

Overview

THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT



Religion has the power to be both a force for peace and a weapon of war. Search for Common Ground's¹ (Search) religious engagement approach has been developed to galvanize the former and minimize the latter.

Most religious actors² want to be part of a solution to conflict rather than part of the problem. As influential and trusted people within their communities, with multi-religious assets at their disposal³ they are well positioned to promote peace through their networks. Our goal is to work with them to build safer, just and more harmonious societies where collaborations across religions and different sectors of society are the norm, interreligious dialogue is valued and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is upheld.

For believers, religion provides a framework for understanding the material and spiritual world and how to live their lives accordingly. It is an inextricable factor of their identity, of who they are and who they are not.

Identity plays a highly significant role in the intersection between religion and conflict; hardly surprising given that of the world's seven billion people today, nearly six billion identify as members of religious communities.⁴ When people embroiled in conflict feel their

deeply held religious identities are under attack, they are inclined to withdraw into their communities, demonize the perceived enemy and find justifications for violence. Religion then becomes a lightning rod for conflict and can be manipulated to advance a binary 'us versus them' mentality. This is true of conflicting identities within religions, between religions and between secular and religious actors.

A commonly held opinion, therefore, has religion as one of the main drivers of conflict impeding efforts to solve global problems like terrorism.

Yet the many religious actors and faith-based non-profit organizations around the world working to reduce conflicts and helping those suffering from violence and oppression attest to the reverse. Religion is not the main cause of war today.⁵ At the same time the majority of armed conflicts now have a religious dimension and this number is on the rise.⁶ If we want to live in safer and more harmonious societies, we cannot afford to ignore the religious aspects of a conflict and how religion can be both a driver of violence and a path to peace.

Purpose of this Overview

This document serves as an introduction to the concepts underlying Search's religious engagement work and goes hand-in-hand with a 'How To' toolkit comprising concrete examples, case studies, and activities. The three-part modular toolkit expands

on Search's *Accommodating Religious Identity in Youth Peacebuilding Programs* developed by its Children and Youth department. This overview of the *Common Ground Approach to Religious Engagement* provides a deeper understanding of why Search, a non-faith based international organization, is working with religious actors and their communities in order to prevent and solve violent conflicts. It offers a language of communication that bridges Search's Common Ground guiding principles with those of religious communities resulting in a shared approach that opens opportunities for cooperation and joint action across religions and different sectors of society.⁷

As a reality check, the document also highlights the risks entailed when engaging with religious actors and suggests ways to minimize them.

Our target audiences are Search and other field workers implementing projects around the world where religious engagement and/or religious sensitivity are necessary components for the success of their activities in transforming conflict and advancing reconciliation. We hope it will also be of use to policymakers as they plan effective strategies that engage religious actors to advance FoRB and generally build more peaceful societies.



What Is Religious Engagement?

Religious engagement is ongoing and takes place during times of both peace and conflict. When Search uses the term religious engagement, we are referring to peacebuilding activities that engage religious actors, often in collaboration with other sectors in the broader society, on matters of religion and society. This is likely to include working with religious actors from different traditions on conflicts where religious identity and belief play significant roles in exacerbating tensions. Search catalyzes the power of religious leaders and communities of faith to bring about positive, enduring change while ensuring that they have the tools to generate dialogue and be a force for peace. We intentionally use the term religious actors rather than religious leaders when referring to religious engagement in order to include people who may not have formal religious authority, titles or qualifications. These include men, women and youth; community lay-leaders, educators, social workers and activists etc.

When Do We Use Religious Engagement?

There is a crucial need for a sound analysis of the complexities of a conflict including an exploration of the role religion is playing (or not) in influencing the systems, actors and the interplay of power and politics. Not all conflicts have a religious dimension and sometimes overestimating this dimension may cause more damage than benefit in the conflict transformation process.⁸

Religious actors are often deeply involved in preventing violence in societies, for example with at-risk youth or in areas of extreme poverty where economic and social rather than religious factors are at the forefront. However, when there is a religious dimension to a conflict, engagement with religious actors is not just worthwhile but crucial to peacebuilding.

But even when religion does not play a significant role in enflaming conflict, religious actors are generally influential players in society and it is worthwhile engaging with them, together with other societal and state stakeholders, in an inclusive process.

How Do We Engage Religious Actors?

There are many ways to engage religious actors depending on the need and circumstances of a particular context. A profound contextual analysis is a critical first step to deciding on a methodology of action. But whatever the context there is generally a basic initial need for mutual learning and trust building between parties in order for the engagement to be effective in reducing conflict and building more harmonious societies.



Examples of Religious Engagement

- Same or mixed gender interreligious dialogue sessions on subjects ranging from beliefs and values to social problems.
- Intra- or interreligious study of holy texts to explore definitions, laws and interpretations leading to the development and use of a common 'religious language' with which all sides feel comfortable.
- Collaborations on issues of common interest e.g. protecting holy places, safeguarding the environment, poverty reduction, pursuing peace as a sacred imperative.
- Educational workshops and visits to places of worship to build knowledge and understanding of different religions
- Media trainings
- Material development to promote mutual respect and peace
- Trainings in conflict transformation
- Coalition creation across religions and other relevant authorities to promote religious freedom, combat prejudice, stereotyping, and resolve conflicts.
- Religious leaders may also be tasked by state leaders to participate in quiet diplomacy, utilizing their international networks, when conventional diplomacy due to conflict is not feasible.

Other activities may be less cerebral and include joint celebrations of musical and artistic traditions. Young religious actors in particular may be open to more unconventional methodologies in the realm of media, drama and literature such as developing comic books that promote mutual respect. Although some activities may have a short-term dynamic depending on the need, most effective are those that become institutionalized and are sustained over time.

What Outcomes are Achieved Through Religious Engagement?

Search has worked with religious actors in multiple ways and the variety of achieved outcomes attest to the potential for this type of inclusive engagement to build mutual trust and advance peace. The tool-kit accompanying this introduction provides case studies with outcomes. But below are two examples of successful outcomes achieved through religious engagement activities.



Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites

Since 2005 Search has been active in developing ways to safeguard holy sites that all too often are violently targeted by perpetrators aiming to harm believers and the places they hold dear. In 2011 the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites (Universal Code) was launched by Search and three other non-governmental organizations after a three-year development process which included consultation with senior religious leaders of all faiths and beliefs worldwide. The Universal Code maps out a practical code of conduct to preserve and secure sacred places and their worshippers and promotes interreligious cooperation. Endorsed by thousands of religious leaders, field projects have been successfully implemented to reduce interreligious tensions in locations as diverse as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nigeria, Jerusalem, Sri-Lanka and Indonesia.⁹

Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Kyrgyzstan

Through this project Search helped the State Commission on Religious Affairs to draft new legislation on FoRB by bringing together religious actors, together with a range of governmental stakeholders and civil society organizations in collaboration on the subject and by providing capacity training and advice. At the same time, we worked with the justice sector to increase its knowledge and understanding of national and international legislation on FoRB after which a guidebook was developed and training sessions were conducted for personnel in the justice system. In addition, we strengthened Kyrgyzstan's monitoring system on FoRB violations.

Our Theory of Change

Three *basic assumptions* underpin our religious engagement work and inform our theory of change:

1. ***It is vital to involve religious actors in peacebuilding*** because they have the influence to shape social norms and they belong to institutions that can scale positive, enduring change locally, regionally and internationally.
2. ***Engaging religious actors is essential*** because religion can be used both as a driver of conflict and a path to peace. Building interreligious relationships based on mutual respect and working together with other relevant stakeholders to reduce tensions minimizes conflict and enhances peacebuilding.
3. Using a Common Ground approach with religious actors that ***values dialogue as the accepted response to conflict is the most effective way to catalyze collaborative solutions across religious dividing lines.***



Building on the above assumptions, our Theory of Change is:

IF religious actors from diverse religions and faiths engage with one another to expand perspectives and build mutual respect and, together with other relevant stakeholders, take part in collaborative actions to transform conflicts, particularly those with a religious dimension, THEN they can play a catalyzing role in bringing about constructive social change in their communities and institutions and in shifting social norms BECAUSE they model a caring, inclusive approach that celebrates the dignity of all human beings and their positive influence will be a local and global force for peacebuilding.

Search's Common Ground Approach (CGA) transforms the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches towards collaborative solutions. It is rooted in the belief that by catalyzing collaborative approaches to conflict we can transform conflict into a positive force for social change to create safer, healthier and more just societies.



By applying this approach through local, regional and global programs to build both horizontal and vertical cohesion, together with individual 'champions', strategic partners, and mobilized youth, we can decrease violence in our societies. Violence is avoided, and lives are saved because dialogue is the expected and accepted response when conflict arises. The change endures if institutions adopt this approach and make it their own, social norms adapt to the new collaborative paradigm and markets see a value to commercializing it in society. The result is that conflict is transformed into a catalyst for constructive social change and becomes embedded in society.

Religious communities and networks, whether local, regional or global, are pervasive in societies and are naturally placed to build social cohesion, both horizontally and vertically, across dividing lines. On the vertical plane, some religions have clear hierarchies whose leaders pave the way for the transformation of attitudes and behaviors among millions of their followers globally. One example of this was Pope John XXIII's *Nostra Aetate* Declaration in 1965 which revolutionized and positively transformed the Catholic Church's approach to non-Christian religions and their believers. Other religions and faiths have revered leaders that guide believers within their specific spheres of influence. These strong vertical relationships also provide incredible opportunities for driving forward collaborations between religious leaders and their followers on the horizontal plane and across dividing lines provided the incentive and skills exist. That is why it is so crucial to find and engage influential

'champions' on the global and community levels – individuals who can become allies for sustained constructive change and have the power to influence followers en masse across societies and to create change within their communities and institutions.

The other side of the coin is the real challenge of engaging insular-looking religious leaders and their homogeneous communities who have yet to see the benefit of opening up to and learning about peoples and religions other than their own. How do you shift the social norms derived from ancient religious/cultural beliefs, and the fears and traumas from past hostile experiences, which hinder the CGA from being adopted across religious communities?

At the same time and despite this real challenge, we are seeing an exponential growth in interreligious dialogue and collaborative action across religious lines over the past twenty years and there is increasing awareness and acceptance of it among religious communities.¹⁰ 'Champions' can be found on the global level and increasingly more on the community level in conflict areas.

In our experience, many people of faith want to contribute to peaceful solutions that reduce violence and can identify with Search's guiding principles which draw inspiration from the tenets of world religions. They often find in Search's principles messages that resonate with their own texts and which speak to religious principles of compassion, justice, righteousness and the pursuit of peace.

When CGA outcomes satisfy the needs of religious individuals, communities, and institutions they are incentivized to adopt this approach in their daily behaviors and practices. One example is the development and institutionalization of curricula connected to religious sources that promote a collaborative message for schools and other educational institutions that we are starting to implement in the Holyland. Another is the widespread adoption of mediation processes, in prisons and other institutions that we have worked on in Morocco. Yet another is the passing of state laws promulgated with religious actors' involvement that promote religious freedom and the rights of minorities that we have advanced in Kyrgyzstan. If this happens to scale, markets can resource this approach through products like school books, games, mediation and other training programs. In this way, change endures without an ongoing reliance on third-party interventions and funding, as it is sustained by the stakeholders themselves.



Religious Engagement and the Common Ground Principles

Understanding context is a crucial first step to engaging with religious actors. But given the variety of religions, locations and conflicts it can be challenging to know where to begin and what process to follow. The universal principles underlying the CGA guide us on this path, wherever the location, and provide the fertile ground on which that first step is taken. These key principles inform the design and operation of our peacebuilding programs and our partnerships with religious actors.

Following are eight guiding principles underlying the CGA and how they inform corresponding key practices in Religious Engagement.

1. We Change People and Relationships

We see the human journey of transformation from adversarial approaches towards collaborative relationships as at the heart of our approach.

This process resonates with religious actors whose teachings exist to direct them on a path to spiritual growth and transformation throughout their lives. People change when we acknowledge their dignity - a need common to all humanity. Some religions relate this to the principle of 'all human beings are created in the Divine Image'¹¹ i.e. our dignity is inalienable. Ensuring that people can practice their religion freely is an integral aspect of honoring their dignity. It also includes an awareness that religion or belief is often a primary reference point for people of faith with its accompanying style of language and expression. Our interactions with religious actors need to be sensitive and appropriate to this. One example might be utilizing a religious language that speaks of values and responsibilities rather than the secular legalese of human rights. Or recognizing that words like 'peace' and 'land' may have different meanings and connotations within religious texts than in secular society. Honoring dignity also means designing programs that may be challenging and provide a path for personal growth, but will always be implemented with respect, empathy and active listening.

By their nature, religions are highly traditional and resist change. The religious champions we uncover are often courageous, act against the grain and take personal risks when engaging with us. It is our responsibility to protect them and ensure their safety and dignity are not compromised. In addition to protecting their physical safety and security through a 'Do No Harm'¹² policy we need to ensure that programs are not too far removed from participants' comfort zone, while still encouraging people to take the leap of faith needed to move forward towards transformation.

KEY POINTS

The dignity of all human beings is inalienable and must be honored with respect and empathy.

Religion is a primary reference point for people of faith and religious language an effective form of engagement.

It is important to ensure the safety of religious 'champions' who put themselves at risk to forge new paths.

2. We Include People From All Sides of a Conflict

Working with a broad spectrum of religious actors at the senior and community levels is an effective way to advance positive change.

They are usually an integral and significant component of society at both the state and community levels and including them expands the possibilities for finding sustained and peaceful ways forward. Religious institutions are often also principle delivery providers. These include humanitarian relief, development and sustainability, education and health, and law and human rights. They have a natural reach to the marginal elements in society and may have the resources to mobilize significant constituencies. Often, senior religious leaders are well connected with government representatives, civil society organizations and broader regional religious associations that are not limited by finite borders. They may also be sources of resilience against extremist religious interpretations that encourage violence. In all cases it is important to bring in voices from all sides of a conflict to represent as broad a spectrum of opinions as possible. This includes minority and marginal faith traditions even in places where the conflict's focus is on major religions.

At the same time religious actors may also reinforce radicalized interpretations of their beliefs, using their power and connections to promote exclusivist and violent agendas. The principle of inclusion does not necessarily mean all voices if by doing so, we do more harm than good.

KEY POINTS

Religious actors - global and community leaders, men, women and youth - all have a place at the table.

The more societies are exposed to diverse models of religious leadership the more likely they are to interpret religious texts in new ways.

Including young people offers a sense of belonging and reduces their need to seek it from extremist groups.



GENDER SENSITIVITY

Traditionally, religions follow a patriarchal system where men hold positions of authority and are privileged over women who have generally been excluded as leaders in the public domain. Throughout history, people in power have rarely given up positions of privilege without a struggle.

It is therefore not surprising that religious frameworks, sourced in ancient cultures and the belief that they follow the word of God, are highly resistant to change. Conflicts around gender roles and norms in religion generally reflect the place of a society on the continuum between tradition and modernity. Religions have a tradition of studying and interpreting holy texts. The more societies are exposed to different models of leadership and community living, the more likely are they to interpret traditional texts in new ways. This is also true regarding issues of sexual identity. Thus, the principle of inclusivity which brings different voices to the table enables new understandings on gender roles and sexual identity to emerge.

Even in highly traditional societies, women are active in faith communities and as primary educators shape the religious upbringing of their own children and the next generation.

Women are often members of faith-based social groups and are more likely to perceive their peacebuilding work as intrinsically connected to their faith, leading to high levels of commitment, which, in turn, results in increased partnerships and shared resources.

While it is important to value the engagement of religious women in peacebuilding activities, this needs to be done sensitively, taking into account local gender norms and customs. It is still a challenge in many places to include women in activities together with men, but times are changing as awareness grows and it is now more and more acceptable to respectfully find ways for women to

participate in religious peacebuilding activities with their male counterparts. Gender issues are as much about exploring religious and social mores in men as in women. Where there is strong resistance to change (often by women too) projects with same gender activities are an option. However, it is not unusual that once women garner confidence through same gender activities they feel more comfortable to consider public engagement with men, often while still requesting to continue same gender activities.

YOUTH

Young people are among those greatly affected by violent conflict and much of the world's most violent conflicts occur in countries with the most youthful populations.¹³

Yet, they tend to be excluded from peacebuilding efforts. The vast majority of youth who are surrounded by brutality and injustice on a daily basis do not participate in violence.¹⁴ Working with them provides access to vulnerable populations that might not normally be reached through the usual avenues. At the same time there is a growing mistrust among youth for religious institutions and their leadership which reinforces the importance of building and strengthening these relationships going forward.

Inclusion by its very nature acknowledges that all people have a place at the table and even if they have differing views their opinions need to be heard. This is particularly important for some young people who, coping with their own lack of direction and looking for a place to belong, may be attracted to religious extremist groups who provide a sense of community, structure and perceived theological 'purity'. In addition, including young people from a diverse range of religious backgrounds provides them with the opportunities to develop their peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills and can result in innovative programs where they direct their passion towards non-violent activism, driving change and progress.

3. We Uncover and Then Build on Common Ground

While religions are different, they also have commonalities such as the belief in a transcendent presence and the efficacy of prayer.

Bringing religious actors together across conflict zones in interreligious dialogue with the aid of professional and religiously sensitive facilitation, invariably enables them to find points of congruence that often leaves them emotionally and spiritually uplifted. But dialogue is usually not enough to grapple with the complexities of conflict and practically find solutions. One of the best ways to advance interreligious collaboration is to concretely focus on areas of common interest and concern that enable religious actors to work side-by-side on tackling a joint problem. Search's involvement in the initiative mentioned above to safeguard holy sites through our co-creation and implementation of the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites is a good example of how this works. Implemented according to the specific contexts and needs of local populations, it is concrete, encourages action-oriented dialogue to protect places of worship at risk and draws religious actors together with relevant authorities over an issue of great concern for their communities. Finding win-win outcomes like these where all sides feel religiously protected is the stuff of religious peacemaking.

KEY POINT

Face-to-face dialogue, together with side by-side collaboration on a common problem, helps advance interreligious trust.



4. We Recognize That Conflicts Are Complex and Dynamic With Multiple Levels of Power, Historical Relationships and Systems

It is hard to draw generalizations about religious actors in conflict situations. The locations in which religious actors live strongly influence their thoughts and actions.

In countries where there has historically been no separation of religion and state, particularly where there is a majority religion in power, and where religious and political systems are fused and entrenched, religious leaders are more likely to be clerical in their approach rather than prophetic in denouncing injustice. In other countries where there is clear separation, a balance of powers and a variety of religious practices, we are more likely to see religious leaders speak truth to power in the most prophetic of religious traditions.

Working with religious actors is complex, particularly if their secular education is limited and their experiences are drawn from the homogeneous communities in which they live. It is therefore crucial to provide religious actors with the knowledge and skills to understand the root causes of conflict on both an intellectual and experiential level. Program activities need to offer religious actors a variety of viewpoints on both the tangible and intangible roots of a conflict and new understandings are best internalized if they can be connected to religious texts. It is also important to encourage religious participants to meet their counterparts from the other side of the conflict and to facilitate those encounters when it is safe to do so. This enables religious actors to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict and its religious dimensions. In this way the ground is fertilized to catalyze change.

KEY POINTS

Conflict contexts are complex and dynamic and influence the way religious actors behave in a given location.

Religious actors need to be provided with a multi-layered understanding of a conflict.



5. We Are Practical

Collaborations that serve the interests and needs of all sides and where concrete outcomes are planned and successfully executed are a practical way to build trust and strengthen relationships across religions to reduce conflict.

In addition to protecting holy sites or restoring religious heritage, other avenues of collaboration could be around alleviating poverty or caring for the environment – a topic present in many religious texts - and the protection of life-giving resources such as water and fertile ground.

KEY POINT

Joint activities that serve religious actors' and their community's interests are a practical way to build trust and reduce conflict.

6. We Are Creative

The author of the biblical book Ecclesiastes may lament that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’¹⁵; yet it is possible to create innovative and culturally relevant ways to encourage collaboration among religious actors that generate new breakthroughs.

One Search example was a visit of a joint religious delegation of Jewish and Muslim leaders to a country that has suffered severely from sectarian religious violence. The leaders reported back on the profound lessons they learnt from the experience which transformed their attitudes, strengthened their relationships and influenced the way they saw the conflict in their own location. Creativity may also be reflected in flexible programming that is nimbly adapted to better suit evolving conflict dynamics and political realities in real time. This ability to adapt also enables ongoing sensitivity to religious actors’ needs.

There are a variety of ways to engage religious actors that are likely to be new experiences for them. Examples include interreligious dialogues, workshops and study tours. Young people in particular may enjoy innovative peacebuilding activities such as community theater, reality television, sports leagues, and new media technologies.

KEY POINT

Creativity and flexibility when implementing programs with religious actors encourage breakthroughs.

7. We Know That Change Takes Time, Often Encounters Resistance and Is Not Always Linear

Conflict transformation best succeeds when trust is built, and mutual respect is nurtured over a long-term process rather than a short-term cycle.

We have found that this process can take a generation or more to bring about real change. External threats and forces and internal resistance to change create setbacks that call for patience, steadfastness and a long-term belief in the possible. This committed approach over time is likely to resonate with religious actors whose community work is generally rooted in long-term goals of character development and spiritual growth and whose prayers and places of worship are cherished over centuries. Many of the principles found within world religions such as redemption and salvation are lifelong goals that require continued investment so religious actors understand well a long-term approach to sustained constructive change.

KEY POINT

Religious actors know that sustained positive change takes time, patience and persistence.



8. We Inspire Hope

Maintaining hope in fragile, conflict-ridden societies is highly challenging. When people feel attacked, they react to violence with fear and aggression, but this can be transformed through experiencing new realities. Change happens even in the most difficult of circumstances.

If religious actors can be helped to reach beyond the everyday painful reality of their conflicts this message is likely to resonate strongly with them. The role of religious leaders is to provide hope and succor to their communities. Across many faith traditions we find scriptural narratives that offer rituals for self-reflection, repentance, and renewal underlying the belief that hope springs eternal. Religious texts propound peace as a supreme value that must be pursued. Hope is the source from which transformation springs.



KEY POINT

Religious actors resonate spiritually with a message of hope and a belief in positive change.

Risks to Religious Engagement

The following risks need to be considered when engaging religious actors in peacebuilding:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

While people's religious convictions are rarely the sole driver of violent extremism, many violent extremist groups draw on religious narratives and references in their messaging and guiding ideology. These narratives are used to attract potential supporters who for various reasons are susceptible to their messages. They may be searching for a clear identity and sense of belonging, face uncertainty in their future, feel a lack of purpose in their lives, perceive injustices in their communities or feel alienated from them, have weak social ties, or seek opportunities for glory, adventure, and

power. No religious tradition inherently advocates violent extremism. However, we need to acknowledge that in various contexts, religious discourse, combined with extremist interpretations, has been co-opted by violent actors. This toxic combination results in tension for both religious and secular individuals in the community alike. It is essential to understand the complexity of the relationship between religion and violent extremism and to avoid alienating religious groups and exacerbating resentment.

LEGITIMIZING EXTREMISM

While the inclusion of religious actors who are party to a conflict is important, the extent to which 'inclusivity' is a value needs consideration. There are instances where religious interpretations are harmful and lead to violence. Sometimes the risks to engaging with certain religious actors or communities outweigh the benefits of searching for common ground. We need to examine whether it helps or hinders to include such people in peacebuilding activities. Are extremist world-views granted legitimacy if they are included? It is imperative to maintain a careful balance between the competing values of inclusivity and 'Do No Harm' principles that protect the physical security and honors the dignity of program participants.

INSTRUMENTALIZING RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Policy makers need to take care they do not encourage religious actors to endorse specific government policies for the purpose of receiving, in exchange, government resources and support. This approach to peacebuilding is counterproductive as it can be exclusive in its engagement with specific actors and proscribed in its understanding of the complexities of the issues. It may also threaten the credibility of the religious actors cooperating with the government in the eyes of their faith communities. Furthermore, policy makers must not lead efforts to theologically challenge religious narratives inimical to their own values although they may encourage new interpretations and promulgation of laws through a collaborative approach. Theological discussions are best left to religious actors.

A 'COOKIE CUTTER' APPROACH

Working with different religions and religious actors has its own sensitivities. Each conflict has its own specific religious context. In some places there is a danger of overestimating the relationship of religion to the power structure; in others, there may be a misunderstanding of religion's role in the conflict context. In all cases, there is a need for a thorough analysis of issues before engaging with religious actors. A full analysis of what is driving the conflict needs to define the engagement approach.

UNTRAINED STAFF

Peacebuilding practitioners are often not adequately informed about the religious dynamics that affect peacebuilding activities. Consequently, they have difficulty engaging and partnering with religious actors and faith communities effectively and with confidence. Lack of confidence and specialized training limits the success of peacebuilding efforts with religious actors in conflict zones particularly if the organization has values and norms it wants to spread in society. International organizations may also be perceived as having an outside bias and as being ignorant of local matters. To help rectify this, Search has developed a three-part tool kit entitled the Common Ground Approach to Religious Engagement, including a two-day modular workshop for practitioners, to accompany this document.

All Search projects include monitoring and evaluation assessments to continuously improve our organizational impact. We regularly update our tools and methodologies to ensure that the design and activities of each program best respond to the specific drivers of local conflicts. Search's open source platform DMEforPeace.org is the premier knowledge-sharing resource for the peacebuilding and violence prevention field.

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References

1. Search for Common Ground (Search) is an international organization committed to conflict transformation. Since 1982, we have led programs around the world to help societies channel their differences away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. Our long-term programming in 30 countries and 141 active projects around the world enables Search to reach over 700,000 direct participants in many of the world's most challenging conflicts.
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