



UTS

Institute for
Sustainable
Futures

ISF Strategy 2025-2027



Acknowledgement of Country

The Institute for Sustainable Futures acknowledges the Gadigal people, upon whose ancestral lands our office stands. We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, recognising them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

Who we are and what we do

The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) is an independent research institute at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Our mission is to create change towards sustainable futures.

We work to realise our vision of a socially, ecologically and economically just and safe world in which everyone has the resources and skills they need to flourish.

Our strength is our deep understanding of global sustainability challenges and their complexity. This is embedded in our approach.

We bring together expertise from diverse fields to lead our action research and to address challenges holistically from a systems perspective.

We work in partnership with government, industry and communities to help them address their sustainability challenges and create transformative change.

Our Graduate Research Program nurtures and develops a new generation of global sustainability leaders. Our learning experiences give individuals, organisations, industry and government the knowledge and skills they need to drive change.

Our research makes impact in many forms including:

- new thinking and skills
- transformed values
- changes in practice, systems, products and services
- investment outcomes and policy change.

ISF has grown in both size and impact since its inception in 1997. We began with a cohort of Director, Administrator and several PhD candidates. We now are an institute of 106 staff, 60 higher degree research students and 40+ associates.

In 2024, Climate-KIC Australia joined ISF as a research program. Climate-KIC brings to ISF deep knowledge of systems innovation, adding to our existing expertise in sustainability relating to water; international development; energy; resources; business, economy and governance; food systems; urban systems; and climate adaptation.

Our values

Passion



We are passionate about what we do and challenge the status quo

Care



We go the extra distance for each other, our collaborators and the planet

Inclusion



We listen before we speak and respect each other in our thinking, knowledge and world views

Integrity



We combine rigour and relevance with an ethical approach to achieve impactful outcomes

Collaboration



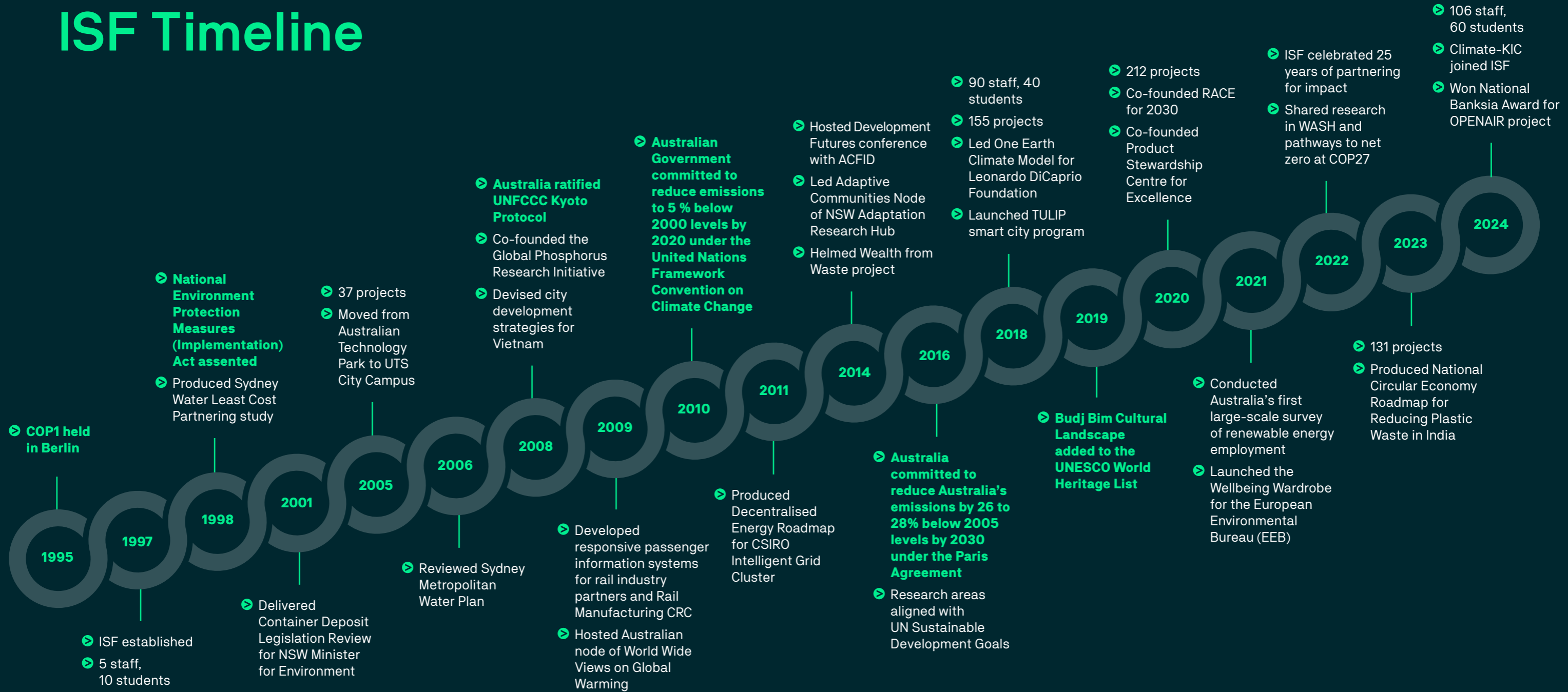
We meet people where they are at, to co-create and enable transformative and lasting change

Courage

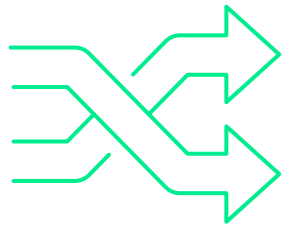


We take risks and take responsibility for progressing our purpose

ISF Timeline



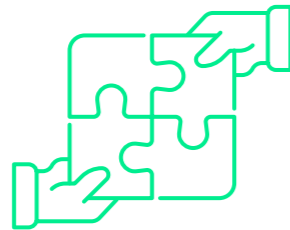
What makes us distinct



We focus on systems change

Our projects and research create lasting positive effects by reforming the complex systems that shape our world. We are clear and future-focused about the change we are seeking to make.

We connect big-picture thinking with grounded realities to create viable change pathways.



We take a transdisciplinary approach

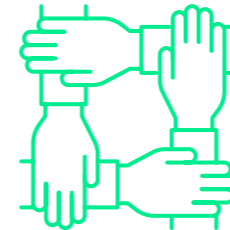
We generate and integrate knowledge from diverse perspectives. This enables us to tackle socially relevant issues that don't fit neatly into one domain or a single sector or field. We also contribute to the field of research in this area.¹

Our approach combines the academic rigour, diverse skillsets, and innovative methods and tools needed to deliver evidence-based, independent and ethical research of the highest quality. We value the diverse perspectives provided by practical, local and personal knowledge alongside scientific and disciplinary expertise in creating solutions that are inclusive of all stakeholders.



We collaborate meaningfully with our partners

The people we work with – from funders to collaborators and communities – are our partners. Their perspectives are important to our work. We collaborate meaningfully with them to co-develop visions, develop viable pathways and support them in making transformative change. We build and maintain strong partnerships aligned with our mission and values. We partner at scale, joining together key players from governments, other institutions, industries and international bodies to form purposeful, productive alliances.

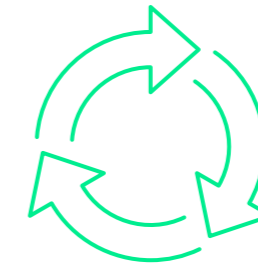


We hold ourselves accountable to the strongest integrity and quality standards

Our work benefits from high-quality research design and review processes consistent with UTS's position among the top 100 global universities.²

We adhere to strong ethical research practices guided by care for our partners and vulnerable populations.

We ensure we maintain a strong independence in what we do. We are open and transparent with partners and clients regarding the evidence and data we collect.



We combine the best parts of not-for-profit and commercial worlds

ISF occupies a special space within the sustainability sector, standing out in a crowded market of academic institutions and commercial consultancies.

We approach our work with the integrity of a not-for-profit organisation. We are guided by our values and our research is reliable and trustworthy.

At the same time, we understand and respond to the needs of our clients. We operate efficiently and are customer-oriented.

1. Fam, D., Lopes, A.M., Mitchell, C. & O'Rourke, M. (eds.) 2021, 'Transdisciplinary learning within tertiary institutions: A space to skin your knees', in *Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Failures: Lessons Learned from Cautionary Tales*, Taylor and Francis, pp. 198-216.

2. Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024

Our work

ISF's research spans a broad range of sustainability concerns.



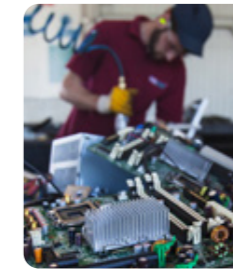
Business, Economy and Governance

- Sustainable economy, finance and investment
- AI and sustainability impacts



Energy Futures

- Customer and community energy innovation
- Energy jobs and fairness
- Pathways to 100% renewable energy
- Electric vehicles and transportation



Resource Stewardship

- Circular and equitable resource flows
- Responsible value chains
- Product stewardship and circular economy governance
- Food systems and organic resources



Healthy Environments

- Smart cities
- Housing
- Human and planetary health
- Resilient Communities



Water Futures

- Integrated water systems
- Smart buildings and digital water
- Water efficiency and demand analysis
- Decision-making under uncertainty



International Development

- Development effectiveness
- Water and sanitation
- Climate change adaptation and resilience



Transformative Learning

- Learning design and evaluation
- Short courses for organisations and individuals
- Bespoke enterprise learning



Graduate Research program

- Systems innovation
- Facilitation, design and sensemaking



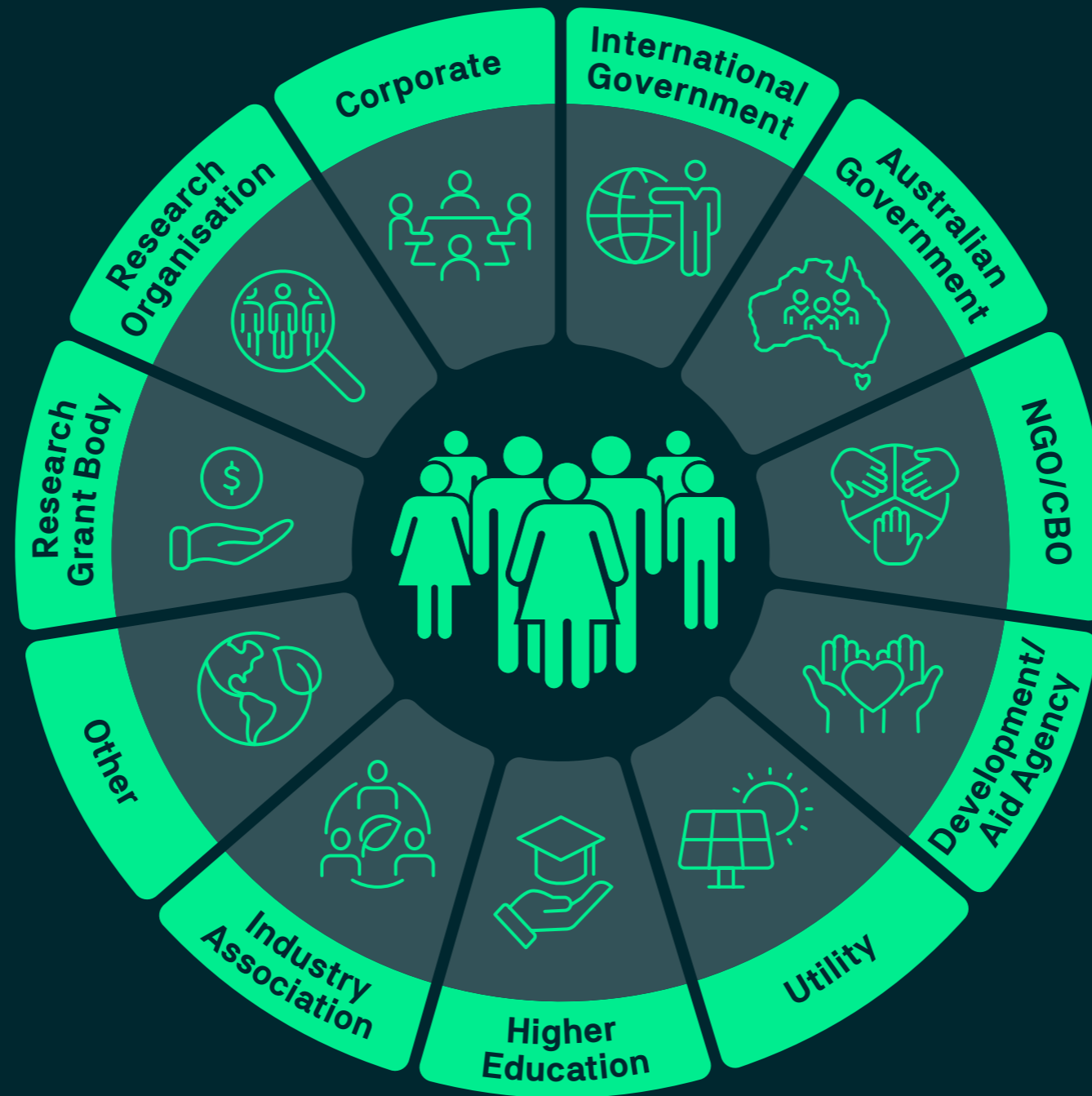
Climate-KIC Australia

- Systems innovation, design and education
- Industry decarbonisation and regions
- Cities and built environment
- Adaptation and resilience
- Renewables and low emissions technology

Climate-KIC Australia works within the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures

Who we work with

We collaborate with a diverse range of clients to deliver solutions-focused, project-based research.





Context: towards 2030 and beyond

The world is rapidly changing. We are already feeling the effects of climate change. New technology is bringing with it new challenges. Uncertainty has become the new normal.

We are fast approaching 2030, a landmark year for both the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets to reduce greenhouse emissions steeply by 2030 to fulfil the expectations of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The decisions we make – and the action we take – in the next few years will not only determine our ability to meet the 2030 targets. They will also have long-lasting effects on sustainable futures.

We are facing growing inequality, and insecurity of resources such as water, food and energy.

The immediate future calls for transformative change and collaboration across government, industry and civil society.

The sustainability transition to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies has begun and is picking up speed.

There is urgent need for policy, economic and operational support for this transition. We must also ensure the transition does not unfairly disadvantage vulnerable communities.

Governments, businesses and civil society must work together to strengthen climate policies and invest in solutions that help the world to rapidly reduce emissions. They must also collaborate to address the complexity of governing change.

There is need to build resilience in climate-affected communities and systems and to ensure the health of people and planet in the future.

ISF's role

ISF is well placed to engage with uncertainty.

Our methods respond to rapidly changing dynamics. We develop and use tools and techniques that enable us to explore and anticipate alternative futures.

Our role in the years leading up to 2030 will be to:

- inform and influence policy and investment that will accelerate and support the sustainability transition
- provide viable sustainability pathways to governments and industry
- fill skills and knowledge gaps and boost capabilities of individuals, organisations, industries and government
- empower communities to build resilience and address the impacts of climate change head-on
- ensure that the most vulnerable among us are not left behind.

ISF's 2025-2027 challenge

Our challenge in the next three years is to grow our impact to serve our mission and vision while modelling operational excellence and organisational sustainability.

We will meet this challenge by focusing on five strategic priorities.

Our 2025-2027 strategy: snapshot

Mission

Create change towards sustainable futures

Vision

A socially, ecologically and economically just and safe world in which everyone has the resources and skills they need to flourish



Strategic priorities

Act on leverage points

Identify and activate the systemic levers that drive the most transformative change. Scale out, up and deep.

Deepen global impact

Strengthen connections with international partners to make a greater impact on a broader scale.

Form purposeful alliances

Deliberately construct coalitions that accelerate and magnify systems change.

Build capability for transformative change

Provide guidance and skills to support the sustainability transition and equip learners with the future-oriented capabilities needed to lead change.

Champion continuous improvement

Continue to strengthen our capabilities, practices and approaches to improve client and staff satisfaction while sustainably growing our impact.



Strategic priorities for 2025-2027

Act on leverage points



ISF has influenced policy changes and built our partners' capacity to create impact at a largely local level for more than 25 years. To address the global and national challenges we now face, we will identify the leverage points³ that can make the greatest change within systems and act on them.

This will enable us to:

- **scale up** to impact laws, policy and investment
- **scale out** to impact greater numbers, and
- **scale deep** to impact cultural values and beliefs.⁴

We will seek to activate levers of change across social practice, behaviour, markets, production systems and technologies.

We will increase and intensify our engagement with policy processes.

And we will extend our work in the financial realm, to influence investment in transitions and pathways in areas such as energy; climate action; resources; and water and sanitation.

Establishing a 'Business, economy and governance' research program and partnering with the Net Zero Asset Owners Alliance for the One Earth Climate Model are recent examples of ISF seeking new leverage points. Both these strategic actions extend our work from policy intervention to considering investment flows in the national and global economy.

3. Meadows, D.H. 1999, 'Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system', The Sustainability Institute.

4. Moore, M.-L., Riddell, D. & Vocisano, D. 2015, 'Scaling out, scaling up, scaling deep: Strategies of non-profits in advancing systemic social innovation', Journal of Corporate Citizenship, vol. 2015, no. 58, pp. 67-84.

Deepen global impact



ISF has a strong background in international engagement across all our research programs.

The urgency of the global challenges we are facing demand that we escalate our global leadership. We can increase our impact by bringing together and working with international NGOs, multilateral agencies, governments and industry. This applies to both high- and low-income countries.

We now have scale to do this. We can build on our strong international relationships with the international development and energy sectors, and with our international

PhD alumni. We can leverage Climate-KIC's European connections and the UTS Global Partnerships and strengthen our existing connections with partners in our region.

A global approach maximises our impact by allowing us to use the lessons learned from one project to support another, while addressing each project's unique context and requirements.

Form purposeful alliances



ISF's approach to partnerships is a hallmark of our work and one of our main strengths. Collaborating with likeminded organisations, governments, industries and communities has helped to progress our mission and inform our research.

In recent years we have enabled systems change by founding and participating in partnerships with groups including:

- The Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence
- NSW Decarbonisation Innovation Hub
- RACE for 2030 Cooperative Research Centre
- Sanitation and Water for All
- Climate Resilient Sanitation Coalition
- Local Water Solutions Forum
- International Water Association
- Australian Water Association
- Materials and Embodied Carbon Leaders Alliance (MECLA)

- Business Renewables Centre Australia
- Australian Water Partnership
- Australian Council for International Development
- Research for Development Impact Network.

Our merger with Climate-KIC strengthens our ability to make systems change and signals a renewed strategic approach to partnerships.

Given the urgency of the task ahead, we will take a more active role. We will deliberately construct coalitions that can accelerate and magnify the change we seek to create.

Build capability for transformative change



ISF will advance and support change by developing capacity among the leaders of the sustainability transition.

The ISF 2024 Strategy established a new course development program to develop future leaders of the sustainability transition and to enhance ISF's research translation. In the coming years, we will refine and strengthen our educational offerings. We will identify the areas where our courses can best use our expertise and where they can address skills-gaps we have recognised in our research.

Enterprise learning will be an important focus, as it allows us to tailor learning experiences to partners' needs. We will also continue to build new short course

and award course offerings for a broader market, with a focus on key leverage points for transformative change.

Informed by UTS's expertise in course design, we will build our reputation for high-quality and rigorous course content. Our standing as a respected and long-running research institute will set us apart from other providers. Our Graduate Research Program will continue to equip research students with the future-oriented capabilities they need to facilitate transformative change towards sustainable futures.

Champion continuous improvement



ISF is a learning organisation that values and prioritises ongoing personal and organisational development, innovation and knowledge transfer.

In the coming years we will use a range of reflective practices and future thinking methods to identify how we can most effectively develop our key capabilities and transform our practices. This will ensure client and staff satisfaction while growing our impact in an internally sustainable way.

We will honour our reputation as an employer of choice. And we will model our values by fostering an environment in which our people can thrive and are valued, respected and responsible for contributing to ISF's mission.



Commitment to achieving our priorities

ISF is committed to accountability.

We have robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems in place to measure the impact of our projects and initiatives. In the next three years, we will continue to refine and use them.

We know that internal and external changes will occur during this time, and we are committed to reviewing our approach and strategic priorities to best respond to them.

Let's collaborate

Contact isf@uts.edu.au to see how we can work together towards positive change.



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