



ICSD Member Strategy Survey

Findings Report

Fielded March 2026 | Prepared April 2026

Executive Summary

In March 2026, the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) fielded a member strategy survey to inform its 2026–2029 strategic plan. The survey collected open-ended reflections and ranked priorities from members across regions, career stages, and roles. This report synthesizes the responses, surfaces the dominant themes from the qualitative data, and identifies points of agreement and disagreement that the Strategic Planning Task Team should consider as it drafts the next plan.

Thirty-three members began the survey and twenty-nine completed it. Respondents came primarily from North America and Asia, with meaningful participation from Africa and Europe. Faculty and researchers made up most of the sample, alongside several Board members and institutional representatives.

Five themes dominate the qualitative responses:

- Membership growth is the single most-cited priority. Members repeatedly call for a clear recruitment plan, easier sign-up and payment, and a path to a much larger and more globally diverse base.
- Governance is widely viewed as too large and not nimble enough for an organization of ICSD’s size. Members want a smaller working board, clearer roles, accountability for participation, and faster decisions.
- UN and policy engagement is seen as a defining opportunity. Members want ICSD to convert its ECOSOC consultative status into sustained, evidence-grounded engagement with the Commission for Social Development and partner organizations (IFSW, IASSW, ICSW).
- The SDI journal and scholarship are central to ICSD’s identity and the most highly-ranked priority area in the structured question. Members want a stronger, indexed journal and more year-round scholarly exchange.
- ICSD’s distinctive niche should be the bridge between research, policy, and practice in social development — interdisciplinary, evidence-based, and rooted in a clear social development framework that members want articulated more clearly.

Members also flagged practical concerns: a clumsy membership form on the website, weak between-conference communication, financial barriers for Global South participation, and a need to invest in early-career and Global South scholars.



1. Methodology

The survey was administered through Qualtrics and remained open through March 27, 2026. It contained ten substantive questions plus three demographic items. Most substantive items were open-ended; one item asked respondents to rank their top three priority areas from a fixed list of thirteen options, and two items used multiple-choice formats (communication channels and partnership types in the printed instrument).

A total of 33 respondents began the survey; 29 completed all items (88% completion). Open-ended responses were reviewed and coded thematically. The analysis below draws directly on respondents' own words; representative quotations are included throughout to preserve member voice.

Respondent Profile

The sample skews toward academic respondents based in North America and Asia. The breakdown below counts those who answered each demographic question.

Relationship with ICSD	n
Individual member only	15
Board member (alone or in combination)	11
Institutional representative (alone or in combination)	5
Did not answer	5

Primary professional role	n
Faculty	19
Researcher	6
Other (specified)	2
Administrator	1
Did not answer	5

Region of primary residence	n
North America	11
Asia	10
Africa	5
Europe	2



Did not answer

5

The sample is small but covers ICSD's main constituencies. The strong faculty/researcher representation should be kept in mind when interpreting results: practitioner and student voices are present but limited.

2. What ICSD Needs to Achieve Over the Next Three Years

Question 1 asked members to capture, in one sentence, what ICSD needs to achieve by 2029. Responses converge on a small number of priorities, though the language used to describe them varies.

2.1 Grow membership and reach

Membership growth is by far the most frequently mentioned need. It appears in roughly half of the Q1 responses, often paired with a call for stronger recruitment systems and lower barriers to joining.

"A major issue is membership recruitment. There should be a plan as to how ICSD Board members can reach out to colleagues and their network to join ICSD... The current membership is less than 100 people. A goal could be to obtain 1000 members worldwide."

"A greater membership base is needed; the opportunities are wide for this to be a strong organizations of scholars."

"Strengthen its global visibility through research, publication, and wider membership recruitment."

Several respondents tie growth explicitly to diversity and the Global South, noting that some members in Africa cannot use credit cards or debit cards and are effectively shut out of joining. One respondent suggests sponsorship pairings between Global North and Global South members; another suggests reduced membership rates supported by cross-subsidy.

2.2 Strengthen global visibility, voice, and reputation

Closely related to growth is a call for greater visibility — within the academic community, within the SD field, and within UN policy spaces.

"Strengthening its presence in the development sector including louding its voice at the UN system and a visibility in producing scientific knowledge."

"Position itself for growth to become the leading international organisation promoting knowledge, practice and innovation in the welfare and development field."

2.3 Clarify ICSD's niche and value proposition

A second cluster of responses focuses on identity. Members want clearer articulation of what ICSD uniquely offers and how it differs from sister organizations.

"Greater clarity on its niche value proposition and greater engagement by members around that value proposition."

"Identify its priorities and position the organization for growth."



2.4 Strengthen governance, transparency, and democratic practice

A smaller but pointed set of responses calls for governance reform — specifically, more inclusive, transparent, and democratic governance.

“Inclusive, transparent, leadership and governance that respects and implements democratic principles... without circumventing the process for the sake of expediency.”

“Transparent, Participatory, and Accountable governance system, which allows to work for social justice, an inclusive society.”

2.5 Other notable suggestions

- Expand training opportunities on global concerns (AI, war, democratic decline).
- Maintain engagement with the Doha Political Declaration and make the next Georgia conference accessible to global members.
- Launch a digital monthly research session for member presentations and peer learning.
- Establish regional knowledge hub centers and country-level points of contact.

3. Most Relevant Part of ICSD’s Mission Today

Question 2 asked which part of ICSD’s mission is most relevant in the current global and policy context. Responses are broad — many members affirmed that all parts of the mission remain relevant — but several concrete emphases recur.

3.1 Connecting research, policy, and practice across divides

The most distinctive answer frames social development as a corrective to a fragmented and increasingly polarized global moment.

“Facilitating dialogue at the global and regional levels on poverty, inequality, health, and social protection... social development as an approach to social policy is more relevant now, in a divided era, than ever. SD offers insight into the mutually reinforcing role of social and economic inclusion.”

“Building and spreading knowledge of social development to eradicate poverty, improve standards of living, and promote human equality and ecological sustainability.”

3.2 Poverty, inequality, and ecological sustainability

Respondents repeatedly named poverty eradication, inequality, ecological sustainability, climate change, and human rights as the substantive areas where social development matters most. Several responses emphasized the holistic nature of social development while singling out poverty eradication as the most salient challenge.

3.3 Interdisciplinarity and community capacity

Several respondents highlighted ICSD’s emphasis on interdisciplinarity, community capacity, and multi-disciplinary professional engagement as a defining strength.

“The emphasis on community capacity and interdisciplinarity.”



“Multi-disciplinary international organization... knowledge/innovation hub for social development to eradicate poverty, improve standards of living, and promote human equality and ecological sustainability.”

3.4 Regional emphasis

Several respondents called out specific regions — South East Asia, Africa, and rural areas globally — as the contexts where ICSD’s mission is most needed.

4. What ICSD Currently Does That Provides the Greatest Value

Question 3 invited members to name what ICSD currently does that they value most. The answers are revealing: members value conferences and the international network above all else, but several explicitly note that ICSD’s value beyond conferences feels thin.

4.1 Conferences and international networking

Conferences — biennial and regional — are mentioned more often than any other source of value, frequently paired with networking and intellectual exchange.

“The biennial conference is an important forum for transnational dialogue and scholarship for social development that to me is at the core of the organization.”

“ICSD’s greatest value for me is its ability to bring together international scholars and practitioners to collaborate, share knowledge, and advance the field of social development.”

“Conferences that enable social development experts to convene and share emerging trends.”

4.2 Global platform and professional network

Beyond conferences, members value ICSD as a global platform for scholarly exchange, networking, and professional belonging.

“Global professional network.”

“It provides a platform for engagement with scholars, practitioners, students and international organisations committed to advocate for social progress on a global level.”

4.3 Limited value beyond conferences — a recurring concern

A smaller but striking set of responses asserts that ICSD provides little value outside the biennial conference. This should be read alongside Q10 responses on communication and engagement.

“Very little.”

“To answer this question, one would have to know what ICSD provides for its members. The answer is ‘Not much.’ One can go to the web page and read some documents, or reports, but that is about it unless one goes to a Biennial Conference somewhere in the world every two years.”



The same respondent goes on to call for stronger between-conference communication using newsletters, podcasts, online training, and even text-based outreach — pointing to a clear opportunity to increase the felt value of ICSD between major events.

4.4 Other valued contributions

- ICSD’s effort to rebuild the SDI journal and strengthen organizational structure.
- Participation in international forums and the UN system.
- Creation of regional branches (especially the new North American Regional Branch).
- Partnerships with sister organizations to amplify the SD mission.

5. Governance Structure: Effectiveness and Areas to Strengthen

Question 4 was the longest open-ended question and elicited the most detailed responses. There is a clear cluster of agreement that the current governance structure is too large and not nimble enough for an organization of ICSD’s scale, with several respondents offering concrete suggestions for reform.

5.1 The board is too large for ICSD’s size

This is the dominant message from Q4. Multiple respondents — including those who explicitly identify as Board members — describe the 29-member Board as oversized relative to a membership base of fewer than 100 individuals.

“The board is way way too big for this type of organizations. I would recommend taking a very close look at best practices... It is no surprise that the org moves so slowly and accomplishes so little with a board of this size and an Exec Committee that is not more nimble.”

“A 29-member Board is large for an organisation of ICSD’s scale and resource base.”

“The Board is large relative to the size of the organization. e.g. in some years the membership was 45 members of which 29 are positions on the board. This cannot be changed until the constitution is amended before the next round of elections.”

“It just looks like there’s a lot of leadership for not that many members. A small board is more nimble... maybe that body is an assembly and not a board, in the assembly is responsible for articulating the strategic direction and then a smaller board is in execution mode.”

5.2 Active participation and accountability

A second strand argues the structure could work — but only if board members were genuinely active. Several respondents call for clear participation standards and accountability.

“Even though the structure is large and somewhat complicated, I think that it could work IF PEOPLE ON THE BOARD WERE ACTIVE AND PARTICIPATED in Board meetings, and other committees and task groups... There should be something that sets a standard for participation in ICSD as a Board member.”



“Improving clearer role accountability, more active engagement of board members, and stronger coordination between regional branches and the central leadership to enhance efficiency and impact.”

5.3 Stronger regional branches and central coordination

Multiple respondents argue that regional branches are an under-used asset and that better alignment between branches and the central board would increase impact.

“Stronger branches with active participation of members in regions that are representative of the countries in a region... better alignment of board strategy with branches.”

“These structures can be especially valuable for strengthening regional collaboration, expanding membership, and connecting global scholarship with local practice. Moving forward, ICSD could further strengthen this model by empowering branches and country representatives with clearer roles, stronger communication channels with the Board and Executive Committee, and greater support for regional activities.”

5.4 Concrete reform suggestions

One particularly detailed response offered a multi-point governance agenda that synthesizes much of the rest of the feedback:

“Stronger branches with active participation of members in regions.”

“Better alignment of board strategy with branches.”

“Board needs to meet at least three times per year.”

“More sub-committees or task teams leading priority work streams — accountable to the board.”

“Parameters of the Executive Council clearly defined between board meetings.”

“More frequent meetings of executive officer bearers to coordinate implementation.”

“In the medium term, work towards a more representative Board — gender, country, region.”

“More opportunities for greater engagement of the board with general members.”

5.5 Diversity in leadership

Several respondents emphasize representation, including more women, younger scholars, and a wider range of regions in leadership roles.

“One area that needs greater attention is representation. I would work to attract scholars and practitioners from a wider range of regions, different age groups (especially younger ones), and more women into leadership roles.”

5.6 Dissenting and process concerns

A small number of respondents express more critical views about how governance has been practiced — describing the structure itself as good but the implementation as exclusionary, or raising concerns about the relative weight of appointed and elected members. While these are minority voices, they reinforce the broader call for transparent, democratic, and accountable practice.

“ICSD structure is good, however the implementation of the governance structure, compressed benchmarks that cause lots of errors, engaging in exclusionary approaches... is not tenable for a well-functioning voluntary organization.”



6. Priority Areas for 2026–2029 (Ranked)

Question 5 asked respondents to rank their top three areas of focus for ICSD over the next three years from a fixed list of thirteen options. The table below shows two complementary measures: the number of respondents who placed the item in their top three at all, and a weighted score that gives 3 points for a rank-1 vote, 2 points for rank-2, and 1 point for rank-3.

Priority area	Top-3 mentions	Weighted score
The Social Development Issues journal	17	36
Scholarship and research	11	28
Biennial conferences and symposia	14	21
Engagement with the UN system and related bodies	10	19
Advocacy and public positions on SD issues	7	17
Governance and internal organizational effectiveness	5	12
Member networking and collaboration	6	11
Global South participation and branch activities	6	10
Visibility of ICSD with other international organizations	3	5
Practice projects and applied SD work	4	5
Education and curriculum development	1	3
Financial sustainability and resource development	1	3
Digital inclusion	1	1
Other (please specify)	1	3

Several patterns stand out:

- The SDI journal is the clear top priority on both measures. Combined with the high score for ‘Scholarship and research,’ this points to scholarship as the strategic core of ICSD in members’ minds — a finding that is consistent with the qualitative answers about ICSD’s distinctive niche.
- Biennial conferences remain a top-tier priority, reinforcing Q3.
- UN engagement and advocacy together score highly, reflecting the new ECOSOC consultative status.
- Governance receives a notable but more modest score in the ranked question, even though it dominates open-ended responses. This suggests members see governance reform as an enabling condition rather than a top-line strategic outcome.



- Practice, education, financial sustainability, and digital inclusion all rank low — though they show up qualitatively as concerns, especially financial sustainability and digital engagement.

7. Most Effective Communication Channels

Question 6 asked which communication channels are most effective for ICSD. The results are clear and align with the qualitative concerns raised in Q3 and Q10 about between-conference engagement.

Channel	Selections
Email updates	23
Newsletter	14
Website	11
Social media	9
Webinars	6
Regional branch communications	6
Other	2

Email is by far the most preferred channel; nearly every respondent selected it. Newsletter and website round out the top three. Webinars and regional branch communications, while less popular as primary channels, were called out positively in the open-ended responses as ways to deepen value between conferences.

8. Most Important Partnerships for ICSD’s Future Influence

Question 7 was open-ended in the fielded version of the survey. Responses cluster into four partnership categories.

8.1 UN system and ECOSOC bodies

The single most-cited partnership category is the UN system, especially the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) and the NGO Commission for Social Development.

“Continued partnerships with ICSW IFSW and IASSW especially around UN engagements.”

“UN CSocD and NGO CSocD.”

“Strong partnerships with the United Nations is critical. And then localized regional chapter should build the relationships with the appropriate bilateral and multilateral agencies and NGOs.”

8.2 Sister international social work and SD organizations



ICSW, IFSW, and IASSW are repeatedly named, especially in the context of joint UN engagement and coordinated advocacy.

“International organisations in the welfare, social work and social development field; strengthening partnerships with multidisciplinary and multisector organisations; social development research institutes/centers; UN NGO Commission for Social Development.”

8.3 Universities and research institutions

Academic partnerships are seen as essential for credibility, knowledge production, and institutional membership growth.

“The most important partnerships for the future influence of the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) are collaborations with universities and research institutions, international organizations (such as the United Nations), civil society organizations, and policy-making bodies.”

“Partnerships with universities, particularly those who have enough resources to be institutional members and can help to promote the work of the organization.”

8.4 Civil society, regional partners, and special interest groups

A smaller cluster of responses calls for partnerships with NGOs, civil society organizations, and groups working on specific issues such as gender equality, disability rights, and LGBTQI+ inclusion. Several respondents also call for stronger relationships between the central organization and regional branches as themselves a kind of internal ‘partnership.’

9. ICSD’s Distinctive Niche

Question 8 generated some of the most thoughtful responses in the survey. There is broad agreement on the contours of ICSD’s distinctive niche, with one significant point of internal debate over the balance of scholarship and advocacy.

9.1 Bridging research, policy, and practice in social development

This is the modal answer. Members see ICSD as uniquely positioned to translate scholarship into policy-relevant insight while staying grounded in practice.

“Linking academic and scholarly research with international commitments through UN organizations.”

“Play a role of providing evidence based knowledge for the development of international and regional social development framework, which later can be adopted into national laws.”

“Bridging global scholarship and practice in social development, providing the United Nations and international partners with interdisciplinary expertise grounded in both research and community-based practice.”

“Innovative practice integrating academic and development responses to development challenges — particularly those facing women and children in the majority (non-European) world.”



9.2 Interdisciplinarity as the differentiator

Several respondents argue that ICSD’s interdisciplinary character — drawing on political, economic, sociological, and other disciplinary insights — is what most clearly distinguishes it from IFSW, IASSW, and ICSW.

“We need to differentiate our value from IFSW ICSW and IASSW, while still fostering collaboration with these organisations. ICSD’s niche is that a) it is an interdisciplinary field and we bring political, economic, sociological and other important disciplinary insights to understanding and responding to social policy/welfare issues.”

“A shared understanding of the key pillars of social development and what makes it different to other approaches to social policy and social welfare needs to be taken into consultations.”

9.3 The scholarship/advocacy debate

One sharp disagreement runs through the responses. Most members see scholarship and advocacy as compatible. A minority — but a forceful minority — argues that ICSD should lean into its scholarly identity and resist the pull toward advocacy that is not strictly evidence-based.

“Scholarship. UN and ECOSOC already has many many advocacy-focused organizations. We should articulate and capitalize on our strengths as scholars. Our goals should be to inform, research should be somewhat neutral. I believe we have fallen into error focusing on advocacy that is not explicitly evidence-based and research informed.”

This view is in tension with several others that explicitly identify advocacy as the niche, e.g.:

“Advocacy.”

“Social values advocating for marginalized communities, particularly with the dual influence of poverty.”

The Task Team should consider how the strategy frames this balance — most likely, ICSD’s distinctive contribution is evidence-informed advocacy, but the strategy should be explicit about that posture.

9.4 Other niche framings

- Global knowledge hub connecting SD theory, policy, and practice.
- Pioneering contribution to SD scholarship over five decades — historical legitimacy as a foundation.
- Cross-cutting, interdisciplinary engagement with bodies like the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women.
- A bridge between micro/community-level research and broader national and international dynamics.
- Sustainable Social Development; promoter of reciprocal learning, spirituality, and cultural humility.

10. What Success Looks Like in 2029



Question 9 asked respondents to imagine what would be visibly different if ICSD were clearly succeeding in 2029. The answers paint a coherent picture, with a small number of dominant signals.

10.1 A larger, more diverse, more engaged membership

“Much larger membership — and increasing scholarly reputation.”

“Larger, more country-diverse and more involved membership base. Branches that are active beyond the branch conferences — facilitating collaborative research/writing for instance. Meaningful engagement at UN processes.”

“1000 members and active communication with members, through text messaging, verified email address, and a new web page.”

10.2 Visible UN and policy presence

“ICSD’s presence at UN CSocD is noticeable and expected.”

“By 2029, ICSD would be more visible and influential globally, with a growing and engaged international membership, stronger regional branch activity, and a recognized voice contributing research and practice insights to global social development policy discussions, including within the UN.”

10.3 A stronger SDI journal

“Its journal become a world class preferred destination for authors, the Global south contribution becomes stronger, and its voices in the UN becomes loud.”

“SDI is Scopus indexed or moving in a positive direction towards becoming Scopus indexed.”

10.4 The most comprehensive vision offered

One respondent offered a particularly detailed vision worth quoting at length, as it captures most of the threads of the survey in a single response:

“(a) SDI is Scopus indexed or moving in a positive direction; (b) actively practices in UN sub-committees and works collaboratively with its partners to advance the implementation of the Doha Declaration; (c) Disseminates knowledge through its journal and other platforms; (d) Convenes high quality global and regional symposia; (e) has strong branches that actively involve its members; (f) ICSD has doubled its membership, is financially viable, is effective in executing its strategies; (g) ICSD has a viable communications strategy that is effectively implemented, leading to improved visibility while remaining highly engaged with its members and partners.”

10.5 Other markers of success

- Stronger financial foundation and an efficient organizational structure.
- Recognized partnerships with UN bodies, NGOs, academic institutions, and professional associations.
- Working partnerships focused on a specific global initiative such as access to social protection.
- ICSD as a recognized knowledge, advocacy, and policy partner to governments.
- Strong branches and country-level points of contact.
- Good governance grounded in transparency and democratic process.



11. Other Considerations for the Strategy Team

Question 10 was an open invitation for additional input. Responses surface practical concerns and concrete suggestions, several of which echo themes from earlier questions.

11.1 Make governance more nimble

“Please make the governance structure more nimble. It is ridiculously large and unwield. If nothing else, clearly empower a smaller group of people within the org to make decisions... because there are too many decision-makers with diverse agendas.”

11.2 Reduce the North–South gap

“One suggestion I have is to make greater efforts to reduce the gap between North and South in terms of opportunities. For example, the ICSD conference could be offered both in person and virtually. Scholars from the South often lack funding to attend conferences.”

“Scholars from Global South and make it more accessible for research scholars. ICSD can introduce awards and scholarships.”

11.3 Modernize the website and digital infrastructure

“The current web page is not made with the best coding software... the web page needs updating, revision, etc. in new code so that it cannot be hacked and it looks like a 2026 state of the art web page.”

11.4 Articulate what social development is

“I am not sure there is a good understanding across our membership base of what social development as an approach is. Fostering an understanding of this will go a long way towards ensuring that members and the organisation itself are able to clearly articulate how ICSD differs from other large organisations such as IFSW, ICSW etc.”

11.5 Invest in early-career scholars and broader volunteers

“Strategies for greater involvement of younger scholars.”

“Initiatives for Early Career Researchers through which they can contribute to ICSD and also enhance their learning outcomes through the process.”

“Enhanced volunteerism by retired practitioners, advocates, etc. not working at academic institutions — broaden the outreach.”

11.6 Plan for leadership transitions and avoid hasty execution

“The strategy needs to survive leadership transition.”

“Doing things in hurry and producing poor outcomes/outputs may not be a right approach. Be inclusive, share opportunities with everyone. Have a long-term focus.”

11.7 Other suggestions

- Build a knowledge hub on the website.
- Conduct comparative cross-country research in areas with knowledge gaps.
- Integrate priorities from ICSD’s Doha Declaration statement into the strategy.



- Set up regional knowledge hub centers and country contacts.
- Introduce awards and scholarships for SD research and practice.
- Develop research initiatives on Indigenous social development strategies in the Global South.
- Focus on resource mobilization to strengthen ICSD's core work.

12. Cross-Cutting Themes

Reading the survey holistically — across the open-ended questions, the rankings, the demographic context, and the partnership and communication items — six cross-cutting themes stand out for the Task Team.

12.1 Membership growth is the central organizing concern

Membership recruitment, retention, accessibility, and onboarding appear in nearly every section of the survey. Multiple respondents cite the figure of fewer than 100 members and treat that as a defining constraint on everything else ICSD wants to do. The barriers identified are concrete and actionable: a clumsy online membership form; payment systems that exclude members in parts of Africa; weak between-conference contact; weak word-of-mouth from board members; and an aspirational price point that may be too low to convey value but too high for some members to afford. The 1,000-member goal floated by one respondent is a useful provocation for the Task Team — even if not adopted as a literal target.

12.2 Governance reform is widely supported and often urgent in tone

The qualitative responses to Q4 and Q10 are remarkably consistent: a 29-member board is too large, decisions are too slow, board participation is uneven, and the line between elected and appointed members is sometimes unclear. While Q5 ranks governance only sixth on the weighted score, the open responses make clear that members see governance as a precondition for everything else. The Task Team should treat governance reform as an enabling pillar of the strategy and consider whether the current structure can be reframed (e.g., a smaller working board plus a larger assembly) without waiting for a constitutional amendment.

12.3 The SDI journal and scholarship are the strategic core

In the structured ranking question, SDI and scholarship together dominate. The qualitative responses reinforce this: members want SDI indexed in Scopus, published reliably, with a strong editorial board and contributions from the Global South. They also want year-round opportunities for scholarly exchange (online symposia, monthly research sessions, webinars). Scholarship is the most concrete answer to 'what is ICSD's distinctive niche?' in members' own words.

12.4 UN engagement is the most-cited external opportunity

The new ECOSOC consultative status creates clear expectations among members. They want ICSD to convert that status into sustained, focused engagement with CSocD and the NGO CSocD, in coordination with IFSW, IASSW, and ICSW. Several respondents flag that UN engagement should be evidence-informed (not pure advocacy), should be anchored to the Doha Political Declaration and the SDGs, and should not crowd out ICSD's core scholarly work.



12.5 Global South participation is a value commitment with practical barriers

Members from across the sample call for greater Global South participation, including hybrid conference access, scholarships, accessible payment systems, and regional knowledge hubs. The barriers cited are mostly practical (visas, payments, travel costs) rather than ideological — which means they are addressable with operational decisions.

12.6 ‘Value beyond conferences’ is the most actionable communication finding

The combined message of Q3, Q6, and Q10 is that conferences are the most-valued offering, and that members feel little ICSD presence between conferences. Email is the strongly preferred channel, followed by newsletter and website. There is appetite for monthly or near-monthly engagement, including webinars, research sessions, and even text-based outreach. A modernized website and a regular communication cadence are likely the highest-leverage early investments the strategy can make.

13. Points of Tension and Disagreement

Most of the survey shows convergence, but there are real disagreements the Task Team will need additional time to review.

13.1 Scholarship vs. advocacy

Some members want ICSD to lean into evidence-based scholarship and resist drift toward advocacy; others want stronger advocacy and public positions. The likely landing point is ‘evidence-informed advocacy,’ but the strategy should say so explicitly.

13.2 Whether the structure is the problem, or how it is used

Some respondents argue the structure is fundamentally too large and must be redesigned; others argue the structure is fine but participation and accountability are weak. The Task Team should consider whether reform should focus on (a) reducing the size of the board, (b) raising participation standards, or (c) both.

13.3 Specialization vs. breadth

Some respondents want ICSD to focus on a small set of priorities; others want it to address a wide range of cross-cutting issues. A strategy that names no more than five strategic priorities while leaving room for member-initiated activity may bridge this tension.

14. Implications for the Strategic Plan

Drawing the survey together, six implications stand out for the 2026–2029 strategy:

- Treat membership growth as a top-line strategic objective, with concrete operational targets (online form, payment systems, sliding-scale fees, onboarding flow, board-led outreach) and a measurable goal.



- Make efficient and effective governance an explicit strategic objective. This should include right-sizing the board over time, clearer role definitions, attendance and participation standards, stronger branch–central coordination, and a transparent decision-making process.
- Position scholarship and the SDI journal as the strategic core of ICSD’s identity and resource the journal accordingly (editor, board, indexing, publication cadence).
- Build a focused UN and policy engagement workstream, anchored in CSocD and the Doha Political Declaration follow-up, in partnership with IFSW, IASSW, and ICSW. Treat the early years as a learning phase with working guidelines.
- Invest in year-round digital engagement: a modern website, a regular email/newsletter cadence, webinars or monthly research sessions, and a member directory.
- Build Global South participation, early-career scholarship, and inclusive practice into every pillar — not as a separate workstream, but as a design principle.

15. Caveats and Limitations

The survey provides valuable direction for the strategic plan, but a few caveats are worth keeping in mind:

- The response base is small. With 33 starts and 29 completions, individual voices carry significant weight in the qualitative analysis. Single-respondent suggestions are flagged as such throughout.
- The sample skews academic. Faculty and researchers dominate; practitioner, student, and policy-maker voices are present but limited. Themes that align with academic interests (e.g., the SDI journal) may be amplified relative to interests of other groups.
- Regional coverage is uneven. North America and Asia together account for the majority of respondents; Latin America and Oceania are absent from the demographic data. Findings should be read with this geographic skew in mind.
- Some respondents are themselves Board members. This is helpful in that they offer first-hand views of governance, but it also means the harshest critiques of governance come partly from inside the structure being critiqued.
- This report covers the Member Strategy Survey only. A separate ICSD–UN engagement survey, currently being analyzed, will add depth on UN engagement. The Task Team should plan to integrate findings from that survey before finalizing the strategy.

Prepared for the ICSD Strategic Planning Task Team, April 2026.