

President's Report 2026

As ISCA continues to grow and mature, it has been my great pleasure to serve as ISCA President and Chair of the Board. At our fifth AGM, I am delighted to reflect on a year that has been both demanding and transformative. The defining achievement was the successful delivery of the 1st International Conference on Social Capital. Alongside this landmark event, we have strengthened our international community, evaluated and renewed our webinar program, commenced publication of the conference proceedings, and laid the foundations for Social Capital 2027.

Achievements

Over the past twelve months, ISCA has taken an important step in its development from a growing professional association to a recognised international convenor for the field of social capital. We delivered our most ambitious initiative to date, maintained accessible opportunities for learning and connection, and expanded the pathways through which researchers, practitioners and policymakers can contribute to the association.

Social Capital 2026

The 1st International Conference on Social Capital was delivered online on 25-26 March 2026. The conference had originally been planned as an in-person event at Heriot-Watt University Dubai, but changing regional conditions required us to move fully online. This was a major operational challenge at short notice, but the conference team, stream coordinators, presenters and volunteers responded with extraordinary commitment and flexibility.

The conference brought together 544 participants and 199 speakers from around the world across 12 thematic streams. Keynote contributions from Robert D. Putnam, Raj Chetty, Beate Völker and Michael Woolcock gave the conference exceptional intellectual breadth and visibility. The program connected foundational theory with contemporary research, policy and practice across subjects including health, economic opportunity, community development, governance, democracy, disaster resilience, organisations, theory and measurement.

Participant feedback was extremely positive. Among those who completed the post-conference evaluation, all indicated that they would recommend the conference. Participants particularly valued the quality and diversity of the presentations, the international reach of the event, and the opportunity to engage across disciplinary and professional boundaries. The conference demonstrated both the global demand for a dedicated social capital forum and ISCA's capacity to convene one.

Conference Proceedings

Following the conference, ISCA invited presenters to submit full papers for the inaugural Social Capital Conference Proceedings. Approximately 40 papers entered the editorial process. Each paper is being assessed through a substantial peer-review process involving internal and external reviewers, followed by author revision, substantive checks, copy-editing and proofing. Publication is planned for the end of September 2026.

This has required a considerable contribution from authors, reviewers, editors and volunteers. It has also required us to establish publication standards and processes, including approaches to research integrity, citation verification, duplicate publication and proportionate review for conference papers. The proceedings will provide a durable record of the conference and create a new avenue through which ISCA can support and disseminate work in the field.

Webinar Series

The ISCA webinar series resumed after the pause required to deliver the conference. Since its establishment in 2021, the series has delivered 212 webinars, attracted approximately 22,550 registrations and reached participants in more than 160 countries. It remains one of the association's most visible and accessible contributions to the field.

During 2026, we completed a major evaluation of the webinar series. Respondents rated their overall experience at 8.4 out of 10, their likelihood of attending future events at 8.7, and their likelihood of recommending the series at 8.5. Eighty-five per cent considered the series to make a strong contribution to the field. The evaluation confirmed that the series connects researchers and practitioners, broadens understanding of social capital, and helps to sustain an international community. It also identified opportunities for more workshops, networking, thematic series, practitioner-oriented sessions, interactive formats and broader regional representation. These findings will guide the next phase of the program.

Community Building and Interest Groups

Community building remains central to ISCA's purpose. Our community platform and social media groups continue to give members ways to meet, exchange ideas and find collaborators beyond formal events. Interest-group activity has included work on social capital measurement and disaster resilience, alongside the continuing development of the Chilean Social Capital Circle. The Measurement Interest Group, chaired by Dr Eunice Park with Ester Villalonga as co-lead, is preparing to relaunch and develop practical opportunities for collaboration around measurement.

We have continued to welcome members from a wide range of countries and professional backgrounds, including people seeking opportunities to contribute through research, volunteering and regional engagement. This breadth is one of ISCA's greatest strengths, although converting a large international network into sustained participation remains an ongoing priority.

The Bridge and Member Communications

The Bridge continues to provide a valuable channel for sharing association news, member work, event reports and resources. The June 2026 issue documented the achievements and lessons of Social Capital 2026 and helped maintain momentum after the conference. Our email lists, website, Mighty Networks community, LinkedIn and Facebook channels together provide a substantial international communications network that supports our events, membership and outreach.

The production of regular, high-quality communications remains dependent on limited volunteer capacity. Improving the planning, delegation and sustainability of newsletter and communications work will therefore remain important in the coming year.

Membership

ISCA's membership continues to be international and diverse, spanning academic, policy, practice and community settings. We have retained tiered membership fees, fee reductions and sponsored student membership options to ensure that financial circumstances are not a barrier to participation. The conference significantly expanded ISCA's reach, creating a larger community of people who can potentially become active members and contributors.

We now have 275 financial members, representing an increase of nearly 50 per cent over the past twelve months. As most of our events are freely accessible, our wider community extends well beyond our formal membership, encompassing thousands of researchers, practitioners, policymakers and others who regularly participate in ISCA activities and engage with our resources and networks.

Membership growth and renewal nevertheless require continuing attention. Our long-term strength depends not only on the number of members, but also on creating clear and worthwhile pathways for them to participate in events, interest groups, governance, publications and volunteer roles.

Governance

The Board continued to meet regularly throughout the year, providing oversight of the conference, finances, membership, events, publications and future strategy. The current Board comprises Tristan Claridge (President), Jacob Spanke (Vice President), Jeff Donaldson (Secretary), Mario Marais (Treasurer), and Directors Jennifer R Bishop, Alice Campbell, Heather McGregor, Geeta Mehta and Marcelo Siles. I thank each of them for their service, judgement and support during an exceptionally busy year.

The 2026 nominations and election process was completed for the three Board vacancies. The process has generated strong interest and has also prompted useful reflection on candidate assessment, the role of the Nominations Committee, Board oversight and possible

improvements to future election cycles. This continuing development of our governance arrangements is an important part of ISCA's maturation as a member-based association.

Challenges

The year's achievements have also made our constraints more visible. ISCA remains a volunteer-driven organisation with an ambitious international agenda. Much of the association's work continues to depend on a small number of highly committed people, creating risks of overload, delay and burnout. The conference and proceedings demonstrated what this community can achieve, but also the need for clearer roles, better systems and a wider base of active volunteers.

The late change from an in-person to a fully online conference required extensive replanning and placed substantial pressure on the organising team. More generally, geopolitical uncertainty has complicated international event planning and reinforced the importance of flexible and accessible participation models.

Membership growth and engagement have remained more modest than our wider audience and event reach would suggest. Our challenge is to translate the very large number of people who attend ISCA activities into a stronger, more connected and more sustainable member community. We must also secure sponsorship and institutional partnerships if we are to expand access while reducing reliance on volunteer labour.

Financial Position

ISCA has continued to manage its resources carefully while meeting the substantial costs associated with conference delivery, the community platform, communications, event infrastructure and publication. The move of Social Capital 2026 to an online format materially changed both the income and expenditure profile anticipated in the previous year.

For the year ended 31 March 2026, ISCA recorded total income of NZ\$108,968.32 and expenditure of NZ\$111,941.92, resulting in a modest deficit of NZ\$2,973.60. At the reporting date, the association had net assets of NZ\$6,414.54. These results reflect an exceptional year of conference-related activity: the late transition of Social Capital 2026 from an in-person event in Dubai to a fully online conference materially changed both the anticipated income and expenditure. Despite this disruption and the substantial scale of the conference, the deficit was contained, and ISCA retained a positive financial position.

The Board remains committed to careful stewardship of ISCA's resources. Our aim is to preserve the association's financial resilience while making targeted investments in activities that expand its impact, accessibility and organisational capacity.

Looking Ahead

Planning is well advanced for Social Capital 2027, to be held from 18-20 March 2027 at Heriot-Watt University Dubai, with a dedicated virtual day on 17 March and online participation available throughout the main conference. Building on the success and lessons of 2026, the next conference will combine a strong academic program with expanded pathways for policy and practice contributions, including practitioner sessions, roundtables and implementation-focused workshops.

Raj Chetty, Beate Völker and Michael Woolcock are confirmed as keynote speakers. The conference will again pursue broad international participation, with free digital access for participants in Global Access countries and reduced in-person fees intended to improve inclusion. Our priorities over the coming months are to attract strong submissions, secure sponsorship and institutional partners, build the volunteer and stream-coordinator teams, and convert the international reach of the conference into deeper engagement with ISCA.

Beyond the conference, we will complete and publish the 2026 proceedings, renew the webinar series in response to the evaluation, strengthen interest groups and member communications, and continue developing the organisational systems needed for sustainable growth. We will also explore stronger structures for practitioner participation and consider governance improvements arising from the current nominations cycle.

The need for ISCA remains clear. Social capital is increasingly invoked in research, policy and practice, yet the field remains fragmented across disciplines, sectors and regions. ISCA is uniquely placed to connect these communities, improve conceptual and methodological clarity, and support the responsible application of social capital ideas to contemporary challenges.

Acknowledgements

I extend my deepest gratitude to our members, volunteers, Board and committee members for their contributions throughout the year. The successful delivery of Social Capital 2026 was possible only because of the extraordinary effort of the conference steering committee, organising team, stream coordinators, session chairs, reviewers, speakers and volunteers. I also thank Heriot-Watt University Dubai for its continuing partnership and support, including its flexibility as circumstances surrounding the conference changed.

The Board is composed of hardworking and dedicated people, and I feel very honoured to have worked with them during the past year. Special thanks go to Heather McGregor for her leadership in international engagement and her central role in the development of the conferences; Jacob Spanke for his consistent energy, practical support and substantial contribution to conference planning; Jeff Donaldson for his active contribution as Secretary, his governance work and his leadership of the Social Capital & Disaster Resilience Interest Group; Eunice Park and Ester Villalonga for their leadership of the Measurement Interest

Group; Beverly Sloan for her continuing mentorship and leadership in Research Design and Methods sessions; and the many reviewers and editors who have contributed their expertise to the conference proceedings.

Finally, I thank every member who attended an event, presented at the conference, reviewed a paper, contributed to an interest group, shared our work, volunteered, or supported another member. ISCA exists because people across the world continue to believe in the value of a community dedicated to social capital research and practice.

The past year has shown what ISCA can achieve. With the first international conference successfully delivered, a second conference taking shape, a renewed program of events, and a committed international community, the association is well placed to make a lasting contribution to the field.

Kind regards

Tristan Claridge

President of the International Social Capital Association