



STRATEGY

2026-2030



Community members and partners working
alongside Search for Common Ground to build peace.



Across the world, societies are becoming more divided. Mistrust is rising, polarization is shaping daily life, violence threatens to reverse decades of social progress, and authoritarianism is undermining effective governance. Many people no longer believe that the institutions and systems we have relied upon since World War II can protect them or that their leaders can work together to solve shared problems. As global systems weaken, the consequences we face are real: our inability to manage conflict or collaborate effectively is preventing us from solving humanity's problems together.

For more than 40 years,

Search for Common Ground has shown that even the most deeply divided groups can build trust, prevent violence, and create practical solutions together. The Common Ground Approach has

Over the next five years, Search will accelerate the emergence of leaders who drive change through collaboration across dividing lines.

helped stop conflict from escalating, rebuilt trust after violence, and empowered unlikely coalitions to solve seemingly impossible problems. We do this in many of the most conflict-

affected places in the world where our teams work across dividing lines to transform people's lives.

Search's approach to transforming conflict has never been more

relevant, and this moment requires that approach at a much greater scale. Our strategy builds on our presence in more than two-dozen countries to make our approach available and used

by people all over the world.

By strengthening long-term partnerships in the world's most divided places and equipping leaders to work across lines of identity and ideology, we shift how societies respond to conflict and set a new norm for how change is led, transforming conflict and hundreds of millions of lives worldwide.

Today, communities are facing more pressure, polarization, and instability than at any point in recent decades. And yet, those same communities are showing us what's possible. That is why we are stepping into the next five years with a clear ambition:

WE CANNOT ACHIEVE THIS ALONE. WE'RE CALLING ON PARTNERS, GOVERNMENTS, AND INDIVIDUALS TO JOIN US IN BUILDING A WORLD WHERE COOPERATION, NOT CONFLICT, SHAPES THE FUTURE.

BY 2030:

WE WILL IMPROVE THE DIGNITY AND SAFETY OF 200 MILLION PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD.

WE WILL DO THIS BY:



MOBILIZING 1 MILLION LEADERS TO EMBRACE AND PROMOTE A COLLABORATIVE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

EXPANDING THE POWER OF 40 MILLION PEOPLE TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS WHICH AFFECT THEM



THESE ARE NOT JUST NUMBERS, THEY ARE FAMILIES, NEIGHBORS, TEACHERS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS WHO CAN CARRY PEACE FORWARD LONG AFTER ANY SINGLE PROGRAM ENDS.



THE IMPERATIVE OF COLLABORATION:

The World at a Crossroads

Around the world, communities are facing rising polarization, increased violence, eroding trust, and a growing sense of hopelessness and pessimism about the future. In 2024 alone, destructive conflict increased by 25%, leaving one in eight people worldwide directly exposed to violence. Many of today’s most destructive conflicts now cross borders, and the risk of major international conflict continues to grow.

At the same time, the systems designed to prevent and resolve conflict are failing. Governments are investing more in adversarial and military posturing than in diplomacy and cooperation. Most societies are experiencing an increase in polarization which affects all aspects of daily life, while widening inequality and declining trust in institutions fuel instability. Leaders are in crisis, feeling isolated and trapped by divisions, forcing them to choose sides

or withdraw entirely, even when collaboration is most urgently needed.

Yet, at the same time, there is a clamoring for a different way to respond to conflict. Leaders across sectors and regions increasingly recognize that no single actor can solve complex problems alone. People are searching for new ways that allow them to work constructively across divides without abandoning their principles. This is creating **UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND FOR THE PRACTICAL, COLLABORATIVE, AND PROVEN SOLUTIONS THAT SEARCH HAS IMPLEMENTED OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES** in the world’s most challenging contexts.

The moment demands our attention and Search for Common Ground is well-positioned to meet it.

OUR DISTINCT RESPONSE

Over the next five years, Search will accelerate the rise of a new model of leadership that replaces confrontation with collaboration. Through the Common Ground Approach, we will equip leaders to work across dividing lines, build coalitions in even the most polarized environments, and trigger a shift from adversarial to collaborative leadership, setting new 21st century norms.

In some of the world's most divided and complex conflict-affected countries, multipartial teams directly apply the Common Ground Approach, bringing together alliances across dividing lines to address the causes of conflict and improve lives.

This is where our distinct vision becomes real: change starts locally and then spreads. As leaders adopt the Common Ground Approach, they use it to develop their networks, transform institutions, and mobilize communities, expanding impact far beyond any single project or location. In the years ahead, this combination of grounded presence and growing coalitions will transform conflicts, strengthen dignity and safety, and improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

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WHY SEARCH?

WE ARE A GLOBAL PEACEBUILDING ORGANIZATION ROOTED IN LOCAL

LEADERSHIP: We are made up of teams that cross the divides that we are working to bridge. We work alongside trusted partners and community leaders to help people influence change, prevent violence, and rebuild trust using the Common Ground Approach. In 2024, over 181,000 leaders and community members strengthened their ability to influence change using the Common Ground Approach.

WE KNOW HOW TO TRANSFORM CONFLICT AND NORMS IN POLARIZED ENVIRONMENTS:

Over 43 years, we have used collaboration to help communities prevent political violence, rebuild trust, and shift norms in the face of severe polarization.

OUR TECHNIQUE IS BATTLE-TESTED AND WE'RE READY TO SHARE IT:

Our approach has been developed by local leaders in over 50 countries, codified, and refined in diverse contexts across a range of issues. We have learned what works and now we want to make it available worldwide.

WE INNOVATE AT THE FRONTLINE: Search staff—working together from across divides—constantly develop new and innovative ways to spark connection, shape human behavior, shift narratives, and strengthen community resilience. We combine the Common Ground Approach with evolving technologies and creative tools to deliver lasting impact.

WE HAVE EVIDENCE THAT THIS WORKS: Our research shows that this approach solves shared problems, reduces violent conflict, and improves community well-being. In the last year, Search's work with communities and partners prevented political violence in Pennsylvania, USA, created access to humanitarian aid for millions of people in Sudan, and empowered Sri Lankan youth to foster trust and contribute to sustainable development.

Our Mission & Vision

We transform the way the world deals with conflict, moving from adversarial approaches to cooperative solutions.

We envision a world where conflict doesn't lead to violence but to cooperation. A world of safe, just, and healthy societies built on a foundation of trust and collaboration.

Our Model: The Common Ground Approach

Our approach brings people and groups together across dividing lines to address the root causes of conflict and injustice.

The Common Ground Approach relies on:

Multipartial teams & networks: We build and equip coalitions uniquely capable of pursuing shared goals across even the most divided societies.

Action, not just talk: We focus on practical solutions that improve people's lives. By empowering and helping groups solve real problems together, we build trust and demonstrate the power of collaborative solutions.

Radical inclusion/engaging the excluded: We actively engage those who are often excluded, creating platforms for their voices and opportunities to participate in decision-making. By expanding who is involved, we strengthen legitimacy, agency, and ownership of solutions.

Our core capability is to cultivate multipartial coalitions which facilitate collaborative action in divided contexts. We have the ability to:

- Mobilize diverse partners, platforms, and networks, even in the most polarized and fragile settings;
- Understand the drivers of conflict and identify opportunities for transformation; and
- Co-create and implement shared, long-term visions that lead to change that sustains at scale.

Search for Common Ground delivers something the world urgently needs: a reliable, scalable way for people to work together across divides and shape our shared future.



CREATING IMPACT *for* 200 MILLION PEOPLE *by* 2030

By 2030, Search will improve the dignity and safety of 200 million people. We will do this by mobilizing 1 million leaders to embrace and promote a collaborative model of leadership and empowering 40 million people to shape the decisions that affect them.

We will create this impact by:



Transforming conflict in deeply divided societies. Our teams in more than two-dozen countries will mobilize collaborative action yielding practical, community-driven solutions through the Common Ground Approach. Multipartial teams bring together unlikely coalitions across dividing lines, address the root causes of conflict, and drive systemic, lasting change. This work will strengthen the agency and engagement of 40 million people, from prominent public and private sector leaders to those often excluded from decision-making processes, so they can influence the systems that affect their lives. Our innovations and evidence will continue to shape global learning and set the standard for frontline peacebuilding around the world.



Mobilizing one million collaborative leaders. We will cultivate a global network of Common Ground leaders, made up of government officials, youth organizers, community activists, business executives, religious leaders, and others who hold influence in our societies. At the heart of this community will be 5,000 leaders equipped with the Common Ground Approach. These leaders will form the foundation for a community that grows organically to one million people worldwide. Together, we will strengthen relationships, build solidarity, and create the connective tissue that links and engages leaders who model collaboration in practice.



Creating the conditions for collaborative leadership to succeed. We will transform leadership norms so that collaborative and solution-oriented leadership is recognized as the most effective and desirable way of driving sustainable change. We will launch a global campaign to popularize common ground leadership, activate influential partners to shift narratives at scale, and produce widely accessible content that demonstrates the power and impact of the Common Ground Approach.

This vision reflects our global ambition: by integrating our frontline peacebuilding talent with a growing global network of leaders who embrace and promote collaborative conflict transformation, we can meet this historic moment of mounting conflict with practical peacebuilding results that save and improve the lives of millions.

STRATEGIC IMPACT AND OUTCOMES BY 2030

Transformed Leadership Norms

Make collaborative
leadership the norm

Global Community of Leaders

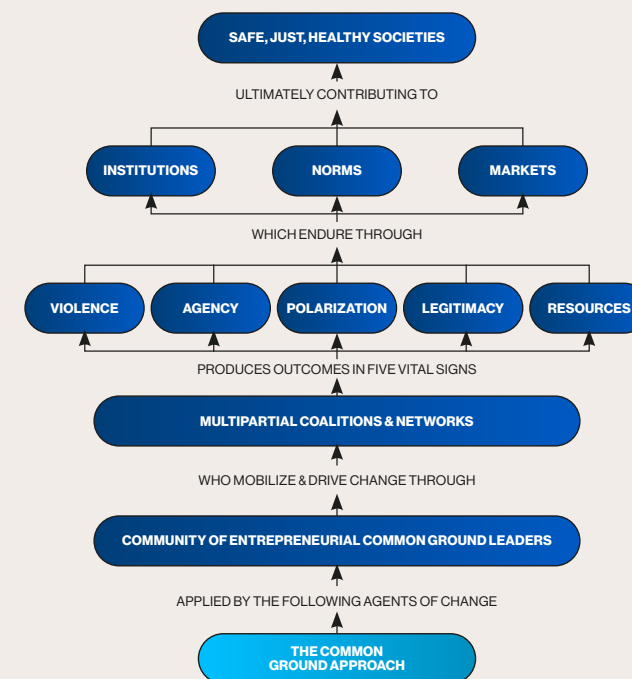
Cultivate a network of
common ground leaders

Transform Conflicts

Drive systemic change in
divided societies

HOW WE WILL DRIVE IMPACT

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



OUR CHANGEMAKERS

WE CULTIVATE **COMMON GROUND LEADERS** WHO ARE:

- Applied visionaries who imagine new possibilities and take action to bring them about;
- Conveners of multipartial coalitions that unite unlikely allies;
- Resource mobilizers who attract long-term resources to create systemic change;
- Advocates who champion dignity, embrace cooperation, and make our impact easy to understand and support.

WE MOBILIZE **MULTIPARTIAL COALITIONS** THAT:

- Represent all parties and actors who may have a role in driving sustainable change;
- Advocate for dignity, cooperation, and the pursuit of just societies even when pressured to take a side;
- Come from the communities we bring together;
- Work collaboratively to address the root causes of conflict.

OUR PRESENCE

Search is a global peacebuilding organization rooted in frontline leadership. Our work is carried forward by locally grounded, multipartial teams who understand their contexts deeply and who build trust across dividing lines. While we engage and support leaders globally, our sustained program presence is focused on more than two-dozen countries where entrenched divisions, large-scale violence, and the risk of escalation demand long-term commitment. These are places where conflict has taken lives, destabilized entire regions, or threatens to do so, and where our decades of partnership and experience enable us to make a durable difference. We are not present in every context that faces these challenges. Instead, we prioritize countries where we have established trust, long-term relationships, and the capacity to deliver meaningful impact alongside local partners.



Search will use the Peace Impact Framework (PIF) to measure impact in the multifaceted ways that reflect people’s lived experience of conflict, safety, and dignity. The framework goes beyond direct violence, capturing the often overlooked vital signs of healthy societies that are essential for creating lasting change:

VIOLENCE

Are people physically safe?

POLARIZATION

Do people trust one another across lines of difference?

AGENCY

Are people taking action in their communities?

LEGITIMACY

Do people trust the institutions that govern and serve them?

INVESTMENTS

Are resources allocated to non-violent, collaborative conflict resolution?

WE DRAW INSIGHTS FROM THREE SOURCES TO ASSESS THESE VITAL SIGNS:

LIVED EXPERIENCES

Perspectives of people directly affected by conflict.

ALIGNED MEASURES

A set of indicators aligned with global standards.

EXPERT OBSERVATIONS

Insights from frontline peacebuilders and agents of change.

WHY THIS FRAMEWORK?

- It is simple: 3 Pillars, 5 Themes, only 10 indicators.
- It is structured to encourage sharing and collective learning.
- It is designed to evolve as the world changes.
- It was developed with input from people leading through and living in conflict.

OPERATIONALIZING OUR VISION FOR IMPACT

To achieve our vision for impact, Search is building a more global, resilient, and agile organization, able to effectively navigate uncertainty, respond to changing conditions, and enable our frontline teams to focus on what matters most: preventing violence and transforming conflict.

GLOBALIZING OUR IDENTITY AND INFLUENCE:

We will strengthen our global presence by developing an authentic global voice that reflects our values and the diversity of our teams. We will reinforce inclusive leadership at every level - from our boards to public ambassadors - and establish strategic partnerships across regions to increase our reach and influence. We will anchor ourselves in countries shaping global peace and security, helping to lay the foundation for a revitalized international approach to preventing violence and fostering collective action.

ADAPTING OUR OPERATIONAL MODEL TO FREE UP OUR FRONTLINE LEADERS:

We are streamlining how we work so our teams can focus on what matters most: driving real change in our communities. Instead of being weighed down by administrative tasks, our frontline leaders will have the support, tools, and flexibility

they need to innovate, respond quickly, and build peace. Our work is defined by people, relationships, and networks—not by the number of offices we maintain. A strong, nimble global backbone, organized through shared service hubs, will provide essential support efficiently, empowering local, national, and global teams to maximize our impact where it matters most.

DIVERSIFY OUR FUNDING TO RESOURCE OUR VISION:

To achieve our ambitious goals, we are building a diverse and resilient funding base that combines public support with philanthropic resources. This approach allows us to pursue our mission with agility, sustain long-term programs, and respond quickly when communities face urgent threats. Our program teams are central to this effort; they help set priorities, build relationships, and share the stories of real people whose lives are transformed by our work. By making giving easier, more meaningful, and more engaging, we are creating new ways for supporters around the world to join us in building safer, more collaborative communities.

Through a combination of storytelling and data, we ensure that every gift is connected to tangible human impact, so donors can see exactly how their support strengthens leaders, empowers communities, and transforms conflict.

▶ OUR PATH TO TRANSFORMATION

PAST

Deliver impact primarily through projects as part of country programs

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90% funded by international development assistance from governments and multi-lateral institutions

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Manage full operational set up in country offices with global oversight

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NGO headquartered in the US and Belgium

FUTURE

Deliver impact by building and equipping a global network of leaders adept at transforming conflict into cooperation, into which country-based program talent is integrated

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A balanced revenue portfolio, 50% funded by philanthropic sources and 50% by public-sector institutions

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Agile support structures through a shared services hub system to manage diverse revenue streams and enable frontline teams to focus on peacebuilding

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Globally distributed leadership and influence achieved through new partnerships, governance entities, and public ambassadors in diverse regions