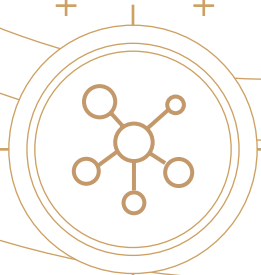


Revised Global Strategy (2018 to 2028)

Search for Common Ground
Revised June 2022



**Search for
Common Ground**
Trust, Collaboration, Breakthroughs



Executive Summary

This is the **updated 2018 to 2028 strategy of Search for Common Ground**. It serves as a unified strategy for all SFCG entities, including all our offices and the United States and Belgium-registered organizations and all offices around the world. In mid-2021 we underwent a review process in which we gleaned learning from the first three years of implementation. This document lays out some adjustments in our direction and the priorities which will guide the expansion phase of our strategic plan.

Violent conflict has a devastating effect on the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world. Over 70 million are displaced, and the most conflict-affected countries have been unable to make progress in reducing extreme poverty. Polarization and a crisis of cooperation prevents action on many of the world's most pressing problems. Increased international competition in a multi-polar world has strained the systems designed to maintain peace among nations while the eroding of social contracts between citizens and their governments has led to downward spiraling of trust in institutions. Many seemingly stable societies are being pulled apart as the crises of climate change, COVID19 and economic instability converge.

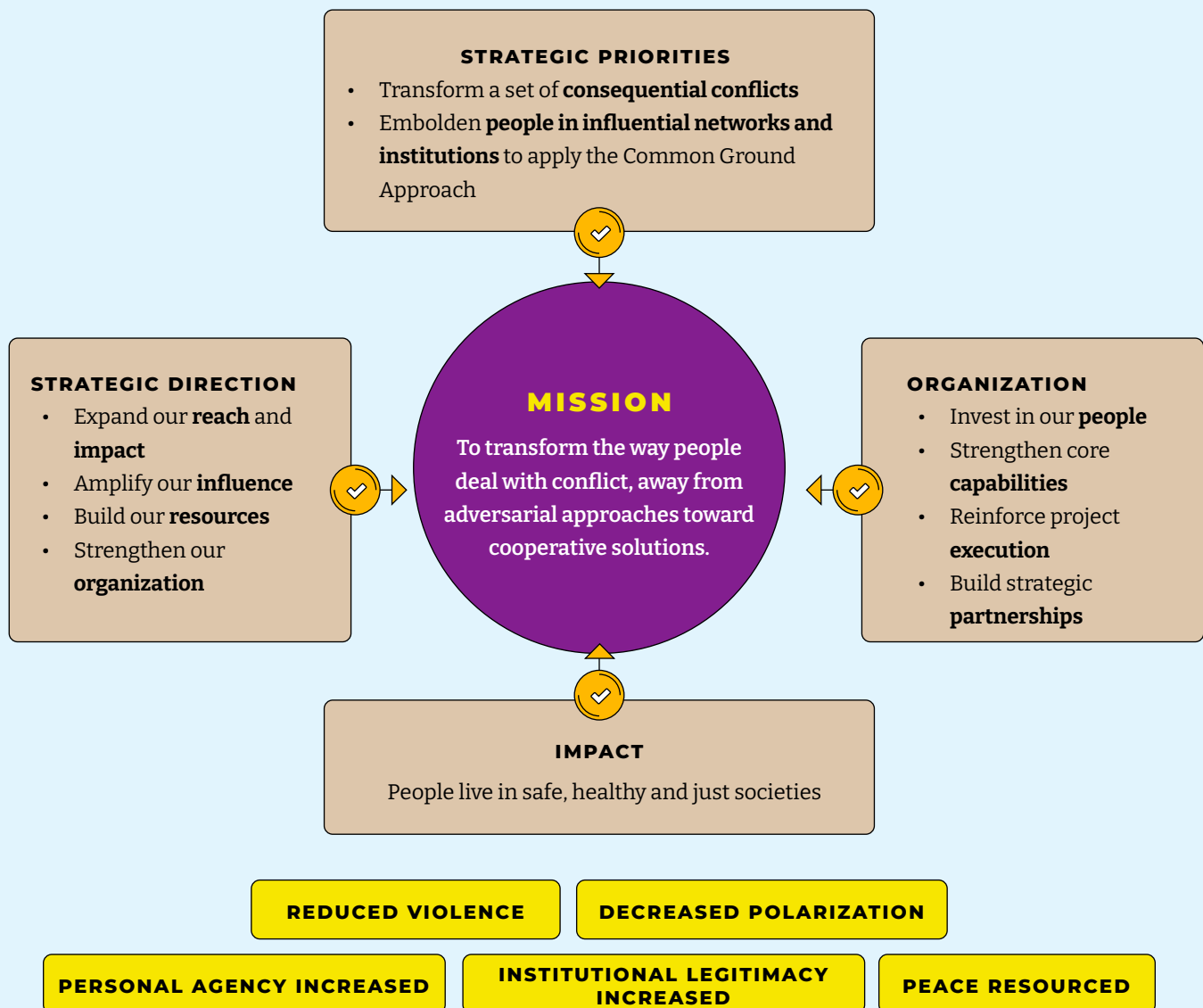
At the same time, many people living with conflict are seeking innovative solutions, reaching out across dividing lines to sustain their communities. From private sector companies to community-based associations to security forces, many people crave a role in stopping violence and building peace. Those who are traditionally marginalized – women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and others – seek platforms for participation and for their voices to be heard. Even in those places where stark divisions have led to extreme violence, people are collaborating across dividing lines to address the root causes of conflict. It is in solidarity and partnership with these people and institutions that we seek to cause enduring change at scale.

Over 40 years, we have generated evidence that the most effective way to prevent violent conflict is **to bring people, groups and institutions together from across dividing lines to take collaborative action to solve shared problems**. This is most powerfully done by those living within conflict. We call this the **Common Ground Approach**.

The expansion phase (2022-2028) of our plan is guided by **four strategic directions**:

1. Expand our reach and impact
2. Amplify our influence
3. Build up our resources
4. Strengthen our organization

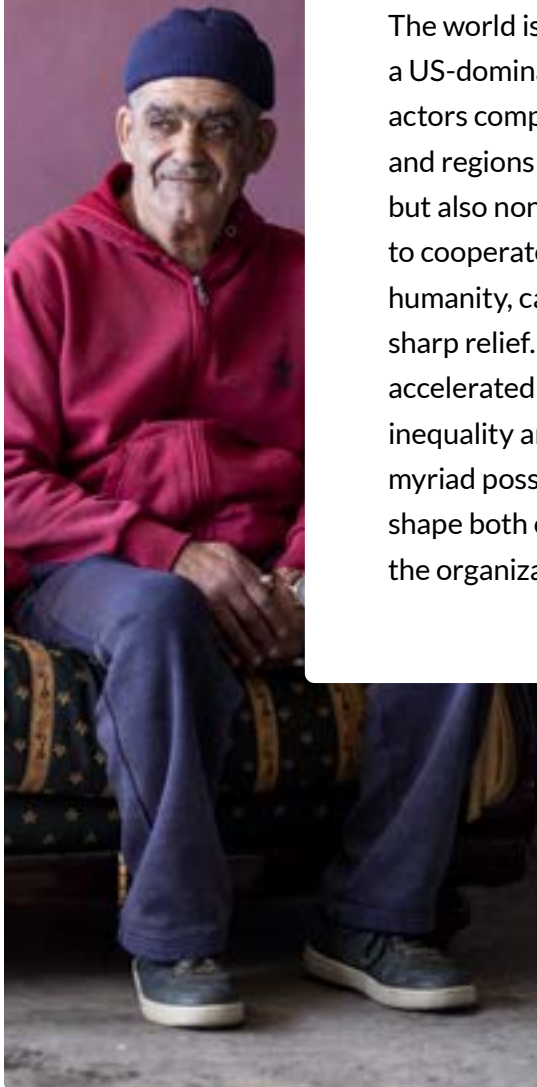
This strategy serves as a North Star to which our efforts are aligned, guiding our allocation of resources, our operational planning and budgeting processes at all levels. In the execution of our strategy we are **adaptable and agile**, recognizing that changes in context and learning from experiences will cause us to change course as necessary.





Our World

The world is in the midst of a transitional period, moving away from a US-dominated, unipolar world to a multipolar system with multiple actors competing. The power to build, or erode, stability of nations and regions is increasingly in the hands not just of governments but also non-state groups. The failure of governments and citizens to cooperate prevents action to respond to the many crises facing humanity, casting differing visions for how to govern the world into sharp relief. The fraying world order combined with climate change, accelerated technology, ethno-nationalist movements, increasing inequality and plummeting trust in institutions have opened up myriad possibilities for future directions. A range of forces at play shape both our strategic choices and the ways in which we manage the organization.



- 1 **We are simultaneously facing a range of types of conflicts.** There is no clearly dominant form of major violent conflict, and so Search needs to be positioned to operate in a wide range of contexts.
 - a. **Global and regional power competition.** This shapes global affairs on all issues, drives instability, leads to inter-state armed conflict, and raises the specter of cataclysmic war.
 - b. **Asymmetrical armed conflict.** A host of ongoing armed conflicts - many of which are transnational in nature - pit states against non-state armed actors, having a devastating effect on civilian populations. A combination of collective polarization, governance crises and inequities make up an array of root causes.
 - c. **Conflict between citizens and their states.** Waning trust in institutions is leading to open confrontation between dissatisfied citizens and their governments. The role of states is in flux with both a rise of authoritarianism and crises in responsive governance.

- 2 **Evolving technology reshapes the media and how institutions and people interact.** Over a billion people will come online during this strategy period. Technology is driving constant shifts to almost every facet of human life.
 - a. **Transforming media and information landscape.** The fragmentation of the information environment leads to segregation in media, hyperpolarization, and the predominance of divisive and manipulative content.
 - b. **Young generation of leaders clamoring for influence.** Youth are overtly seeking more power; influence over popular narratives is shaped by highly networked young women and men using technology in creative ways.

- 3 **Climate change has a major effect on conflict.** The effects of climate change are reshaping conflict dynamics everywhere. Adaptation to mass migration, climate-induced disasters, competition over natural resources, the decline of oil, and other effects can create opportunities for collaboration.

- 4 **Demographic changes drive urbanization.** By 2050 over two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities, shifting the geographical landscape of conflict into urban centers.

- 6 **Diversity, equity and inclusion are central to any company's value.** DEI is not just a matter of workforce management but is tied to any company's core business. This is particularly relevant to us; the emphasis on equity around issues of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity among other dimensions of identity is central to our mission.

- 5 **COVID-19 is becoming a "new normal"** The pandemic is expected to last for years to come, reshaping conflict dynamics and exacerbating inequalities.

- 7 **The donor market is shifting.** Donors are driving more funding to both large contractors and to smaller, local and national NGOs. This presents specific challenges for medium-sized INGOs.

Our Purpose

OUR MISSION

The mission of Search for Common Ground is to **transform the way people deal with conflict, away from adversarial approaches toward cooperative solutions.**

OUR VALUES

Collaboration. We are purposeful in creating a diverse and inclusive culture at Search. We know that no one succeeds alone, so we embrace courageous engagement and collaboration. We listen deeply to new ideas, welcoming multiple and fresh perspectives.

Audacity. We are hopeful and undaunted by what may seem insurmountable. We imagine solutions for some of the most complex problems. We are unafraid to try new things and to experiment.

Tenacity. We take on big challenges. We are not discouraged by our failures, instead we learn from them. We prefer action over perfection, and we never give up.

Empathy. We build relationships based on respect. We seek to understand each other's circumstances and experiences. We encourage the potential in each person and celebrate their growth and success.

Results. We each have a vital role in achieving the mission of Search for Common Ground. We take pride in what we can accomplish together. We are constantly learning, adapting and improving.

OUR VISION

We envision a world where conflict doesn't mean violence, but rather is a source of progress. Our vision is a world where **people live in healthy, safe and just societies**, where cooperation across differences is a norm.

OUR STRATEGIC POSITION

We transform conflicts so people can live free from violence and realize the benefits of durable peace. We are locally rooted and globally networked. Our unique value lies in the **collective impact of our globally integrated team and partners**, from those most directly affected by violent conflict in our communities to those with access and influence on the major powers that influence conflict dynamics.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1:

Expand Our Reach & Impact

OUR APPROACH

We bring people, groups and institutions together from across dividing lines to collaborate around their shared interests.

Our programs take many forms, and our toolbox is wide and varied, with each team tailoring tactics to the dynamics and history of their context. Yet all programs are based on the same foundation: *The Common Ground Approach*.

Through this approach, we:

- **Build trust.** People build trust across ethnic, religious, political or other social divides and between institutions and the public.
- **Ignite collaboration.** Divided groups and institutions work together to achieve goals jointly, generating creative and enduring solutions to their shared problems.
- **Transform relationships.** People and groups recognize how collaboration benefits them and they seek to sustain their connections with others, replicating collaboration without reliance on outside support.

We apply the *Common Ground Approach* in highly polarized and often unjust situations. Through our work we identify and work with champions and drive inter-communal and institutional trust.

We work with everyone who has an influence on conflict, and we seek to remove barriers to engagement. We are especially attentive to engage those who are often excluded, creating platforms for their voices and opportunities to participate in decision-making.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

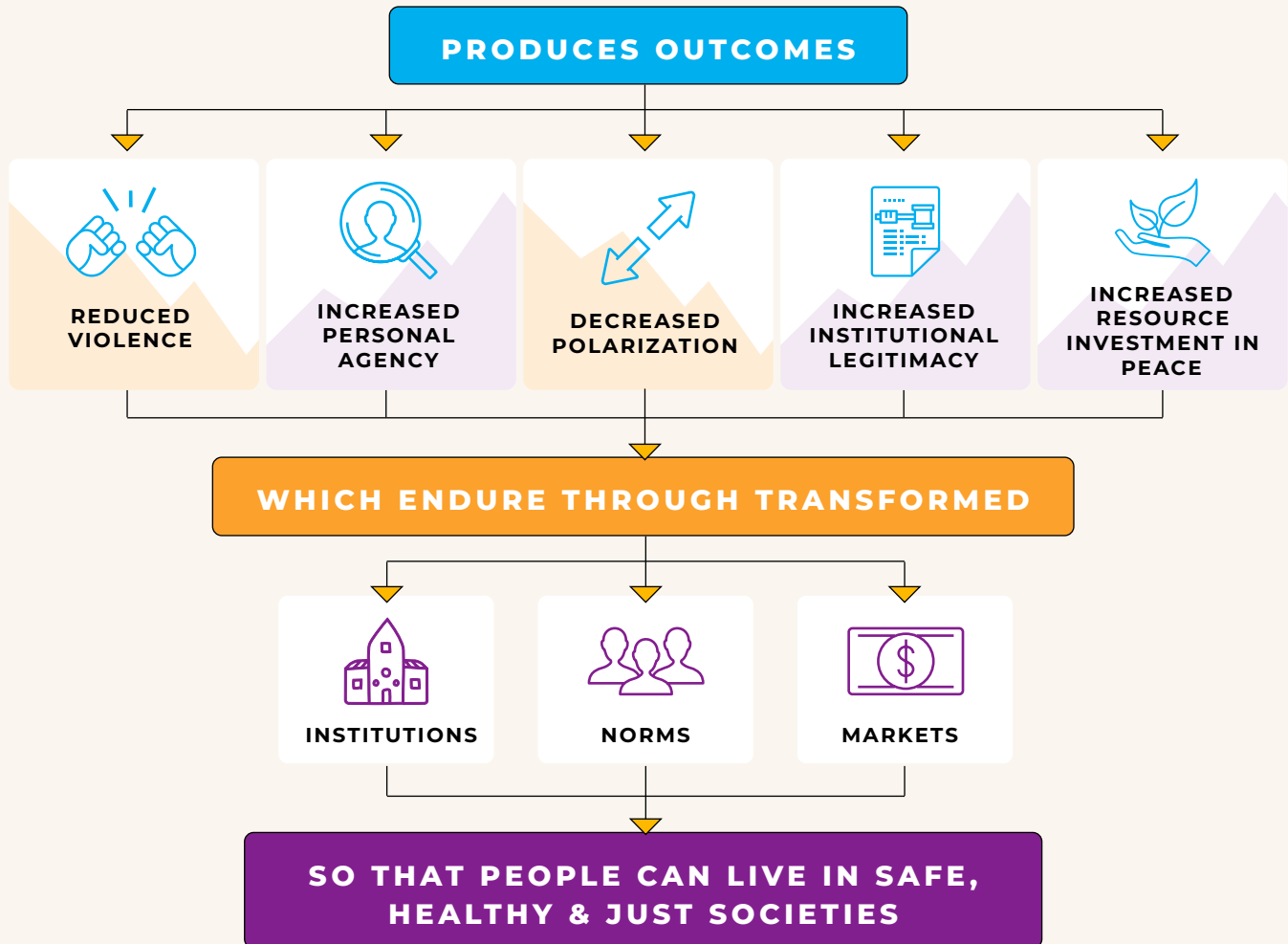
Our theory of change is a result of four decades of experience transforming conflicts and the accumulation of evidence about what works. It is based on three insights:

- The most powerful and enduring way to end violence is to foster collaboration across dividing lines, applying the Common Ground Approach;
- The Common Ground Approach becomes self-perpetuating when collaborative actions satisfy the needs of individuals, communities and institutions. There are incentives for people to adopt it in their daily behaviors and practices and it is the stakeholders to conflict themselves whose buy-in makes it sustainable.
- The transformation of conflicts endures when changes in norms, institutional behaviors and market forces occur, eliminating dependence on external support or resourcing.



THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH

transforms relationships, builds trust, and ignites collaboration across dividing lines



OUR PROGRAMMING

Our programs cause enduring change along the pathways described by our theory of change. We have two interlocking strategic priorities:

1. We work to **transform a set of highly consequential conflicts** from within conflict geographies
2. We **embolden people in influential institutions and networks** to adopt the principles of the Common Ground Approach, particularly collaboration and non-adversarial responses to conflict

We innovate in two ways: *incremental* where we evolve our tools and approaches **and** *transformational* where our teams in conflict contexts create entirely new ways to build peace. Similarly, *transformational* innovation the creation of entirely new offerings and approaches to peacebuilding, invented primarily and organically within conflict contexts. We design our programs within each place that we work, utilizing our global learning and growing evidence base about what works to make good decisions for each context.

1. Transforming a Set of Consequential Conflicts

We have chosen twelve consequential conflicts to which we have made a generational commitment. Our focus is on those conflicts which have a large number of loss of lives, cause significant disruption to people's livelihoods and have long-term devastating consequences on the social and economic fabric of societies. We are addressing each conflict transnationally by using a *conflict geography approach*, meaning that we cause change within the boundaries of the conflict system rather than the borders of countries. Over a minimum of ten years, we aim to have a discernible effect on the lives of people living with these conflicts as measured by the [Global Impact Framework](#). This approach emerged from three insights:

- **The most violent conflicts are transnational.** Most major conflicts - in terms of levels of violence and potential loss of life - expand beyond nation-state borders, involving neighboring countries, people on the move and outside powers. To maximize our ability to cause change, we work across borders, tackling the root causes of violent conflict.
- **Enduring change takes up to two decades to achieve.** Each team develops and pursues a vision for lasting change that is sustained by norms, institutions and market forces. Change at this level is incremental, requiring the building of trust through collaboration which cannot be fast tracked.
- **Adapting to changing context is essential.** We adapt to shifting conflict dynamics. By being deeply rooted in each place with diverse and representative teams, we are able to make quick and well-informed decisions. This ensures our ongoing relevance and ability to seize opportunities that might otherwise be missed, including when political circumstances change drastically.

CONFLICT GEOGRAPHIES

1. Swahili Coast
2. African Great Lakes
3. Greater Lake Chad Basin
4. Sudans
5. Sahel
6. Bay of Bengal
7. Central & South Asia
8. Greater Levant
9. Arabian Peninsula
10. United States
11. Northern Triangle
12. Israel/Palestine

STOPPING AT SUCCESS

In many countries where we have worked, we have had an enduring impact on the way that conflict is managed, improving the lives of millions. We were integral to the consolidation of peace after the wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nepal, and Timor-Leste. We have driven institutional change in the prison and parole systems in Indonesia, the judicial sector in Morocco, and the educational system in North Macedonia. Through these accomplishments, we have begun transitions, enabling people from those societies to adopt and implement the Common Ground Approach through nationally and locally rooted institutions.

SFCG is working to transition to national-level organizations in a number of countries. Our teams in Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, North Macedonia, and Sierra Leone have established locally-registered organizations which carry forward the mission and the Common Ground Approach through ongoing work. We dedicate resources to enabling the new organizations to have the funding base and operational capabilities to stand on their own, serving as a vibrant part of civil society.

2. Transforming Powerful Networks and Institutions

We work with people in those institutions and networks who have a significant effect on conflicts - both within the conflict geographies and globally - to use the *Common Ground Approach* and adopt peacebuilding practices. We recognize that those with influence generate power from networks, movements and culture as well as through traditional institutions. We influence both, at times convening people from across these groups. This means that we:

- **Advocate with government institutions** to increase their will and capability to deploy peacebuilding approaches and resources to responding to conflict;
- **Influence private sector companies** so that they have a positive impact on peace. We focus our efforts on advocacy efforts and partnerships with the technology and extractive industries, given their presence and effects in conflict areas.
- **Equip citizen-powered networks and movements** to use collaborative approaches to advocacy. We pilot and scale innovative approaches to transforming norms on managing conflict, enabling those with networked power to engage with institutions in new ways.

This work enables us to influence policy and shape political processes; we are uniquely able to connect people who live with conflict - particularly women, youth and other traditionally excluded groups - with those who control resources and make policy decisions, to drive inclusive decision making.

OUR IMPACT AND HOW WE MEASURE IT

The success of our strategy is measured by the impact that we have on people’s ability to live in societies where peace endures. We use a three-pillar framework to collect data across five outcomes. These areas are the most critical to building peace, particularly to people living with conflict. Based on our experience and the input of people in conflict areas around the world, we determined these to be the most relevant, practical and concrete measures for ending violent conflict.

Our results across these themes allow us to hold ourselves accountable to people affected by conflict that we aim to support, and to those who fund our work.

The Peace Impact Framework

The Framework includes three pillars from which we generate knowledge and evidence. They were designed by drawing from the best indicators and frameworks in our field and from people directly affected by conflict. It aims to enable us to question our assumptions, remain relevant across a range of contexts, and maintain accountability to those most directly affected by conflict.



Why did we choose this framework?

It’s Simple. With 5 Themes, 3 Pillars, and only 10 global indicators, we can measure impact in a way that is both relevant to people living in conflict and accessible for people and policy makers working to transform conflict.

It was developed with input from people living in conflict. Our pillars, themes and indicators were chosen in consultation with staff, partners and communities around the globe and in diverse conflict contexts.

It’s designed to evolve. Most frameworks have set standard measures. This one does as well, but is set up with two other pillars that help us decide if they are still the right measures as the world evolves.

It is structured to encourage sharing and collective learning. From high-level advocacy work to community youth centers, anyone interested in transforming conflict can identify what matters most to them, use the framework in the way that’s relevant to them, and contribute evidence to our field.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2:

Amplify Our Influence

OUR FIELD

Search aspires to play a leadership role building our field, making peacebuilding relevant to everyone.

- We will invest in effectively **communicating the relevance and impact** of peacebuilding to mass audiences so that it is accessible.
- We will **evolve our brand** so that we are widely known and have an influential public voice.
- We will collaborate with others working in conflict to **grow and share the evidence base of our collective impact**.

OUR GOVERNANCE

As a core element of expansion, Search will **globalize our governance** to reflect the international nature of our organization and expand our reach. This will serve both to amplify our influence and to enable our growth. Through this effort, we will:

- Reflect a global identity when addressing global policy advocacy issues in major transnational conflicts/emergencies, especially with multilateral institutions;
- Develop institutional presence in key capital cities, enabling us to assert influence on policy decisions that influence the lives of people living in conflict contexts;
- Establish a competitive edge through diversified global governance and operational models, enabling us to secure revenue from large grants and private funding;
- Nurture the development and membership of new entities in emerging markets;
- Capture the benefits of diverse, equitable, and inclusive global governance and operational models.

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

We have a network of people who support our mission all over the world, people who have been affected by conflict and who take great risks to build peace. We seek to do right by those who work with us, those who participate in our programs, those in partner organizations, those who work for vendors enabling us to deliver programming, those who give money to our

mission, and those who offer us their expertise.

Relationships are our most important assets, enabling us to pursue our mission, and we maintain them beyond project and grant cycles.

We believe that our most effective work is done with others. Our ability to work within a range of sectors is a key part of our value as an organization. Therefore we work with a diverse set of stakeholders including local community groups, national and international civil society, government, corporations and others. Our unique set of partnerships in each place we work and at a global level are central to our ability to cause enduring change. Our approach contributes to Search for Common Ground's long-term advantage in terms of capabilities, position, innovation and competitiveness. Just as our partners increase our value, we bring value to our partners. Through partners we:

- **Expand our capabilities.** We access capabilities in adjacent sectors which are key to building peace.
- **Expand our influence.** Our alliances enable us to access people, places and institutions; create platforms for traditionally marginalized groups to assert their influence; and expand the scale of our impact.
- **Expand our learning for impact.** Our partnerships enable us to demonstrate our impact, generate an evidence base for what works to build the field.

We pursue partnerships at all levels. At a global level, we are developing a set of strategic partnerships which will substantially enhance our reach and capabilities.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3:

Build Up Our Resources

Our business model explains how we translate our resources, funding, relationships and technical know-how into impact. It includes the full spectrum of our work from how we engage with partners and communities, work with our donors, raise and utilize funds, and deliver programming. During this strategic period, we will drive growth by globalizing the organization.

Grant Funded, Project-Based

The bulk of Search’s work done is through high-quality and impactful projects, funded by government donors and foundations. Our work delivers value to a range of stakeholders including participants, donors, and partners. During this strategy period we aim to:

- Attract and execute medium-size to large projects which last for several years.
- Continue to cultivate business with relatively new donors to diversify our funding base
- Attract resources as a go-to sub-awardee for major initiatives

In order to do this we will:

- Localize management closer to target geographies
- Increase our focus on partnerships so that we can effectively manage and participate in consortia and work with those in other relevant sectors.

Unrestricted Resources

We aim to grow our unrestricted resources to be 10% of our annual revenue. This includes:

- Individual philanthropists
- Foundations
- Partnerships with private sector companies

This further diversifies the stakeholder base that the organization serves, shaping how we deliver our value. It requires us to invest in brand equity, increase our profile, and tell our story of impact effectively.

Diversification of our Funding Sources

Over the period of expansion, we aim to begin the diversification of our funding sources beyond grants and philanthropy to ensure the long-term resiliency of the organization. Through these efforts we will work to access funds in new markets through a global governance effort, invest in new and innovative fundraising models, and consider creating new entities for programming which have different funding models.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:

Strengthen our Organization

We are mission-driven committed peacebuilders; we strive to have an engaged and highly skilled workforce. Our diversity - which encompasses race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation & gender identity, religion, ability and disability groups working collaboratively - is central to our mission and to our ability to execute this strategy. Only through effective and equitable inclusion are we able to generate unique insights and make better decisions that are critical to our success. We strive to:

- **Attract, retain and cultivate top-talent.** We aim to be an organization where people love to work and can build a career, drawing top-notch talent from multiple sectors. We seek to develop our leaders from within, enabling people to grow their influence, and to recruit top-talent from within and beyond our sector.
- **Reflect and leverage the power and value of our diverse workforce.** Our core values create an environment where the dignity of every person is honored and diverse perspectives are integral to decision-making at every level. We aim to forge new territory, to be front-edge leaders in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion given the importance of these principles to the execution of our mission and manifestation of our core values.
- **Be both rooted in the places we work and influential with global institutions.** We harness the power of people's lived experiences and professional expertise to generate insights, drive excellence and shape our global capabilities.

OUR CAPABILITIES

Our core capability is the ability to facilitate practical cooperation and collaborative action among people in highly divided and often fragile contexts. We have the ability to understand the drivers of conflict and develop relevant, impactful programming with a set of diverse partners. We are uniquely able to apply the Common Ground Approach to many sectors which have a direct influence on conflict. Our ability to sustain and evolve our **core** capabilities and develop **technical** capabilities is central to our ability to execute this strategy.

We are guided by several principles:

- We build and maintain our core and technical capabilities in **our front-line teams**, as close to program delivery as possible. We invest in the capacities of both our own teams and those of our partners.

- Through a globalized networked approach, we leverage our expertise across our programs to develop an evidence base for promising practices, capture learning, and shape the entire peacebuilding field.
- We invest in continually evolving our capabilities to adapt to the changing nature of conflict and to remain at the front edge of the field.
- We build our capabilities through a combination of internal institutional investment and forging partnerships.
- We will strengthen our institutional memory to ensure greater sustainability of knowledge and learning.

Core Capabilities	
Common Ground Approach	<p>We will invest in evolving our core methodology of facilitating collaboration across dividing lines in highly polarized environments. We will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening core tools and methodologies • Making the CGA widely accessible to a mass audience • Building and sharing an evidence base
Working With Others	<p>We enable actors in other sectors and industries to apply the Common Ground Approach in a way that brings value to them. i) others in the development and humanitarian sector; ii) government and private sector actors; iii) those involved in political processes. At times this requires us to build technical expertise internally and at times through partnerships.</p>
New Frontiers	<p>Next Generation Media: We will invest in building our expertise and evidence base in the use of media and digital peacebuilding methods.</p>

Our Expansion

2022 marks the beginning of the expansion phase of our strategic plan. This means that we aim to expand our reach, influence and resources. While we expect to grow our revenue, we are driven by our intention to see a discernible increase in the impact that we cause, our ability to measure that impact, and our effect on our sector.



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