Search *for* Common Ground

Measuring Our Impact

Search's Goals, Why They Matter & How We Track Results

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Our Vision for Impact

Every organization measures what it believes creates change. Search measures the conditions that make lasting peace possible, not just the activities intended to create it. That means looking beyond individual programs to the leadership ecosystems, public expectations, institutions, and social norms that determine whether conflict escalates into violence or resolves into cooperation.

This work is urgent. With destructive conflict increasing by 25% in 2024 alone, one in eight people today lives in an environment shaped by direct violence.[1] We see a simultaneous paradox: while public trust in traditional institutions erodes, there is an unprecedented rise in civic activism and a younger generation increasingly determined to build their own future.

Search for Common Ground exists to transform the way the world navigates this instability, moving from adversarial approaches toward collaborative solutions. To fulfill this mission, we measure our progress against four vital signs of healthy societies — Safety, Agency, Trust, and Legitimacy — the clearest lens we have found for understanding whether conflict is easing or intensifying, and whether people, leaders, and institutions are moving toward or away from collaboration. By grounding our evaluation in this framework, we ensure that our work is accountable to the communities we serve, and that we are tracking systemic change, not just project-level results.

Our Scale and Goals for Impact

We envision a world where conflict doesn't mean violence, but rather where differences stimulate social progress and where cooperation across differences is the norm for individuals, communities, organizations, and nations. The people in countries where Search works represent 1/3 of all people who are exposed to violence from conflict worldwide. But their experience with conflict is more than physical[2]:

THE REALITY OF CONFLICT

◆ 1 in 5
do not feel safe walking around the area they live

◆ 1 in 6
feel treated as less than human by other groups

◆ 3 in 5
do not feel included or represented by their institutions

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

1. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Conflict Index," accessed July 21, 2026, https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index.
2. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Conflict Index."

◆ 2 in 3
are satisfied with services from local and religious institutions

◆ 4 in 5
believe they can avoid violence to advance their interests

◆ 4 in 5
believe they can make a difference in their community

◆ 2 in 5
take action regularly — highest among people under 35

Search set three goals to transform conflict by 2030: to make the investment in a core group of leaders who can change conflict dynamics, shift norms around leadership that are driving conflict, and significantly improve the lives of people we serve who navigate conflict every day. These three goals represent interconnected levels of change, not three separate objectives: a core of leaders who model a different way of leading, the societies whose norms and institutions those leaders influence, and the lived experience of the people those systems ultimately serve. Progress at one level reinforces the others — as leaders demonstrate collaborative leadership, public expectations shift, and as norms shift, more people experience the safety and dignity that mark a healthy society.

1M
leaders
mobilized worldwide to embrace collaborative leadership

40M
people
empowered to shape the decisions that affect them

200M
people
whose dignity and safety we aim to improve

These numbers build on one another. A core of 5,000 deeply engaged leaders anchors a broader network of 1 million collaborative leaders. Success at this level means those leaders demonstrably practice the Common Ground Approach. That network's influence is what allows us to shift expectations for 40 million people, so that collaborative leadership becomes the norm rather than the exception. And it is the accumulation of those shifts in leadership and norms that ultimately improves the safety and dignity of 200 million people living with conflict, our broadest measure of success.

Impact Target	Target Group	Why It Matters	What Success Looks Like
Mobilize a Global Community of Collaborative Leaders: Mobilize 1 million leaders, anchored by a core of 5,000 equipped with the Common Ground Approach, to embrace and promote a collaborative model of leadership.	The population with whom we work deeply — people who will shape the future of conflict.	History shows that lasting societal change often begins with a relatively small, deeply committed group of leaders who model a different way forward. Research shows it takes just 3.5% of a population mobilized, and a smaller, deeply active core, to drive lasting change in societies.[3] We measure leaders from all backgrounds with whom we work deeply, and track their interconnectedness, their approach, and their outcomes.	• **Leaders are using the Common Ground Approach:** showing they use the skills to lead with collaboration • **Improved connection and networks:** new access to groups that expand leaders' networks, and new access to areas of influence • **Improved agency:** with improved confidence and action to influence what they care about • **Concrete actions:** led jointly with others across conflict lines to transform conflicts
Make Collaborative Leadership the Norm and Create the Conditions for it to Succeed: Empower 40 million people to shape decisions that affect them by 2030.	The population we reach with programming and initiatives we lead, including media with broad reach.	Norms shift when enough people expect something different from their leaders. Adversarial, confrontational leadership still dominates public life, but research shows that between 10-25% of a population can spread new ideas and overturn established norms.[4,5] We measure the change in public opinion, expectation, and perception of leadership, and track our contribution to this threshold where we work.	• **Reduced tension and polarization:** with less dehumanization and less support for the use of violence • **Improved engagement with institutions:** better satisfaction with services, and greater trust in institutions to represent people's interests • **New institutional policies or decisions:** profound in scope, that improve conflict dynamics or prevent worsening dynamics • **Evolving norms:** showing a change in accepted or expected behavior from institutions at scale
Transform Conflict in Deeply Divided Societies: Improve the dignity and safety of 200 million people.	The broader population in places we work, who may not all be directly exposed to our programming.	Change is only real if it reaches beyond those directly engaged in our programs. 200 million people represent two-thirds of the population we serve, and 10% of the population worldwide who live in uncertainty because of conflict. We do not only want to measure who we reach, but also the impact on their lives, both physically and holistically.	• **Improved safety:** people feel safer in their daily lives • **Shifting norms around trust:** people have improved expectations of other groups across dividing lines • **Improvements in well-being:** shifts taking place at scale that show quality of life is improving

3. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

4. Damon Centola, Joshua Becker, Devon Brackbill, and Andrea Baronchelli, "Experimental Evidence for Tipping Points in Social Convention," *Science* 360, no. 6393 (2018): 1116–19, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aas8827.

5. J. Xie, S. Sreenivasan, G. Korniss, W. Zhang, C. Lim, and B. K. Szymanski, "Social Consensus through the Influence of Committed Minorities," *Physical Review E* 84, no. 1 (2011): 011130, https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevE.84.011130.

The Theory of Change graphic (Figure 1, Search for Common Ground *Strategy 2026–2030*)[6] shows how this works in practice: The Common Ground Approach equips individuals to become collaborative leaders; those leaders come together in multipartial coalitions and networks that model cooperation across dividing lines; those coalitions strengthen the norms, institutions, and markets that structure everyday life, building trust and shared ownership of decisions; and the accumulation of that trust, healthier institutions, and stronger norms produces safe, just, and healthy societies over time.

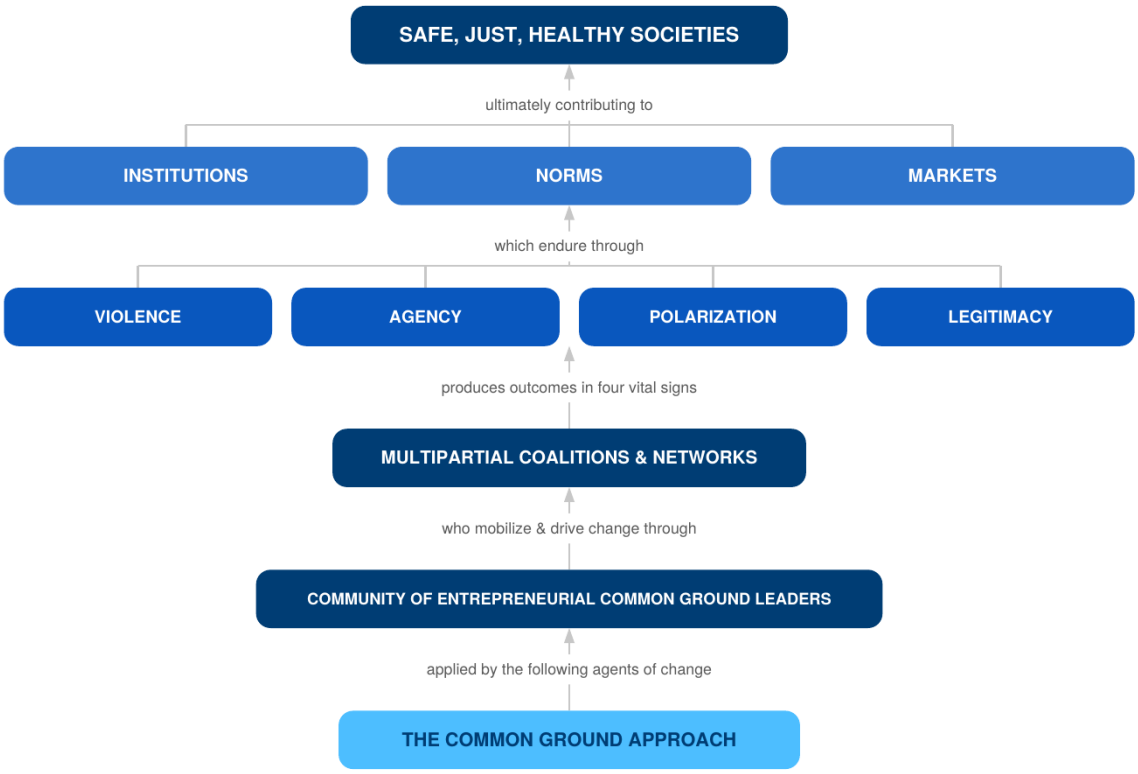


Figure 1. Search's Theory of Change, showing how the Common Ground Approach builds toward safe, just, and healthy societies.

How We Measure Impact

Search measures impact using the Peace Impact Framework (PIF), the organization-wide system built around the same four vital signs introduced above — Safety, Agency, Trust, and Legitimacy — our

6. Search for Common Ground, *Strategy 2026–2030* (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2026).

central lens for understanding healthy societies.[7] We track our investments and the results they yield across these vital signs to better understand the return associated with each goal. For each vital sign, the PIF draws on three sources of insight: lived experience (the perspectives of people directly affected by conflict), aligned measures (indicators consistent with global standards, so we can compare and share learning across contexts), and expert observation (insights about how dynamics are evolving from practitioners and local experts).[8,9] This keeps measurement simple enough to apply consistently everywhere we work, while still capturing the full, lived reality of conflict.[10]

More than a set of indicators, the PIF is what gives us confidence in our own impact. It helps us decide where to invest, when to adapt an approach that isn't working, and how to explain, with evidence rather than assertion, what our work achieves.

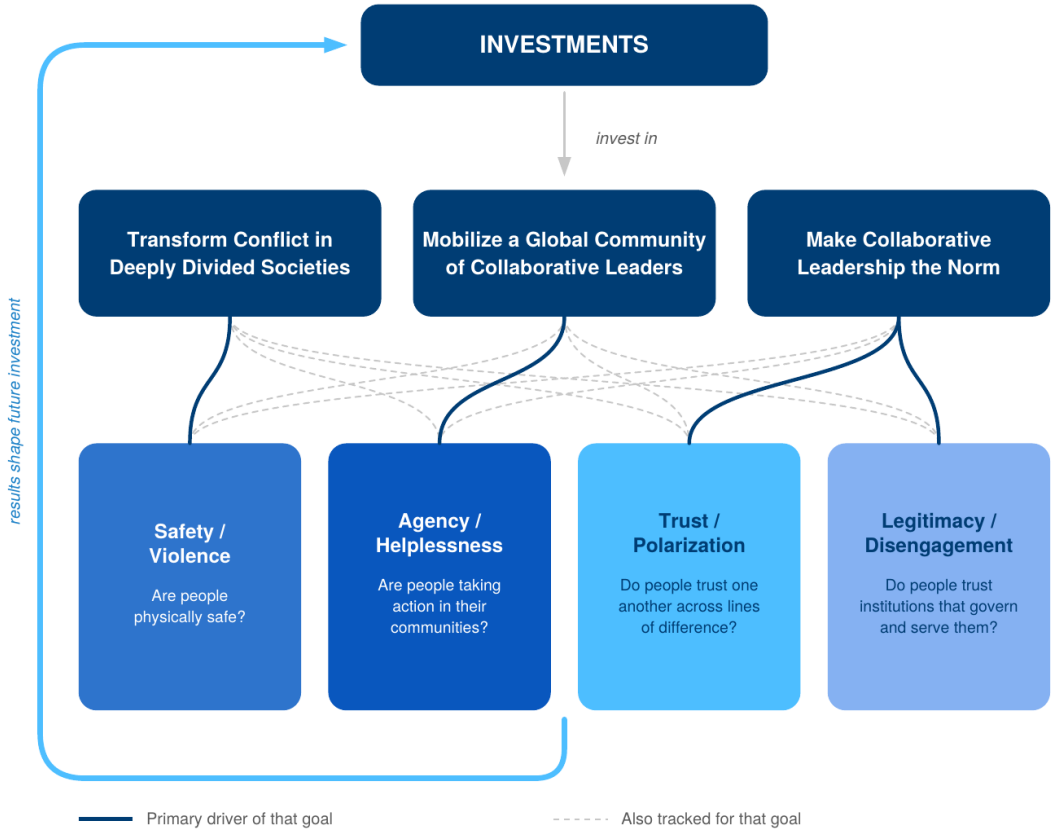


Figure 2. How investment moves through the framework: Search invests in three goals, those goals produce results across the four vital signs, and those results shape where Search invests next. The solid line shows which vital sign each goal relies on most.

7. Adrienne Lemon, "A Global Framework to Measure Peace," in *Are We Making a Difference? Global and Local Efforts to Assess Peacebuilding Effectiveness*, ed. Stacey L. Connaughton and Jasmine R. Linabary (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 259–72.

8. Philip Rojc, "In a World Beset by Conflict, Could Better Ways to Measure Peace Change the Funding Equation?," *Inside Philanthropy*, March 9, 2023, https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2023-3-9-in-a-world-beset-by-conflict-could-better-ways-to-measure-peace-change-the-funding-equation.

9. Adrienne Lemon, "Peace Impact Framework with Adrienne Lemon, SFCG," interview, CoPeSe Network – Peacebuilding, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u73zrODdTCc.

10. Adrienne Lemon and Marie Pinet, "Measuring Unintended Effects in Peacebuilding: What the Field of International Cooperation Can Learn from Innovative Approaches Shaped by Complex Contexts," *Evaluation and Program Planning* 68 (2018): 253–61, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0149718917302938.

These vital signs are the shared backbone for tracking all three of our goals. We count who we reach with our programs, and we use the signs to understand where that reach turns into impact. However, each goal draws on different themes. The success of building a network of leaders relies heavily on people's sense of Agency/Helplessness to build the future of their societies, especially for those historically excluded from decision-making. The success of shifting norms around leadership and conflict is shaped by Trust/Polarization and Legitimacy/Disengagement, which tell us whether trust is growing across lines of difference and whether people believe leaders will lead collaboratively. Safety plays heavily into our ability to measure the impact of conflict on people's lives, but all vital signs are used to understand their experience of dignity. Tracking these intentionally, we can see not just whether a goal's headline number is moving, but why, and adjust our approach accordingly.

Calculating Return on Investment

All Search program teams collect data to track conflict dynamics and the results of their programming. That same data lets us calculate return on investment — a six-step process that turns individual results into a comparable, economic estimate of impact.

1. **Tool Calibration.** Before data collection begins, tools are aligned across country teams so results stay comparable across contexts and languages, even as each team tailors its approach to local realities.
2. **Results Calibration.** Quantitative results are adjusted so responses provided on a scale are counted as binary. An 8% reduction in polarization means that 8% less people surveyed report feeling polarized than in the previous survey. Qualitative results are also tagged by significance and level of contribution. A qualitative result is only counted if it is determined to have high significance in a conflict and a high degree of contribution from Search (i.e., it would not have happened without our intervention).
3. **Calibration of Scope and Scale.** Each result is tagged as one of three levels (core group, surrounding community, or systemic environment) so types of change are compared with their equivalents. The change observed in a sample is then applied to the size of the population it represents: an 8% shift in a population of 100,000 becomes an estimated 8,000 people.
4. **Calculation of Investment.** A budget review isolates the resources behind each result, then adds the supporting costs beyond the direct program line, so the full investment is captured.

5 **Calculation of Final ROI.** Return is expressed as cost per identified result, then aggregated across Search's 150+ projects to produce average returns by investment type and the results one can expect at each scope.

6 **Estimate Economic Value of Results.** There are two approaches to estimating economic ROI. Standard ROI involves tallying results and finding correlating data to estimate economic gains in income for people or communities. Social Return on Investment, or SROI,[23] generates the estimated value of results as communities define them, to understand their value within the marketplace. In both cases, this step requires additional data and research, and is a newer approach being used in a select group of Search's programs at this stage.

Peace Creates Both Concrete and Economic Value

Peacebuilding is not only a moral case; it is also an economic one.

Search found that on average, across independent evaluations, that $1 spent on peacebuilding programming results in one less person experiencing dehumanization, and that $1 can also support two people to take action in collaboration with other across divides. These figures come from comparing program costs against outcomes measured through the PIF's aligned indicators, which is what allows us to calculate a consistent return rather than relying on a single program's results.

$1 → 1

person feels less dehumanized for every $1 spent

$1 → 2

people reached in collaboration for every $1 spent

What is most important about these numbers is that they are found to scale as investment scales: a targeted investment yields targeted results, but a large-scale investment can also yield results across large populations and lay the groundwork for deep changes in institutions, norms and markets that shape conflict dynamics. The full body of results behind these figures is available at www.sfcg.org/impact.[13]

23. Jeremy Nicholls, Eilis Lawlor, Eva Neitzert, and Tim Goodspeed, *A Guide to Social Return on Investment*, ed. Sally Cupitt (London: The SROI Network, 2012), https://new-economicsf.files.svdcdn.com/production/files/aff3779953c5b88d53_cpm6v3v71.pdf.

13. Search for Common Ground, "Your Impact In Action."

What We've Learned

Our approach allows us to find patterns in our results and make broader conclusions about our work. The programs that scale most successfully share a common pattern: deep investment in a carefully chosen group to lead change, and intentional investment in supporting their connection and influence. This pathway supports results durable enough to hold on their own and, in the strongest cases, to reshape how institutions invest in peace. Two lessons stand out from the evidence we have gathered across contexts.[11,12]

Trust Compounds

Investing in relationships over years creates trust that becomes an asset communities can draw on in a moment of crisis.

- **Preventing an invasion in South Kordofan:** In Dilling, Sudan, local peacebuilders partnered with Search to mediate directly between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces, deescalating tensions and averting what could have become a major military assault on the town. We learned that trust built long before a crisis is what makes rapid, credible mediation possible when one hits, a lesson that shapes how Search sequences long-term leadership investments ahead of anticipated flashpoints.

Since 2012, a $16M investment in women and youth leaders in Sudan has yielded:

- **Political Influence:** Over 1500 women went on to lead at local and national scale in Sudan, participating in negotiations as the war has unfolded and setting policies for Women, Peace & Security that will last for the future.
- **Lives Saved:** The prevention of one military assault, on average, results in at least 20 lives saved, based on current data on the region.[22]
- **Access to Life-Saving Resources:** Negotiated humanitarian corridors opened, sustaining access to resources for an estimated 25 million people.

Investing in Leaders Changes Systems

Programs that expand leadership do not only change individual lives, they shift who has a voice in decisions, and how institutions respond.

11. Search for Common Ground, "Meeting the Moment: 2023 Impact Report" (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2024), https://a-impact-report-2022.yev.site/impact-report-2024.
12. Search for Common Ground, "Your Impact In Action" (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2025), https://www.sfcg.org/impact.
22. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "ACLED Explorer," accessed August 21, 2026, https://acleddata.com/explorer/.

- **Women leaders in Sri Lanka:** Search worked directly with women considering or holding local leadership roles, providing business-skills support, mentorship, and platforms to build confidence engaging in public life. We measured change using the PIF's Agency and Legitimacy vital signs — business literacy, confidence in financial decision-making, and confidence engaging with local governance — tracked through participant surveys and interviews over time. The results were substantial. We learned that women who access public and financial systems are more likely to seek, and win, a public voice. That finding shapes how Search designs women's leadership programming elsewhere, pairing support in public-facing and financial spaces with civic-engagement support from the outset rather than treating them as separate tracks.
- **Safety and economic opportunity at scale in DRC and Rwanda border regions:** Working with 21,000 female traders and border checkpoint guards, Search reduced gender-based violence and harassment while improving traders' livelihoods.

$50	85%	57%
average cost per trader supported	of participants reported less violence and harassment	saw more profitable trade

The results showed that safety and economic gains can move together at real population scale — evidence that has informed how Search now pairs protection programming with livelihoods support by default in border and trade-corridor contexts.

Challenges

- When people living through conflict share what matters most to them, agency and polarization are almost as important as safety and other basic needs, likely because discrimination and the ability to participate in public life are so closely tied to people's sense of security. This challenges an assumption we often see in conflict investments: that safety or relief programming is the only priority for people in crisis. We need to build more evidence on this and make it more widely available.
- As climate change and environmental degradation intensify competition over water, land, and other resources, these pressures are increasingly acting as a direct catalyst for violence, adding a fast-moving variable to conflicts that are already complex.

Sharing Impact Together

Our 2026–2030 strategy tracks the impact of a global network of leaders skilled in transforming conflict into cooperation. As that network grows, so does our ability to show donors not just that our work matters, but what it returns. Our approach to measuring that impact is expanding alongside it.[14,15]

- **Turning evidence into smart private and public sector decisions:** A study with USAID and the University of Southern California, using PIF-aligned indicators, found that every $1 invested in youth-led peacebuilding returns $5 to $10 in social and economic value. The Kenya Private Sector Alliance is now building a funding mechanism on this evidence, and several governments are exploring it for their Youth, Peace and Security National Action Plans.
- **Measuring resilience:** The PIF was also integrated into the American Democratic Resilience Framework, which will track these dynamics and be made available publicly.[16]
- **The power of youth in Africa:** Beyond Search, the PIF's vital-signs approach has taken root more broadly in the Youth, Peace and Security field: EU- and AU-linked YPS coalitions have used it to structure regional dialogue,[17] the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation cites it as a model for indicator development,[18] and a Common Impact Framework built on the PIF now informs continental and national YPS conversations.[19]

Together, measuring impact lets us build a larger body of evidence about what works to transform conflict, and where to invest to change it for the future.

Why Better Measurement Matters

Better measurement is not an end in itself. It leads to better investment decisions, stronger accountability to our communities and donors, and a more credible body of evidence about what prevents violence and builds lasting peace. For Search, the Peace Impact Framework has given us the confidence to say, with evidence rather than assertion, what is working, what needs to change, and where a dollar invested in peace will do the most good. Beyond Search, this approach offers a model for the broader peacebuilding field and for philanthropists trying to invest in what works: measure the conditions that make peace durable, not just the activities meant to produce it, and use that evidence to make the case that peace is not only possible, but measurable, learnable, and worth the investment.[20,21]

14. Search for Common Ground, *Strategy 2026–2030*.
15. European External Action Service, *Report of the Second EU Youth, Peace and Security Conference* (Brussels: EEAS, 2026), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026/documents/Report%20of%20the%20second%20EU%20Youth%2C%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Conference.pdf.
16. Beth Fukumoto, "Hawaii Isn't Insulated from the Threat of Political Violence," *Honolulu Civil Beat*, October 12, 2023, https://www.civilbeat.org/2023/10/beth-fukumoto-hawaii-isnt-insulated-from-the-threat-of-political-violence/.
17. *Report of the Second EU Youth, Peace and Security Conference* (Anna Lindh Foundation, 2025), https://alf.website/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Report-of-the-Second-Youth-Peace-and-Security-Conference.pdf.
18. Benjamin Claeson, Mohamed Ghanem, and Catherine Howell, *Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP): Inception Report 2023* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2023), https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/dhf-report-ipyp-2023.pdf.
19. Lena Slachmuijlder, "Deliberative Technologies in Youth, Peace & Security," Toda Peace Institute, published in *Transcend Media Service*, July 20, 2026, https://www.transcend.org/tms/2026/07/deliberative-technologies-in-youth-peace-security/.
20. Shamil Idriss and Rachel Kleinfeld, "No One Is Right in the Debate for and Against Philanthropic Pluralism," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, June 15, 2023, https://www.philanthropy.com/opinion/no-one-is-right-in-the-debate-for-and-against-philanthropic-pluralism.
21. Heidi Burgess, "Rachel Kleinfeld and Shamil Idriss on Polarization, Philanthropic Plurality, Social Justice, and Democracy," *Beyond Intractability*, Newsletter 127, June 26, 2023, https://www.beyondintractability.org/newsletter-127.