-changing opportunities.
- Our income will be more balanced, by finding further earned income streams and a growing base of grants and donations.
- We will continue to maintain and develop strategic partnerships with other like-minded organisations across sectors and geographies.
- Our staff and volunteers will be consistently supported, resourced, and inspired, forming a cohesive, collaborative team.
- Alumni will be active contributors and ambassadors, helping amplify our mission across communities and generations.
- Our governance will be robust, future-facing, and grounded in clear roles, responsibilities, and engagement.
- Our systems – financial, technological, and operational – will be efficient, scalable, and aligned with our ambitions.
- We will be able to clearly evidence the positive impact of our work on individuals and society.



OUR CULTURE, GOVERNANCE & PLANNING

Our organisational culture is mission-driven, values-led, and grounded in our beliefs.

- We have demonstrated remarkable resilience through significant leadership transitions and global disruption.
- We have deeply committed people – staff, volunteers, board members, and partners. Together, they provide a positive environment for participants on our programmes.
- Effective governance is central to sustaining our strength. As a registered Irish charity, we are committed to maintaining the highest standards of accountability, and compliance. This includes ongoing board development, with clear roles and responsibilities.
- We operate in alignment with the six principles of the Charities Regulator’s Governance Code: advancing charitable purpose; behaving with integrity; leading people; exercising control; working effectively; being accountable and transparent.
- At the same time, we function as a mission-driven social enterprise, generating most of our income through educational programmes and reinvesting any surplus into scholarships, and improving organisational sustainability. This approach is consistent with our charitable status, as we prioritise public benefit, operate transparently, and advance our core charitable mission – promoting intercultural understanding and global citizenship.



“Since becoming part of EIL explore I have grown and developed so much as a person, I am much more confident, understanding and culturally educated. I have made so many new friends and created many connections.”



Our strategy is taken forward through dynamic, annual planning cycles.

- Our progress is tracked through an annual cycle of planning, implementation and review.
- Each year, we will develop an Annual Plan and prepare a corresponding Annual Budget.
- We will constantly reflect on achievements and identify areas for improvement and change.
- Our strategy is a dynamic and living framework – anchored in long-term goals but responsive to change.
- Our board and leadership team maintain oversight, ensure accountability, and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- As our work involves considerable international travel, we are proactive about how we can operate in alignment with sustainability principles.



"The Explore programme has given me the strength to trust my own choices and not fear how other people perceive me. I have grown to harness my independence and make choices I never thought I would have the courage to do before. Many people would say I am a completely different person since returning from my 8 weeks in Mexico and I would agree, I'm proud of the person I am now."





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