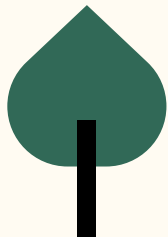




Neighbourhood network



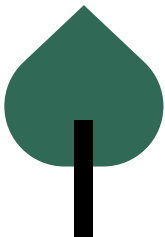
Strategic Plan 2026-2030







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Welcome

Introduction and acknowledgements from the Chairperson

It is my great pleasure, as Chair of the Board of Neighbourhood Network, to introduce our new Organisational Strategy 2026-2030. This plan represents months of thoughtful work, collaboration, and vision, and I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to its development. In particular, I want to acknowledge our CEO, Sam Bishop, for his energy and dedication throughout this process; our Learning Partner, Eimear McNally, who guided us through inspiring “Blue Skies” workshops; and our staff team, whose creativity and commitment shine through every page of this Strategy. I also want to thank our Board’s Strategy Sub-Group for their steady leadership, and the stakeholders who shared their insights with us—especially Cairn, Pobal, and the Department of Rural & Community Development. Your contributions have helped shape a plan that is both grounded in experience and ambitious in vision.

This Strategy charts a bold course for the next five years, rooted in our belief that small moments of connection can lead to profound changes, making neighbourhoods not just places to live but thriving communities. Over the last decade, we’ve learned that strengthening local communities contributes to broader social cohesion. Healthy neighbourhoods that are full of life make for happier towns and villages. Neighbours that are connected to each other are more likely to work together on local issues for the greater good of all. We have a unique ability to activate this neighbourhood energy in all kinds of places.

At a time when loneliness, the housing crisis, migration, and the climate crisis are changing day to day life in Ireland, our mission to build neighbourhood connection has never been more relevant. This plan offers practical ways for people to build belonging, solidarity, and resilience right where they live. It is filled with optimism for what we can achieve together. Working with neighbourhoods allows us to address multiple issues simultaneously; disconnection, social inclusion, environmental improvement and food security can all be woven into our place-based neighbour connection projects. While



many of the current global crises seem beyond our control, we can take action locally with those who live near us. By doing so, we not only contribute to a wider cause, we make our neighbourhoods better places to live for everyone.

To our network of volunteer Neighbourhood Connectors across Ireland, I want to express my deep gratitude. The passion you bring to your communities can be felt in towns, villages, and cities across Ireland. We see it in the stronger bonds between neighbours, in inclusive and creative communities, and in the knowledge that each of us has a role to play in shaping a brighter future.

As an organisation, **Neighbourhood Network** is committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We believe that strong, connected communities are the foundation of a sustainable and resilient society. Our new Strategy will enable us to take action on specific goals such as:



SDG 3: Good Health & Well-being

Neighbour connection reduces loneliness, fosters social bonds, and improves mental well-being.



SDG 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities

All of our programmes strengthen social cohesion, empowering neighbourhoods to be more connected, inclusive, and resilient.



SDG 13: Climate Action

Our neighbour connection activities encourage climate-conscious living through urban greening, food sustainability, and environmental education.

With hope and enthusiasm, I am looking forward to seeing the positive impact our work will continue to have in communities all across Ireland.

Louise Callaghan
Chair, Neighbourhood Network



.....

“ The first fundamental of successful city life: People must take a modicum of responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other. This is a lesson no one learns by being told. It is learned from the experience of having other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility to you take a modicum of responsibility for you. ”

.....

Jane Jacobs (American urbanist writer)



Our Story

Street Feast began in 2010 when a handful of friends came together around a simple but powerful idea: that sharing a meal could bring neighbours closer. They imagined communities gathering on their streets, in laneways, and on rural greens. Together, they transformed ordinary spaces into places of welcome, laughter, and connection. What started with small groups of people sitting down together over food, camaraderie, and craic has grown into a nationwide tradition. Today, Street Feast is celebrated in towns and villages across Ireland, with thousands of participants coming together each year to meet, eat, and build lasting neighbourhood bonds.

We now do so much more. From one volunteer-led project in 2010 to a nationwide movement in 2025, our journey has always been about sparking connection. Today, with 12 staff, a committed Board, and thousands of volunteers, we continue to build stronger, friendlier neighbourhoods. Here's a list of our projects;

Sparking Neighbour Connection with an annual Street Feast:



In 2025, an estimated **88500** people participated across **962 Street Feasts**, with **95%** of hosts reporting that their neighbourhood felt friendlier as a result.



79% felt safer in their area, and **83%** of hosts expressed interest in organising future community events, demonstrating the long-term impact of Street Feast in strengthening neighbourhood bonds.



Street Feast now has partnerships with **16** Local Authorities, **3** Government Departments and selected corporate partners.





Building social infrastructure in new neighbourhoods with Home Together and Our Fabric:



In 2024 we fostered connection among more than **3,600** residents in 10 Cairn-built estates.



91% of participants said their neighbourhood felt friendlier after engaging in Home Together. **85%** experienced an increased sense of belonging.

Our Fabric

In 2025, we launched our first **Our Fabric** programme in partnership with Fingal County Council.

Empowering Neighbours to come together to take action on Climate Change with Our Shared Plate:



Our Shared Plate partnered with **9 Midlands communities** to empower neighbours to grow, cook, and eat together.



Between 2024 and 2025, **1115** participants attended educational workshops and events, demonstrating how local action on food and climate strengthens communities.

Growing a sustainable, impact-driven organisation:

- We achieved **charity status** in 2024.

- In 2025, we have **12 employees**, 3 full-time and 9 part-time.

- We have an engaged and active Board of Directors with seven members. Four sub-groups on the Board support the operational staff in the areas of Finance, Governance & Human Resources, Impact & Strategy, and Communications & Income Generation.

- We have developed strategic relationships with private corporations, NGOs and other organisations aligned with our goals.

- In 2025, we are working with prominent Irish universities to conduct research on the impact of our work in neighbourhoods.





Current Context

The context for our work in the next 5 years

1. Loneliness will be an increasingly important public health issue

When **Neighbourhood Network** began, it was to address a growing issue of disconnection between people in everyday life. Despite the availability of technological connection, many people were experiencing loneliness and a sense of disconnection where they were living. In many ways, the issue has become even more acute in the last decade. Loneliness has been found to raise the risk of mortality by **26%**, social isolation by **29%**.¹ Ireland has one of the highest rates of loneliness in Europe,² with **20%** of adults frequently feeling lonely. Loneliness is increasingly recognised as a public health issue, comparable in impact to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, according to U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy.

The HSE has acknowledged the power of human connection in addressing loneliness and its related health outcomes, launching Ireland's National Framework for Social Prescribing³ in 2021. Research conducted in April 2025 explored the value of Community Connection as one of 3 key social prescribing methods.⁴ Social connection will play an increasingly important role in public health over the coming decades.

1 Source: Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Baker M, Harris T, Stephenson D. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review. *Perspect Psychol Sci*. 2015 Mar;10(2):227-37. doi: 10.1177/1745691614568352. PMID: 25910392. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25910392/>

2 Source: EU-LS 2022 https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/survey-methods-and-analysis-centre/loneliness/loneliness-prevalence-eu_en

3 Source: HSE, 2021 <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/mental-health-and-wellbeing/social-prescribing/>

4 Source: Ryan, A., Walsh, O., Clarke, A., Connolly, D. (2024). Feasibility, usability and acceptability of three outcome measures for social prescribing services. Trinity College Dublin, and the HSE Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme.

2. Ireland will build more houses (and neighbourhoods) than ever before

The housing crisis has endured for over a decade and will likely continue to be a challenge for the coming decade. Ireland's population is expected to increase by **922,000** between 2022 and 2040, resulting in a total population of over 6.106 million people by 2040.⁵ At the same time the amount of people living in each household is expected to decrease to **2.4** by 2040⁶.

The government has committed to building an average of **50,500** homes per year – scaling up to **60,000** homes in 2030 and maintaining that level into the future.⁷

Many of these builds will be within mixed tenure neighbourhoods including homeowners, renters, and social housing tenants. In 2025 there are over **500** Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in Ireland providing affordable rented housing to those who cannot purchase their own homes or afford private sector rents,⁸ up from **237** AHBs in 2015. AHBs accounted for **61,000** homes in 2024, up from **37,000**⁹ in 2020. Research has found that “neighbourliness” is one of three key ingredients in social cohesion in disadvantaged communities.¹⁰

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create sustainable, resilient new communities across Ireland. As crucial as the bricks and mortar are, we believe in investing in the social scaffolding of these new neighbourhoods leading to thriving, inclusive communities.

5 Source: ESRI, July 2024 <https://www.esri.ie/publications/population-projections-the-flow-of-new-households-and-structural-housing-demand>

6 Source: Ibid, p.44

7 Source: Dept Housing, Local Government & Heritage, Nov 2024 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/press-releases/government-agrees-to-progress-amendments-to-draft-revision-of-national-planning-framework-ambitious-new-housing-targets/>

8 Source: Citizens Information <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/local-authority-and-social-housing/approved-housing-bodies/>

9 Source: Irish Times, Nov 2024 <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2024/11/26/housing-bodies-to-assess-removal-of-their-borrowings-from-state-balance-sheet/>

10 Source: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)00877-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)00877-6/fulltext)



3. The population of Ireland will become increasingly diverse

In 2025, Ireland is home to **5,380,300** people. **15.5%** of these are 'new Irish', representing a growing minority of people coming to Ireland from all over the world to work and live. Refugees have been welcomed by communities all over Ireland from rural villages to urban neighbourhoods.

The intersection of domestic challenges in housing and cost of living with global challenges of migration caused by conflict and climate change is highlighting the need for greater solidarity between people in the communities where they live.¹¹ Our communities continue to become increasingly diverse at the same as access to basic services are becoming increasingly difficult.

4. Climate and Biodiversity will be increasingly important public issues

Ireland is also facing a **Climate and Biodiversity Crisis and Action Plans** are in place to address these challenges. Ireland has committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least **42%** by 2030. Latest research from the Environmental Protection Agency¹² shows that we are on course to achieve a reduction of just **10%**. As a society, we need to address these challenges before it's too late. Active, engaged neighbourhoods play a key role in helping Ireland to achieve our targets. Our Pilot Climate Action project "**Our Shared Plate**" has shown that communities from a wide variety of backgrounds can take meaningful collective action to make their neighbourhoods more sustainable.

11 Source CSO 2024 <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/populationandmigrationestimates/>

12 Source: EPA, May 2025 <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/climate-change/ghg/indicators-targets/>



Vision, Mission & Values

Our Vision

Happy, healthy and resilient communities nationwide where people feel connected, included and supported.

Our Mission

We spark neighbourhood connections through hands-on initiatives, empowering people to build happy, healthy and resilient communities.

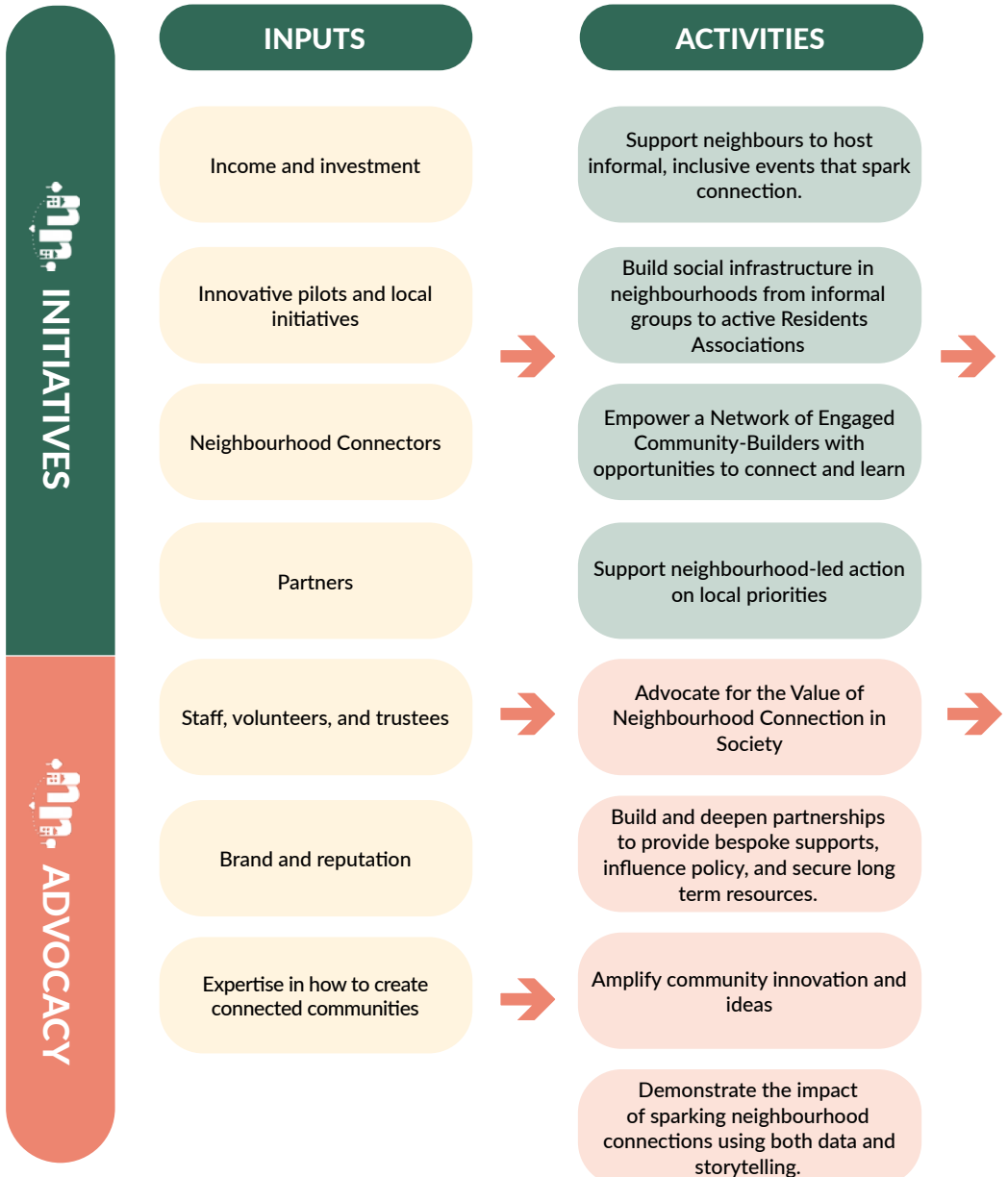
Our Values

We are....

*dynamic & innovative,
collaborative, & impact-driven;
passionate about community,
dedicated to inclusion
committed to sustainability.*



Our Theory of Change



SHORT - MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES

More people take part in community events, increasing social connection

Communities are equipped with awareness and tools to address climate adaptation

Neighbours are helping each other more

New build estates regularly initiate programmes to support social connection and social cohesion

Statutory and non-statutory bodies shaping communities prioritise neighbour connection in the design of their services and planning

Neighbourhood connection and community cohesion become important governmental priorities, with increased spend in future budgets

LONGTERM OUTCOMES

People feel a sense of belonging and are supported in their community

People feel pride and take responsibility in their neighbourhoods

Neighbourhood Connectors

Improved local leadership and civic participation

Sustained community initiatives that grow and develop over time

Greater sense of cohesion in communities across Ireland



VISION



Happy, healthy and resilient communities nationwide where people feel connected, included and supported

Executive Summary



1.

We facilitate social connection and collaboration in new and existing neighbourhoods across Ireland.



2.

We empower a network of engaged neighbours with the resources they need to take community building into their own hands.



3.

We promote and demonstrate with evidence how neighbourhood connection builds social cohesion in Irish society.



4.

We build a long-term, sustainable organisation





Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1:

We facilitate social connection and collaboration in new and existing neighbourhoods across Ireland.

RATIONALE:

At the core of Neighbourhood Network is a simple and powerful idea: small moments of connection can lead to profound changes, making neighbourhoods not just places to live but thriving communities. We know that hosting neighbourhood events leads to stronger personal connections and supports social inclusion. Building on our decade of successful engagement with Street Feast, Our Shared Plate and Home Together, we aim to provide opportunities for neighbours to connect with each other in communities across Ireland.

“*Street Feast created a greater sense of togetherness among those who attended. Our theme was ‘We Are One’. Invited local neighbours and nearby migrants. Brazil, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mexico, Portugal, England, New Zealand were represented!*”

– Patrick, Wicklow, Street Feast host.

Goals under Strategic Objective 1:

- 1.1 Provide in-person and online resources to support neighbours in hosting informal, inclusive events.
- 1.2 Build social infrastructure from informal groups to active Residents Associations (RAs), embedding inclusion and mutual help.
- 1.3 Support neighbourhood-led action on local priorities like climate, safety, or inclusion.
- 1.4 Deepen partnerships with Councils, Housing Bodies, and developers to deliver bespoke supports.
- 1.5 Pilot innovative initiatives in selected areas and scale successful models across the network.



What Success Looks Like:

By 2030, neighbourhoods across Ireland are alive with regular, inclusive events that bring people together, with over 1,200 gatherings supported each year. Hosts reflect the diversity of their communities and feel equipped with the tools, templates, and starter packs that make it easy to invite neighbours to connect.

Councils and housing bodies are actively referring neighbourhoods to Neighbourhood Network programmes, embedding our model into local practice. Communities are taking the lead on their own priorities—from climate action to safety—and inspiring grassroots initiatives are underway nationally.

Neighbourhood Network is recognised by local authorities and developers as a trusted partner. New initiatives are regularly piloted, our programmes reach every region, and our projects are financially sustainable, demonstrating that neighbourhood connection can be both impactful and viable in the long term.

Strategic Objective 2:

We empower a network of engaged neighbours with the resources they need to take community building into their own hands.

RATIONALE:

We catalyse bottom-up community development by empowering those active in their local neighbourhoods. Our experience has shown that there are leaders in every community in Ireland who, with support, can make a big difference in the lives of those around them. To optimise their contributions, and bring together their experiences, we will develop a national network of 'Neighbourhood Connectors'. Participation in our national network will include peer-learning opportunities, resources and educational workshops run by Neighbourhood Network. We will curate this programme in response to the experience and expertise of our Neighbourhood Connectors.

“*A real sense of community has been created. We were all strangers moving into the estate and now it's lovely to be able to stop when out walking and chat to neighbours and know them by name. I have trust in my neighbours . I do not have children yet but I can really see what a positive impact it has had on them and their families.*”

- Heather from Mariavilla, Home Together participant 2024

Goals under Strategic Objective 2:

- 2.1 Support and recognise neighbours who build long-term community networks.
- 2.2 Establish a national network of community-builders with opportunities to connect and learn.
- 2.3 Amplify community innovation and ideas through shared learning and storytelling.
- 2.4 Host peer-learning events to build confidence, connection and skills.

What Success Looks Like:

By 2030, a thriving national network of Neighbourhood Connectors is active in every county, supported with resources, and pathways for sustainable volunteering. These connectors feel valued, equipped, and motivated, with participation rates increasing every year.

An active online platform connects the community, complemented by annual conferences, regional gatherings, and quarterly peer-learning events that bring participants together to share skills and build confidence. Attendees report feeling more capable of leading community-building work as a result of Neighbourhood Network's support.

A storytelling hub shares the lived experiences and ideas of neighbourhood leaders, featuring peer stories and community contributions, sparking innovation and inspiration nationwide. This network of connectors has become self-sustaining, dynamic, and visible—proof that neighbours themselves hold the solutions to creating lasting, supportive communities.



Strategic Objective 3:

We promote and demonstrate with evidence how neighbourhood connection builds social cohesion in Irish society.

RATIONALE:

Neighbourhood Connection is vital for the future of Ireland. We believe passionately in the power of connecting people in the communities where they live, giving them the confidence and skills to create opportunities for connection. As the voice of neighbourhood connection in Ireland, we will bring this concept to the fore in Irish public discourse. We will be passionate advocates for our work and the work of our growing network of Neighbourhood Connectors. As a result of our advocacy, policy-makers, media commenters and the public will understand how neighbourhood connection contributes to social cohesion in Irish society.

Goals under Strategic Objective 3:

-
- 3.1 Develop and implement an advocacy strategy to influence public policy.

 - 3.2 Demonstrate our impact using both data and storytelling.

 - 3.3 Build strategic relationships with decision-makers in key sectors.

 - 3.4 Empower staff to act as advocates in their roles.





What Success Looks Like:

By 2030, Neighbourhood Network is recognised nationally as the voice of neighbourhood connection and for its role in building social cohesion.

We regularly publish and share robust evidence of our impact, including annual reports, creative evaluation tools, and research publications. Our findings are cited in public debate, media, and policy-making circles, ensuring neighbourhood connection is understood as essential to Ireland's future.

Staff across the organisation confidently act as advocates, with advocacy goals built into their roles, and NN staff and board members contribute regularly to national events and media. Our message is consistently heard: strong neighbourhoods lead to a stronger, more cohesive society.

Strategic Objective 4:

We build a long-term, sustainable organisation

RATIONALE:

Neighbourhood Network is at a key moment of organisational evolution. We are evolving from a set of dynamic, linked projects to a coherent, resilient and ambitious organisation. Our people are vital to delivering our mission. We are proud of the talent, energy and creativity in our staff, volunteers and Board. We will invest in our people so they are empowered to deliver on our mission. We are now in a position to reach more communities and increase our impact, sustainably growing our organisation through these activities:

Goals under Strategic Objective 4:

- 4.1 Implement a sustainable growth plan and long-term resourcing strategy.

- 4.2 Build strategic partnerships with aligned funders and organisations.

- 4.3 Foster a “Best Place to Work” culture with pathways for staff progression.

- 4.4 Actively seek opportunities to improve our governance structures.

- 4.5 Invest in systems that streamline work and empower staff.

- 4.6 Deliver a communications strategy that supports a clear, unified brand.

- 4.7 Initiate Strategic Review to inform the next plan and develop Strategic Plan 2031–2035.

What success looks like:

By 2030, Neighbourhood Network has grown into a resilient, ambitious, and trusted national organisation. A five-year business model underpins sustainable growth, with multi-year funding agreements secured and financial records demonstrating stability.

More strategic partners and funders are actively engaged, providing repeat and long-term support. Our people are thriving, with strong staff satisfaction, clear pathways for progression, and a strong culture that makes Neighbourhood Network a “Best Place to Work.” Governance is robust and future-focused, with a diverse and skilled board, active sub-groups, and annual appraisals ensuring accountability.

Efficient systems for finance, CRM, and project management save time and empower staff, while a unified communications strategy has refreshed our brand and strengthened national recognition. As 2030 closes, we complete a strategic review and publish the 2031–2035 plan, ready to continue our mission into the next decade.



Implementing Our Strategy

This Strategy was developed between March and July 2025. It was led by the Board, with the support of the Board's Strategy Sub-Group, our CEO Sam Bishop, and staff team. Our Learning Partner, Eimear McNally facilitated two half-day staff "Blue Sky" workshops in 2024. A follow-up Strategy Consultation workshop was held on April 4th 2025. Stakeholder conversations were held with representatives of the Community & Voluntary Support Unit in the Department of Rural & Community Development, Pobal and Cairn.

Responsibility for implementing our Strategy will lie with the CEO and will be supported by the Board. All staff have fed into the creation of this Strategy and will be empowered to implement the aspects relevant to their roles. We will review the Strategy annually to ensure we are on course and make adjustments in response to changing external contexts.

