



2025

Roots & Rivers Annual Report

Table of Contents

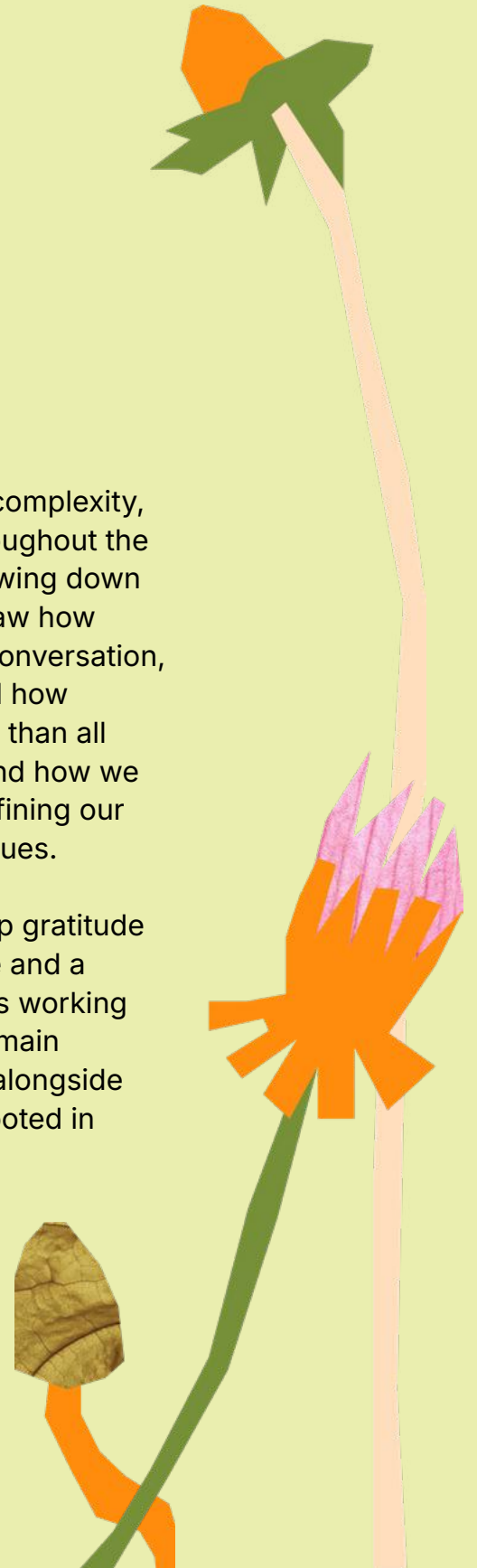
03	Message from Roots & Rivers	15	Our Client Work
05	Thinking in Seasons	23	Internal Work
07	2025 Highlights	27	2022-2025 Strategic Plan
09	Team and Ecosystem	31	Conclusion



Message from Roots & Rivers

In 2025, we supported organizations navigating complexity, uncertainty, and change, including our own. Throughout the year, we were reminded of the importance of slowing down to reflect, especially when urgency is high. We saw how clarity emerges when there is space for honest conversation, how trust is built through thoughtful process, and how meaningful change happens incrementally rather than all at once. These lessons shaped our client work and how we worked as a team, strengthening our practice, refining our approach, and grounding our decisions in our values.

As we look ahead to 2026, we carry forward deep gratitude for the relationships that made this work possible and a renewed commitment to supporting organizations working toward equitable and long-lasting change. We remain focused on building on what's working, learning alongside our partners, and contributing to impact that is rooted in community, reflection, and long-term purpose.





Thinking in Seasons

At Roots & Rivers, we've begun making sense of our work in relation to the passing seasons. When seasons transition, we pause as a team to reflect on where we've been and to set intentions for the months ahead. This practice has become one of the most grounding parts of how we work together, and it shapes the design of this report.



2025 Highlights

One Team, 40 Projects

We worked on 40 projects in 2025 and brought 31 across the finish line. As we evolve our thinking towards ongoing partnerships instead of one-off projects, we will be exploring how to evolve this metric.

A Changing Team

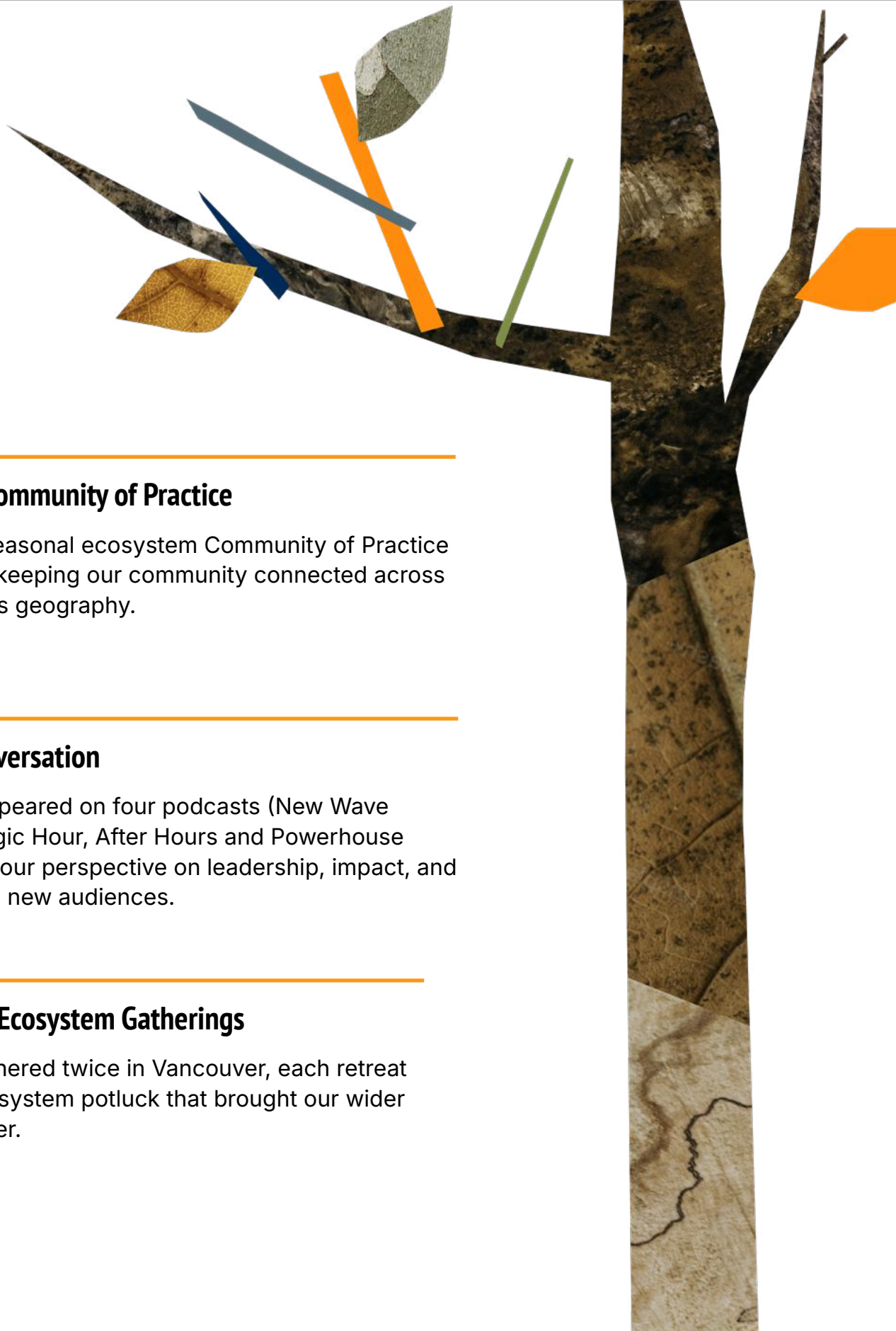
Adishi joined the Roots & Rivers team full-time, and Austin put down new roots in Halifax, expanding our presence and our perspective across the country.

We Showed Up in the Room

At the Banff Systems Summit, BC Nonprofit Leadership Conference, Canadian Forum for Social Innovation, and the BC School Superintendents Association Conference, Roots & Rivers was present in the spaces shaping the sector.

Sharing What We Know

Our team led sessions on impact measurement at Social Venture Institute Virtual and on social innovation labs at the Local Government Management Association's Annual Conference, sharing practical knowledge with practitioners across the country.



Developing Our Community of Practice

We hosted three seasonal ecosystem Community of Practice gatherings online, keeping our community connected across the year and across geography.

Our Voices in Conversation

Team members appeared on four podcasts (New Wave of Leadership, Magic Hour, After Hours and Powerhouse Balance), bringing our perspective on leadership, impact, and systems change to new audiences.

Team Retreats & Ecosystem Gatherings

Our staff team gathered twice in Vancouver, each retreat paired with an ecosystem potluck that brought our wider community together.

Our Team

Roots & Rivers is a close-knit team. The people who make up our staff and ecosystem are central to everything we do. 2025 brought meaningful change to our team, and we want to take a moment to recognize both the people who shaped our year and the work we did to strengthen how we support and grow together.



Annelies Tjebbes
Founder & CEO



Adishi Gupta
Project & Engagement Specialist



Austin Lui
Senior Facilitation Lead
& Project Manager



Hayley Rutherford
Senior Project Manager
& Operations Director





Celebrating Janani

Former Project Manager & Engagement Lead

For the first time, we have an alumni staff member to celebrate. In August of 2025, after three and a half years with Roots & Rivers, Janani Ravikularam left our team to take on a new position. She has had an incredible influence on our team, ecosystem, clients, and community. Janani's ways of working are now part of the foundation that will support us as we move forward.



Welcoming Adishi

Our Project & Engagement Specialist

Adishi joined our team in September 2025 as our new Project & Engagement Specialist. She first became part of our community as an ecosystem member in 2024, and it's been a joy to see her journey lead to this staff role. Her dedication to fostering meaningful engagement is inspiring, and we are excited to continue learning alongside her.

Hiring Process Reflections

In summer 2025, Roots & Rivers was a team of four full-time staff. As Austin prepared to relocate from Vancouver to Halifax, we created a job posting for a new role to help us manage this change and support our growth. Midway through the hiring process, we got the news that another change was coming to our team. We said goodbye to Janani, wishing her well in her new role.

We had entered this process focused on what we thought we needed. As we reflected, we realized how deep the impact of losing one person was to our small team. By the end of the process, as a team of three, approaching Austin's move, and amidst growing precarity and austerity in the sector, we began to consider some new possibilities.

We ultimately did not fill the originally posted role. This was an incredibly tough decision, but one that felt grounded and clear once made. We welcomed Adishi Gupta as our new Project & Engagement Specialist and met an incredible group of people along the way, many of whom we hope to collaborate with as part of our ecosystem.

This process reminded us of the abundance of talent and heart in our community. We share our gratitude to everyone who applied, shared our posting, or supported us through this transition.

Compensation Philosophy

In Spring 2025, we partnered with ReImagine Work to develop our first Compensation Philosophy to inform a more equitable, transparent, and collaborative approach to how we compensate our staff team. This process included a team-wide review of our jobs with a focus on the different ways each team member contributes to internal and external work, the development of a set of guiding principles, and a salary grid grounded in market research and our company values.



Our Ecosystem

In 2025, we had the privilege of working with an incredible group of ecosystem members on client and internal projects.

Andrea Solnes

Anum Ahmed

Daniela Cohen

Hadil Al-Ashwal

Jess McKeown

Joy Lopes

Karolina Wudniak

Lana Klok

Louise Adongo

Meagan Sutton

Marialejandra Reyes Valerio

Ry Hemingway

Sangeeta Subramanian

Shiva Mazrouei


Tasneem Damji

Temitope Abiagom

Vashisht Asrani

Weiwei Su

Yaw Sarkodie-Mensah



Engaging the wisdom of our ecosystem remains core to how we work. In 2025, we began to consider our ecosystem as a Community of Practice, building on an existing rhythm of connection and evolving it into something more intentional. Part of this shift was reconsidering the purpose and design of our seasonal gatherings, where long-standing collaborators and new members come together in conversation. We consistently heard a need for space to speak candidly about instability in the sector, AI, wellbeing at work, and the weight of global events. We also heard a desire to remain connected and purposeful in our work. These gatherings continue to be a reliable space for sharing wins and struggles, testing ideas, and strengthening relationships across our network.

We also worked to streamline intake and onboarding processes and to articulate clearer project roles and contribution options for those contributing to client-facing work. These efforts reflect a shift toward a more defined ecosystem model centering reciprocity, transparency, and sustained connection.

Our Clients

Our clients work across the social purpose and public services sectors, a broad and interconnected set of organizations committed to improving community wellbeing and addressing complex social challenges. A shared orientation toward people and planetary benefit, not a single issue or approach, is what connects them. Our clients are supporting people and communities through education, healthcare, economic inclusion, housing, and other essential services.

We are inspired by the leadership, integrity, and persistence of the organizations we work with. Our clients deliver essential services while navigating complexity with thoughtfulness and courage, strengthening their communities in the face of uncertainty. We are proud to partner with organizations that are deeply committed to public benefit and to advancing more equitable and sustainable systems.





Our Client Work

In 2025, we had 40 active projects, 31 of which were completed, including 14 strategic planning, 8 evaluation, and 9 facilitation engagements. Each project offered a window into the realities facing the communities and systems our clients are working with and for.

Rather than diving into specific projects in this report, we're reflecting on the patterns, pressures, and possibilities shaping the realities of our clients that we observed from working on projects across healthcare, community economic development, and education.

Healthcare

In 2025, we worked with community health centres, professional associations for healthcare professionals, unions, and organizations addressing barriers to healthcare access through strategic planning and evaluation projects. Across these engagements, we saw how much these organizations were under pressure to collaborate, modernize, and move toward more integrated and equitable models of care, in contexts shaped by workforce shortages, burnout, and a slow speed of system change.

Our Healthcare Clients

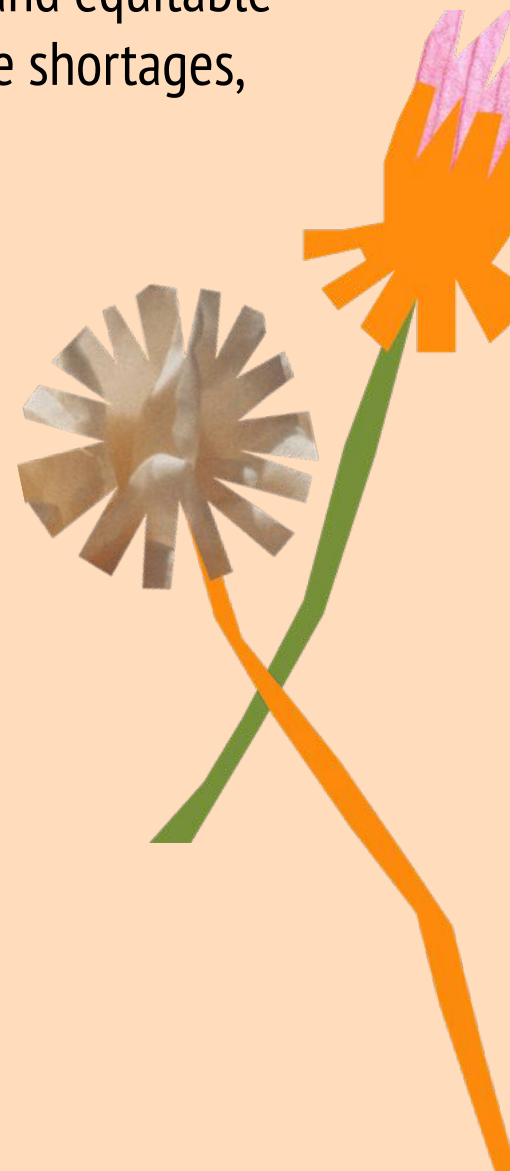
BC Association of Community Health Centres

BC Family Doctors


Health Sciences Association of BC

Hope Air

Midwives Association of BC



Strategic Planning In a Complex Context



Working alongside healthcare professional associations and unions representing health care professionals from across BC, we witnessed how each of these groups was navigating the province's focus on integrated primary care while also navigating significant structural change. Recent amalgamations of regulatory colleges, alongside broader system reforms, have required many to take a deeper look at the state and future of their professions. These shifts are unfolding in a context where the healthcare system continues to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, including workforce strain, service backlogs, and evolving public expectations.

Strategic planning in this environment required more than setting priorities. It meant creating space for open and candid dialogue about scope of practice, professional identity, and what is needed for meaningful collaboration across disciplines. Organizations were grappling with difficult questions about their role within a changing system: how to advocate effectively, support members through uncertainty, and contribute constructively to integrated care. Our role was to help structure these conversations so they could surface tensions, clarify direction, and move toward practical commitments grounded in today's realities.

Engagement Under Pressure

An interesting feature of board and committee leadership within healthcare associations and unions is that many in leadership roles are practicing professionals themselves, and they are working within the same strained systems they are helping to steward. Strategic conversations are happening alongside clinical shifts, workforce shortages, and constant change. Any engagement approach has to respect that context.

Engaging members to inform strategy is essential, particularly to understand perspectives that reflect diverse regional realities. At the same time, we had to recognize that healthcare professionals are among the busiest people working, managing high volumes of communication and competing demands. What proved most effective were targeted asks and multiple entry points for participants, including focused surveys, small group discussions, one-on-one interviews, and webinars designed to fit into existing rhythms. Across all healthcare engagements, our work emphasized navigating complexity rather than simplifying it. By supporting engagement and strategic clarity, we helped healthcare organizations make progress toward more integrated and equitable care within real-world conditions.

Education

In 2025, our work in the education sector focused on supporting leaders and organizations to navigate change, clarify priorities, and strengthen alignment across complex systems. We worked across K–12 school districts, systems-level education contexts, and informal education organizations, bringing strategic planning, facilitation, and governance expertise to a range of public and community-based settings.

Our Education Clients

BC Public School Employers Association

Burnaby School District

Hollyhock Leadership Institute

New Westminister School District

Research Impact Canada

Techsploration

A large, stylized green leaf graphic is positioned on the right side of the page, extending from the bottom towards the top. The leaf has a serrated edge and a prominent vein structure, rendered in various shades of green.

Strategic Planning with School Districts

A significant portion of our 2025 education work involved strategic planning with school districts in BC. These districts were operating in contexts shaped by capacity constraints, evolving governance expectations, and increasing pressure to respond to rapidly evolving community needs.

Our work supported boards of education and senior leadership teams to step out of day-to-day operational demands and focus on longer-term direction. Through facilitated planning processes, we helped districts clarify strategic priorities, strengthen alignment between governance and management, and develop plans that were both aspirational and grounded in operational reality.

Across these engagements, we emphasized structured reflection, clear decision-making, and attention to local context. Strategic planning was used as a tool to build shared understanding across leadership groups and to support more coherent and confident implementation over time.

Informal and Community-Based Education

Our education work in 2025 also extended beyond formal K–12 systems. This work focused on clarifying strategic intent, strengthening governance structures, and aligning organizational practices with values related to equity, access, and impact. The engagement reflected our ability to adapt strategic planning and governance support to community-based education organizations with different accountability structures and operating conditions than public systems.

Across all education engagements in 2025, we designed planning processes that reflected the realities education leaders were working within. Our work balanced structure and flexibility, creating space for honest reflection while keeping momentum toward clear priorities and decisions. This work establishes a strong foundation for our continued engagement in the education sector in the years ahead.

Community Economic Development

In 2025, our community economic development work had us working alongside clients who are strengthening local economies while centering inclusion for people facing systemic barriers. We worked with organizations in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) and those supporting Northern, rural, and remote communities. In these contexts, success is measured by local relevancy, dignity, stability, and long-term community benefit.

Our Community Economic Development Clients

312 Main

EMBERS EastSide Works

Exchange Inner City

Grow Local Society

Minerva BC

Rising Star Housing Co-Operative

Small Economy Works

Economic Inclusion and Local Economies

Organizations working in community development and community economic development are often operating in the spaces between programs offered by governments or other social purpose organizations. Their work reflects a close reading of community realities: where systems fall short, where eligibility criteria exclude those most in need, and where additional support is needed to translate policy into meaningful outcomes. We saw thoughtful program design aimed at reducing barriers for people with diverse lived experiences, including those facing poverty, disability, discrimination, and/or geographic isolation. These organizations meet people where they're at, which demands an organizational attentiveness that is easy to underestimate from the outside. To be genuinely useful to organizations doing that kind of work, we had to apply the same principle to ourselves by showing up in ways that fit their context.

These organizations are active civic leaders. They create spaces and initiatives that highlight local strengths, celebrate community identity, and challenge narratives that dismiss certain regions or populations as lacking potential. And they're doing all of this amid real pressures, including governance transitions, funding instability, and shifting policy landscapes. For our team, this meant staying grounded in each organization's community context, to sit with complexity rather than smooth it over, and to help teams make clear-eyed choices about focus and sustainability without losing sight of what makes their work distinct.





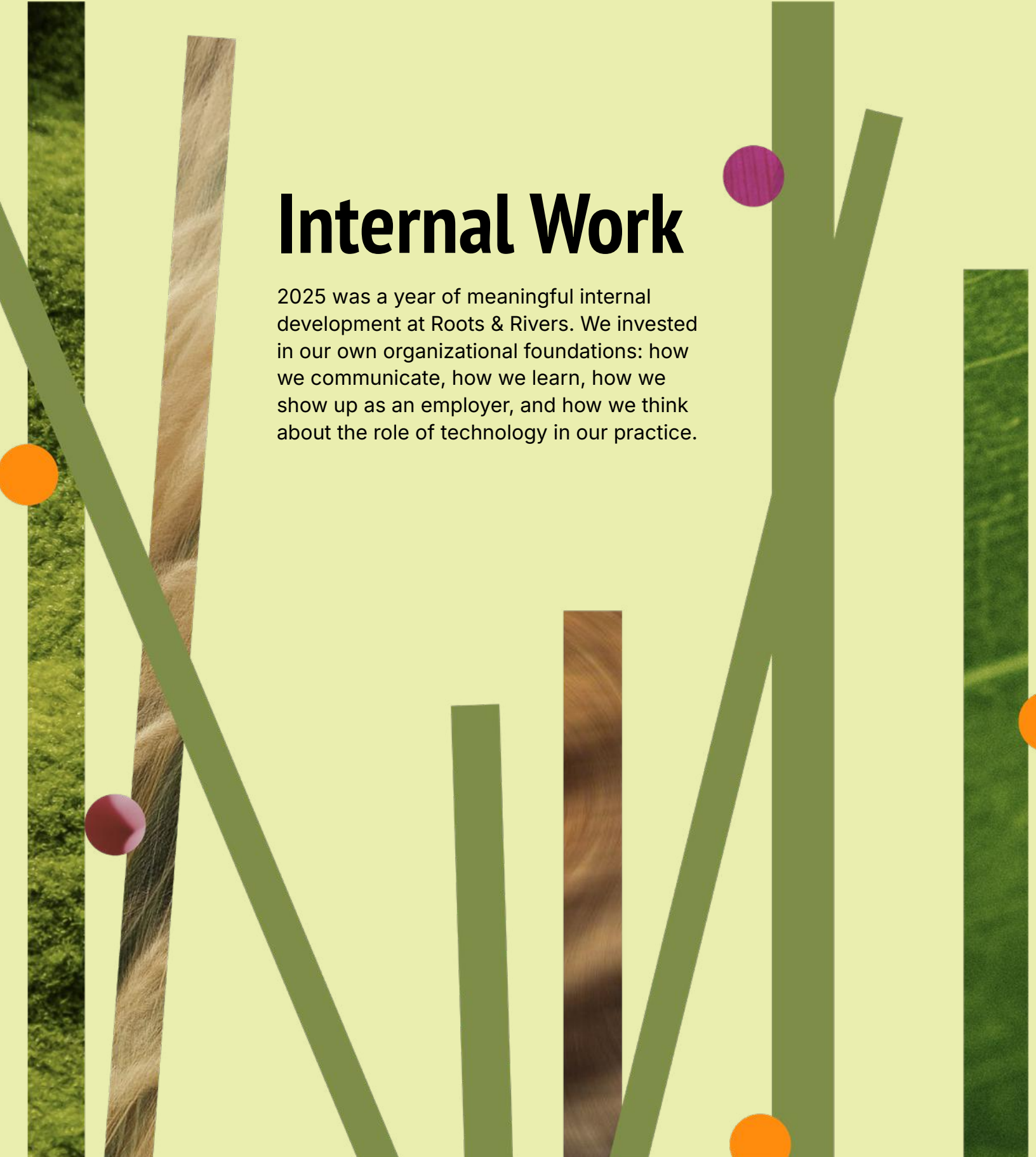
Community Governance and Organizational Capacity

Community development organizations working in complex contexts have to navigate organizational change, not as an exception, but as a structural feature of how community-focused work gets funded and delivered. Many are operating as pilots, which means they may be in a phase of ramping up, working to sustain what they've built, or winding down when a funding cycle ends. Others are simply responding to the pressures of a shifting environment: changing policy, funding instability, evolving community needs. In all of these situations, the stakes of getting transitions wrong are real. Unlike organizational change in other contexts, the ripple effects here extend directly into communities, affecting people who depend on services, relationships built over years, and the trust that makes low-barrier programming possible.

That reality shapes what careful strategic support looks like in this sector. Sunsetting a program isn't just an operational task. It requires deliberate attention to continuity, to honouring what was built, and to transferring learning so that the work lives on even when the structure doesn't. Supporting an organization through governance or financial pressure means helping boards and staff find clarity without losing sight of their community commitments. And in all of it, there's a throughline: the organizational changes happening inside these structures have to be managed with as much care for community impact as for institutional sustainability. That's a discipline in itself, and one we came to see as central to this work.

Internal Work

2025 was a year of meaningful internal development at Roots & Rivers. We invested in our own organizational foundations: how we communicate, how we learn, how we show up as an employer, and how we think about the role of technology in our practice.



Visibility and Thought Leadership

In 2025, the breadth and depth of our public presence grew. With more staff capacity, we published a regular monthly blog, sent a consistent newsletter, and deepened our presence on LinkedIn, prioritizing insight-driven content that reflects our values and contributes to sector conversations.

We also stepped into more public spaces. Annelies appeared on three podcasts, including Venture for Canada's A New Wave of Entrepreneurship alongside Hayley Rutherford, where they spoke openly about parental leave, founder transitions, and building systems that support team growth. The Magic Hour, After Hours, and Powerhouse Balance podcasts offered space for Annelies to explore heart-centred leadership, intuition, and what it means to build a values-driven organization from the inside out.

The team attended and presented at four conferences: the BC Nonprofit Leadership Conference, the Canadian Forum for Social Innovation in Halifax, the Banff Systems Summit, and the Local Government Management Association's (LGMA) Annual Conference. We co-facilitated sessions on cross-scale collaboration, social labs, and nonprofit-municipal partnerships, and had the added satisfaction of seeing the LGMA's new strategic plan, a project Roots & Rivers supported, officially launch.

Generative AI Policy

Like many organizations, we spent 2025 grappling with how to approach generative AI. We were clear that stepping away from the conversation wasn't the right move. Instead, we wanted to be part of shaping how AI is used with intention and integrity. During a learning week, Austin Lui led conversations with ecosystem members and peers to inform our approach. We developed our first AI policy as a living document grounded in these core principles: keeping human connection central, building trust through transparency, and actively mitigating bias and harm. We also launched a LinkedIn series, "AI Could Never," that grounded us in the empathy, judgment, lived experience, and care that AI cannot replace.



Strategic Plan and Theory of Change

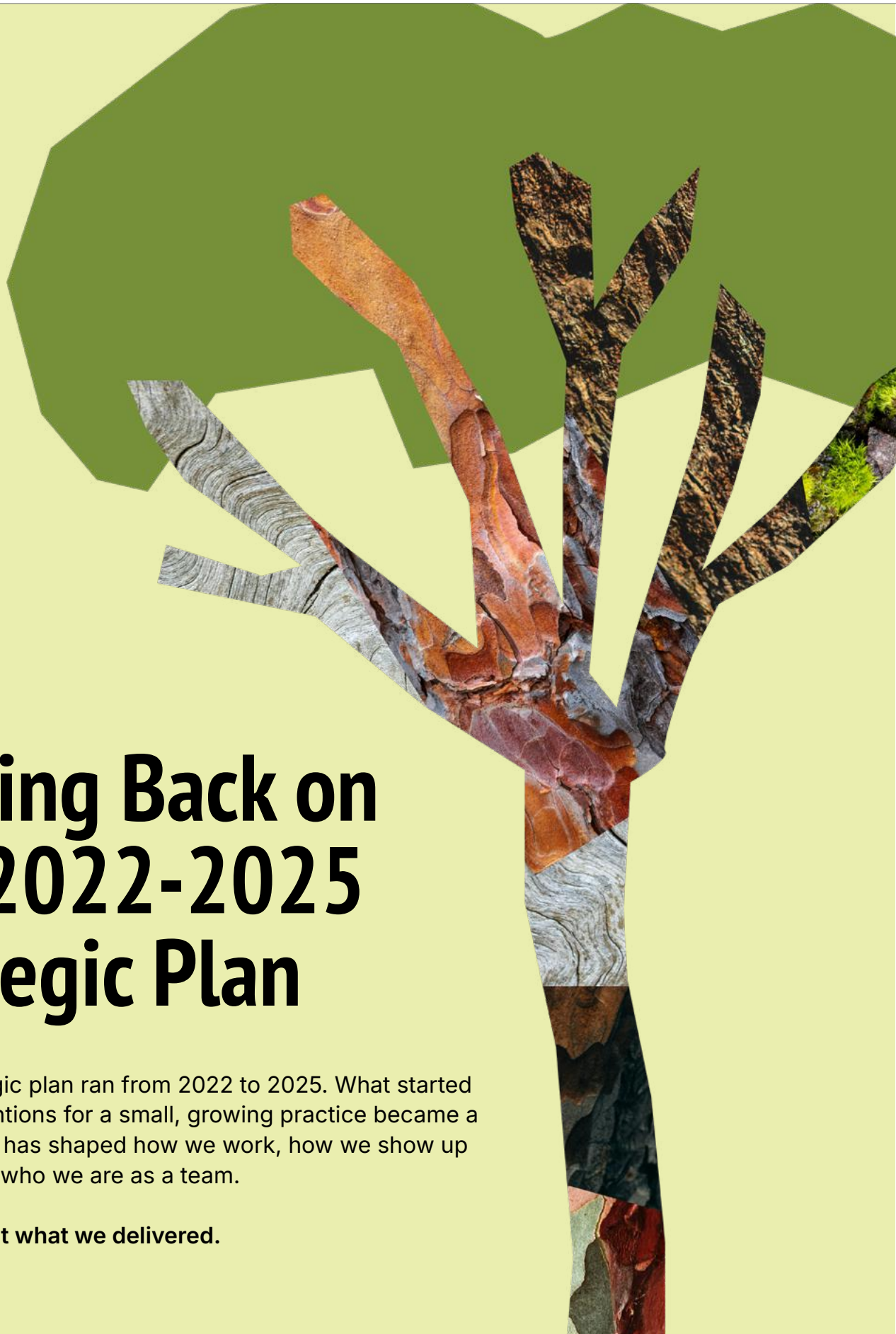
We turned our strategic planning lens inward this year, developing our 2026-2030 strategic plan and refreshing our Theory of Change. We approached this process with the same intentionality we bring to client work: grounding in our foundations, reflecting with our community of partners and peers, and articulating the shifts that will guide our next chapter. The resulting plan reaffirmed our vision and mission while setting out how we will strengthen equity and accessibility, deepen partnerships, build our ecosystem, and grow our national impact.

Learning Weeks

This year, we piloted Learning Weeks, giving team members dedicated weeks to focus on professional development, an internal project, or a topic of curiosity while the rest of the team covered their client work. Hayley dedicated her week to exploring value-based pricing, generating insights that are already reshaping how we think about project wrap-ups, proposal feedback, and our broader approach to pricing in the social purpose sector. Austin focused on AI, directly informing our policy development. The pilot is still evolving, and we are continuing to learn how to make this practice work well for our small, busy team.

Accessibility

In 2025, we brought greater focus and intention to our accessibility practice, an area we had been wanting to advance for some time. We invested in professional development, joined the Community of Accessible Employers, and learned alongside ecosystem members and peer organizations working in this space. By the end of the year, we had developed a comprehensive internal accessibility framework with over 100 commitments spanning hiring, facilitation, communications, and client engagement, as well as a public accessibility statement outlining how we will continue to embed this work across our operations and practice.



Looking Back on Our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan

Our first strategic plan ran from 2022 to 2025. What started as a set of intentions for a small, growing practice became a foundation that has shaped how we work, how we show up for clients, and who we are as a team.

Here is a look at what we delivered.



Goal 1: Deliver Excellent Services

- Built a strategic planning playbook that meaningfully improved consistency and repeatability across engagements.
- Grew from a handful of clients to 100+ social purpose and public sector organizations served across Canada.
- Launched a newsletter, blog, and LinkedIn presence to share our thinking and contribute to field-level conversations.
- Improved how we follow up with clients after projects wrap, helping them share and build on the work we did together.

Goal 2: Deepen Our Principles

- Embedded equity-centered approaches into how we facilitate and plan, not an add-on to our process.
- Grew our accessibility practice significantly with dedicated stewardship, moving from intention to action.
- Developed a Collaboration Principles Policy to ground our client relationships in our values from the start.
- Updated our internal policies, community agreements, and client screening to better reflect our values.
- Integrated community agreements into our facilitation practice as a consistent way to create safer, more inclusive spaces for participants to engage.

Goal 3: Act as a Field Catalyst

- Represented R&R as panelists, judges, and speakers at the Banff Systems Summit, Social Finance World Forum, Map the System Canada, and other sector convenings.
- Contributed growing thought leadership on what it takes for values-aligned organizations to strengthen their capacity and create lasting community change.
- Built sector depth in health, education, and community development through sustained client work over multiple years.
- Began connecting clients across our network through introductions and shared resources, an early form of the cross-sector collaboration we want to deepen.

Goal 4: Solidify Our Foundation

- Grew from a founder-led practice to a team with better defined roles and increased organizational resilience.
- Grew and strengthened our ecosystem of collaborators, engaging 39 independent consultants across the plan period and building toward a Community of Practice through seasonal gatherings, in-person connections, and shared opportunities.
- Completed a major digital transformation, building out our CRM, data management, and internal systems to support sustainable growth.
- Brought on fractional financial support, engaged a legal team, and developed our first compensation philosophy to inform a more equitable and transparent approach to pay.
- Embedded annual 360 reviews, monthly process reflections, and seasonal reviews as genuine practices that support a culture of learning and honest self-assessment.



Goal 5: Scale Our Efforts

- Established a physical presence in Atlantic Canada and grew our ecosystem to include active collaborators across multiple provinces.
- Built relationships with referral partners and peer organizations across the country, laying the groundwork for more collaborative national work.
- Made deliberate inroads into health and education sectors beyond BC, deepening our sector expertise and national credibility.
- Developed a regional growth strategy to guide intentional outreach and ecosystem expansion across the country.

The Next Plan: 2026-2030

Our 2026–2030 strategic plan sets out four shifts that are a direct expression of where our first strategic plan brought us:

- From excellent services to trusted partners
- From individual talent to a collective ecosystem
- From regional roots to national impact
- From an emerging practice to a resilient organization

Each of these shifts builds on tangible progress made between 2022 and 2025. We are moving into the next chapter with a stronger foundation, a clearer sense of who we are, and a team and ecosystem that is ready for what is ahead.



Conclusion

As we closed 2025, we were struck by the steady, relational nature of the year. What feels more significant than the volume of projects is how we worked: with intention, transparency, and a willingness to sit with complexity rather than rush to resolution. Across client engagements and internal decisions, we aimed to align our pace with our values, balancing urgency with reflection and grounding our choices in long-term impact.

It was also a year of strengthening our foundations. We invested in clearer internal systems, expanded capacity in key areas, and articulated a refreshed theory of change to guide our next chapter. Much of this work happened behind the scenes and positions us to show up more consistently and sustainably for our clients and partners. As we look ahead to 2026–2030 and beyond, we do so with greater clarity about our purpose.

We are grateful for the trust placed in us by clients, collaborators, and ecosystem members. The challenges facing the social purpose sector are not diminishing. If anything, they are becoming more complex. Our commitment is to continue doing careful, grounded work that builds on what is already strong, contributes to equitable systems change, and supports organizations to move forward with clarity and confidence.





