

2023–2027

Strength through
Collaboration:
**Convergence
Strategy**

CONVERGENCE





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Letter from the CEO

Dear Convergence Community:

When I took the role of CEO at Convergence on April 1, 2020, one month after the pandemic hit, I could not have imagined the challenges ahead of us. Our country has nearly split at the seams from divisiveness, and people from all walks of life struggle to have constructive conversations with their family members, neighbors, and colleagues. This has caused great pain for individuals and institutions and has great consequences for our nation.

At Convergence, we have been earnestly working to scale our work to reach more people and address the urgent issues and dynamics presented by our toxically polarized society. 79% of Americans say that creating more opportunities for people to talk and interact with those who have different values and views would be effective in reducing divisiveness. We are intent on creating these critical opportunities.

Convergence's refined *Theory of Change* shows how our two integrated sets of programming – solving problems through collaborative dialogue and promoting bridge-building as a critical pathway for culture change – will together strengthen our society and democracy and improve the lives of millions.

Convergence's 5-year strategy will increase our impact, accelerate our momentum, and expand the reach and relevance of our methodologies to serve more people and address more issues. The goals outlined in the plan radiate outward from three strategic priorities:

① **Strengthen Pathways to Impact:** Focus our work in several impact areas critical to the future of our nation. Maximize the on-the-ground results we achieve by convening more Dialogues, assuring adoption of dialogue participants' recommendations, improving the tone of public conversations, increasing the value society places on bridge-building and collaborative dialogue, and equipping others to leverage our processes and methodologies.

② **Enlist New Audiences & Grow Community:** Expand and diversify the stakeholders and audiences we engage in Convergence Dialogues, in support of bipartisanship and collaboration among policymakers, in our efforts to strengthen collaboration across the exploding bridge-building field, and in our communications and leadership development to make bridge-building and collaborative dialogue norms for institutional and societal problem-solving.

③ **Build Sustainable Scale:** Leverage investments in program standardization and increased communications and development capacity, as well as targeted R&D and innovation to achieve a significant increase in Convergence's results and leadership of the movement to grow bridging and collaborative dialogue in America. We will engage current and new funders of our mission and our Dialogues to generate the financial resources for sustainable scale.

We are living through extraordinary times. It will take an extraordinary amount of work and support to ensure Convergence can help change the trajectory of our country. I envision a bright, bold, and ambitious future for Convergence. But we cannot do this without help from our allies. Our goal over the next five years is to raise \$30M to ensure that we can build our capacity to meet the growing needs of our country.

We hope you will join us as we work to restore hope and capacity in our nation's ability to transcend differences and come together to make meaningful, positive change.

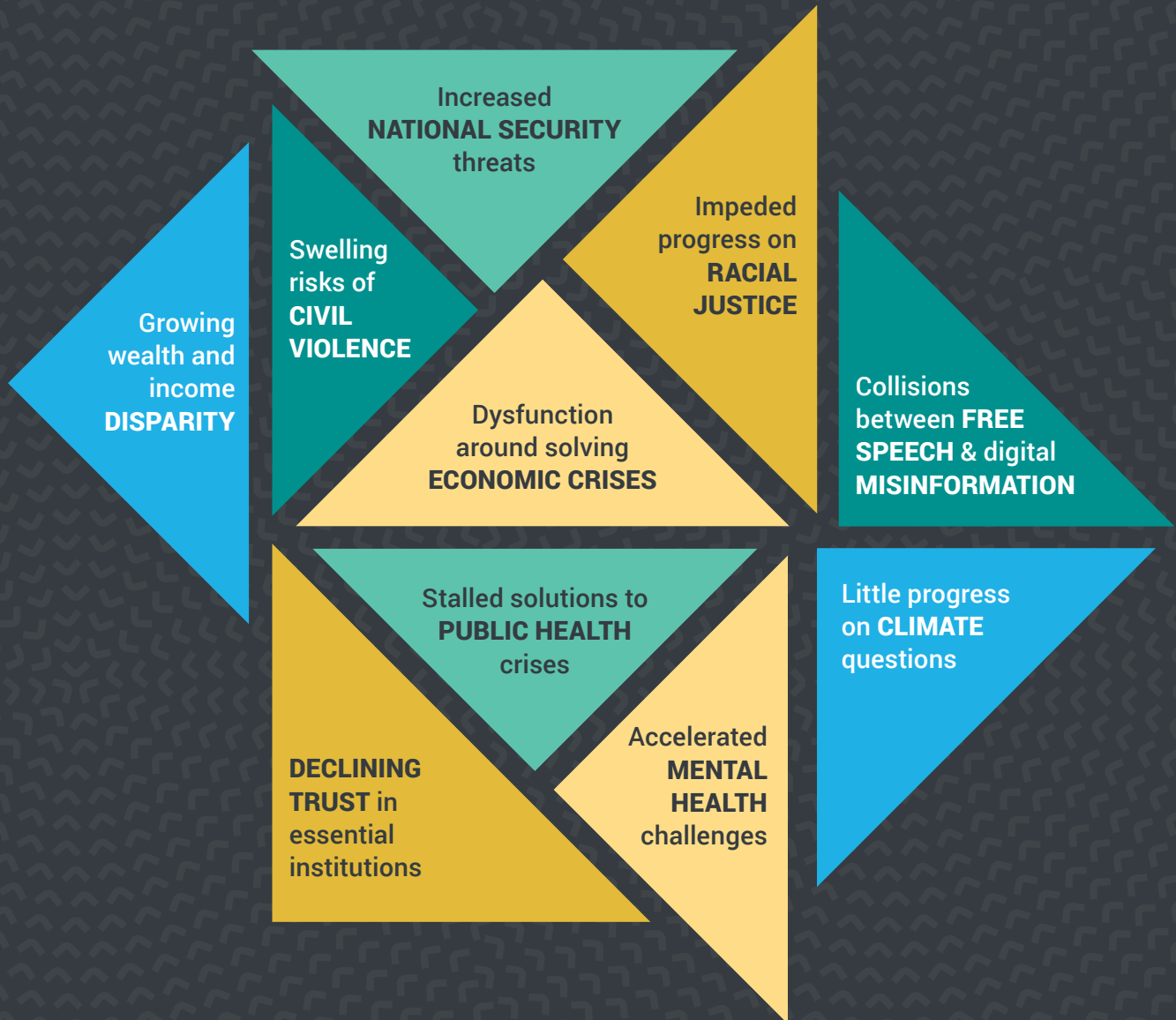
With Gratitude,



David Eisner
President & CEO

The Problem

Toxic Polarization, Itself a Crisis, Impedes Solutions to Other Crises





Convergence Offers a Solution for Overcoming Our Divides and Solving Our Problems

Convergence's track record offers a hopeful path forward

Convergence has been forging powerful common ground solutions to America's toughest problems for over a decade. Since 2009, Convergence has consistently demonstrated that leaders who disagree with one another can successfully build trusting relationships that lead to breakthrough consensus solutions for our most intractable problems. Our track record includes hosting dialogues that feature cross-partisan, cross-sectoral breakthroughs, and collective action on some of America's toughest issues, including economic mobility, healthcare, care for older adults, education, prisoner reentry, guns and suicide prevention, food and nutrition, and the federal budget process, among many others.

At Convergence, our work is rooted in two intertwined beliefs: most people act with good will and a genuine desire to do what's right, and solutions to our country's most pressing and contentious problems emerge when opposing leaders and doers listen, learn together, and engage in collaborative dialogue across their divides.

As the field of bridge-building grows, Convergence serves as the leading national organization working to build bridges and solve problems through convening collaborative dialogues. Convergence's approach is evidence-based, refined by 13 years of successful practice, and supported by deep methodologies and advances in contact theory, neuroscience, and psychology.

"[Convergence] has been quietly connecting people with different priorities, beliefs and political leanings to build trust and foster relationships, so they can find pathways for cooperative action... The process requires skill to manage, but it's not magical. Convergence has shown it can be repeated with reliable consistency."

DAVID BORNSTEIN, THE NEW YORK TIMES



The Reliable and Unique Convergence Dialogue Process

Inclusive, Participant-Led, Evidence-Based, and Results-Driven

The Convergence method of dialogue brings together players on all sides of a contentious issue and helps them cultivate relationships of trust with each other.

Participants in Convergence Dialogues are so surprised and delighted by the relationships they build, the consensus they find, the unlikely alliances they form, and the on-the-ground results they achieve, that they often call the work “miraculous” or “magical.”

It’s not magic that animates our collaborative work, but the power of Convergence’s time-tested processes and methodologies, best practice programming, neutral convening authority and extraordinary team. The evidence-based and repeatable process usually includes five stages:

- 1 **We select issues** that are ripe and amenable for Convergence and stakeholder-participants to collaboratively “unstick,” and frame a discussion-onramp to the issue that is both crucial and disarming.
- 2 **We convene diverse tables** of participant leaders and doers, many of whom oppose each other so stridently they never thought they could talk to one another
- 3 **We facilitate participants** to build trust, find common ground. Participants abide by a set of ground rules including honoring all points of view, respecting the confidentiality of the conversation, and listening carefully when others speak.

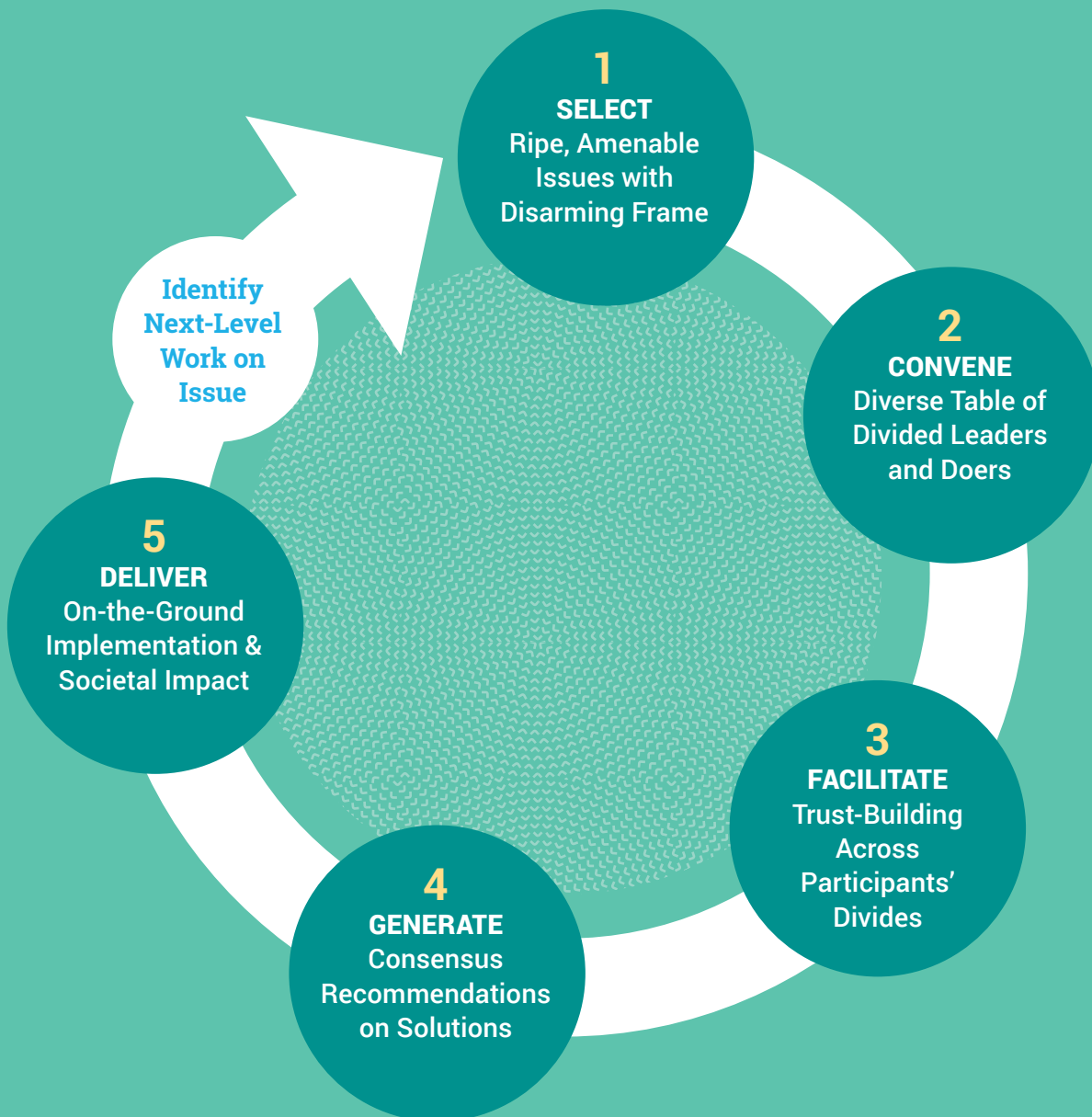
4 **We generate consensus solutions** collaboratively among dialogue participants through establishing guiding principles that create a framework for the policy discussions to come. Once stakeholders are aligned on a bigger vision, they are ready to work together to produce new ideas and solutions.

5 **We deliver societal impact** and on-the-ground implementation of the solutions. By design, a Convergence project strives to engage stakeholders to take action on their ideas after the dialogue stage is completed, or in some instances, even while the dialogue is going on. Convergence itself does not formally endorse stakeholders’ proposals—it remains policy neutral—but often plays a stewarding role to maximize the impact stakeholders can achieve.

Our process has proven consistently successful at producing the kinds of results that drive impact.

Convergence’s success offers a beacon of hope for the majorities of Americans frustrated by divisiveness that change is not only possible, but that we have the tools and the knowledge to bridge even the starkest divides with consistency. In addition, our success highlights the rich set of tools, practices, and resources that others can use to achieve similar successes.

Five-Stage Process



From Action to Impact

Convergence Dialogues deliver impact well beyond the room (or Zoom) in which the participants build trust and collaborate to forge solutions.

Unlike many other convenors, think-tanks and commissions that develop policy recommendations, Convergence Dialogues drive real change, on the ground, in the real world.

We begin with consistently accomplishing these key program objectives:

- ▶ **Building trust and finding common ground** among the most divided participants, including many that are openly skeptical about conversing with others in the group – often resulting in years of ongoing collaboration by erstwhile unspeaking opponents.
- ▶ **Forging consensus solutions** and proposals that are effective, able to attract widespread support – including from previously divided stakeholders and interest groups – and sustainable as political and power dynamics change.
- ▶ **Advancing solutions that meet the needs of widely diverse stakeholders**, including marginalized and vulnerable communities, a result of the broad diversity and inclusion attained at each dialogue “table.”
- ▶ **Engaging larger groups of issue stakeholders**, publishing calls to action, holding closed and public educational briefings, and heavily leveraging unlikely allies to influence prospective leaders capable of public and private implementation.

By achieving these program objectives, dialogue participants are more easily able to succeed in the implementation of their proposals, turning smart ideas into real-world change on the ground. Every dialogue ends with an implementation strategy for adoption of public and private proposals. This work is coordinated and supported by Convergence. Implementation can take various pathways towards achieving important societal change:

- Changing national, state, and local policies
- Piloting market-based solutions, new business practices, and local problem-solving
- Creating new national networks, partnerships, and organizations
- Improving the tone of national conversations about the issue
- Shifting philanthropic priorities toward solving the problem collaboratively

Important impacts also result from Convergence’s three other programming areas where we are piloting ways to use our well-honed bridge-building and collaboration approach in powerful new contexts:

- ▶ **Work with Congress** is yielding ever-greater results as we customize the process and methodologies from our flagship dialogues to facilitate bipartisan planning and collaboration, as well as conflict management, and to lower partisan hostility at the working group and Committee levels.
- ▶ **Efforts to strengthen the emerging bridge-building field** have grown from nascent to significant in the past 2 years, partially a result of Convergence’s success engaging the community in collaborative dialogue.
- ▶ **R&D prototyping of innovations and new programs** have tested opportunities to expand the reach, and impact of our process and methodologies, including both innovations within our flagship Convergence Dialogues and new program-prototype models.

North Star Principles

Mission

We build trust and bridge divides to solve critical issues and strengthen our democracy and society.

Vision

We envision a vibrant society built on broad collaboration and inclusion.

Values

We build trust through collaboration.

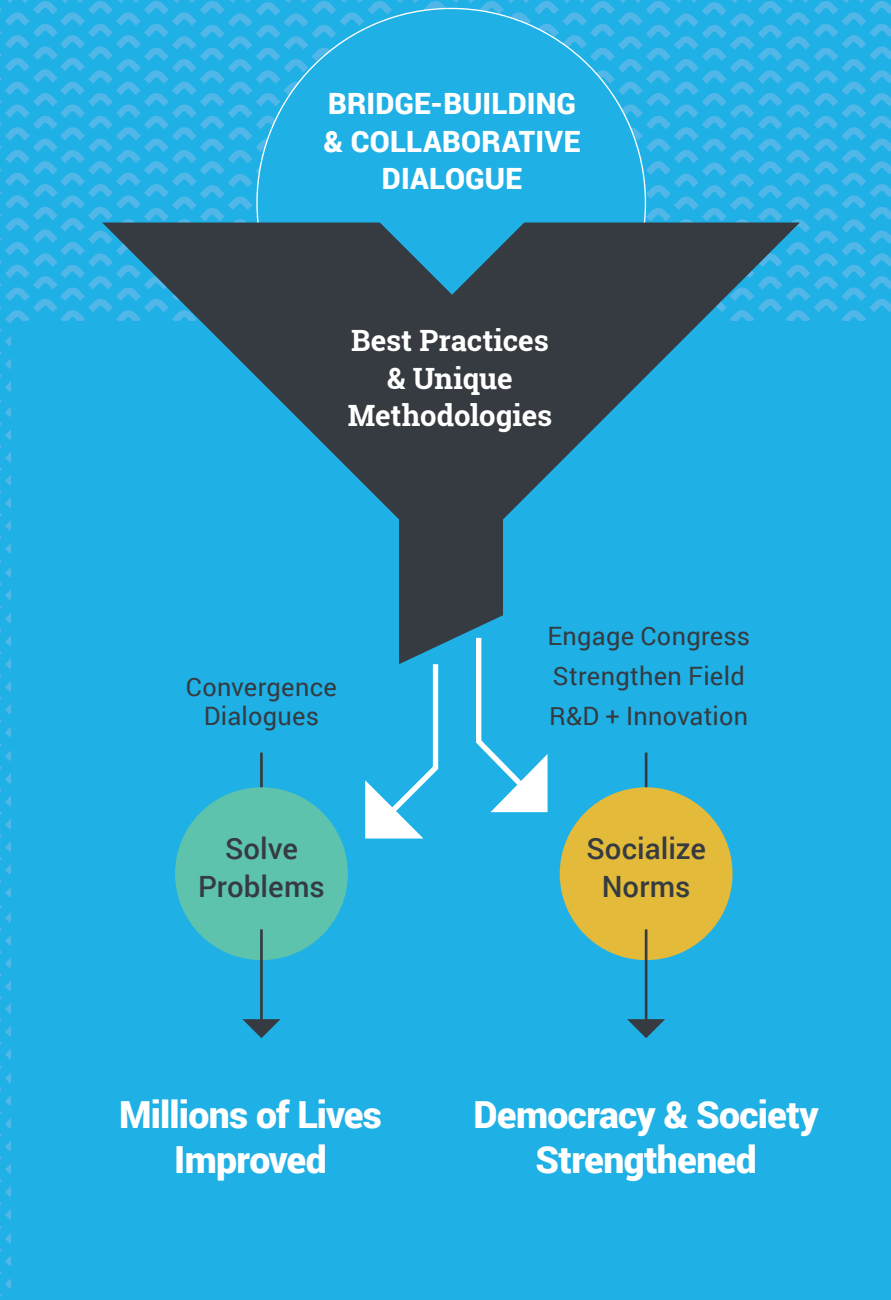
We listen and empathize.

We foster inclusion among diverse people and perspectives.

We meet tough challenges head-on.

We prioritize learning & innovation to improve results and impact.

Theory of Change





A Bold 5-Year Strategy for Convergence

Meeting the Moment. Solving More Problems.
Creating Healthy Norms.

Over the next five years, Convergence seeks to positively impact the lives of millions and strengthen democracy and society by delivering collaborative, consensus-based solutions to stuck issues, and catalyzing a cultural shift in America towards normalizing both bridging and collaboration.

The increasing levels of toxic polarization and gridlock on issues that impact the lives of Americans calls for a bolder, more ambitious Convergence. We must bolster our programming to take on more issues and to bring the skill and experience of collaborative problem-solving to leaders in every sector – from business to the philanthropic and academic sectors. We must work to bring our methodology into communities to address local issues as well as national issues.

Convergence's strategy aims to increase the organization's capability and programming to meet the ever-growing needs of America over the next five years and beyond.

To do this, we will focus our work in several impact areas critical to the future of our nation and we will increase the number of Convergence Dialogues we take on, solving significantly larger numbers of stuck issues. Our new strategy newly prioritizes the need to strengthen Convergence's culture-change work, working to make bridge-building and collaborative dialogue norms throughout society, lessening the toxicity of our divides and the dysfunction it causes.

"I've seen Convergence at work as a former dialogue participant and now Board member. Dialogue by dialogue, they are fundamentally rebuilding the fabric of this country. As we all navigate the current moment of anxiety and uncertainty, I take great comfort that Convergence is driving authentic, productive and transformational dialogues that combat the deep divisions entrenched in our communities and inspire hope, drive sustainable change, and remind us of our shared humanity."

LINDSAY TORRICO, BOARD MEMBER

Momentum & Organizational Transformation

Since 2020, Convergence has prototyped and tested multiple models for broadening the reach and relevance of its programming and expanding its outcomes and impacts.

The resulting momentum has seen launches of several new Convergence Dialogues, new implementation of proposals from past dialogues, strong demand for bridging and collaboration support from public and private institutions, stronger leadership roles in Congress and in the bridging field, and increased fundraising success – including an historic grant from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott.

Now, Convergence stands ready to capitalize on our momentum and undertake the organizational transformation required to address the urgent, complicated challenges facing the nation.

The Strategy: Grow Impact, Community, and Scale

Over the next five years, Convergence will transform and equip itself to play an influential role in overcoming America's toxic divides and addressing our many intractable challenges. We're guided by three foundational strategies:

Strengthen Pathways to Impact

- Focus in several issue areas critical to the country's future.
- Convene more simultaneous and successful Convergence Dialogues.
- Shape bolder and more direct pathways toward adoption of consensus proposals.
- Establish impact targets for expanded work with Congress and the bridge-building field.
- Accelerate R&D and learning cycles to generate best practices and innovation that will maximize the positive impact of Convergence and the entire bridge-building field.

Enlist New Audiences & Grow Communities

- Build interactivity into deeper Convergence's relationships with current stakeholders and audiences.
- Cultivate new communities around Convergence's projects, and partnerships as well as around the powerful benefits of bridge-building and collaborative dialogue.
- Produce and distribute strong digital content, including calls to action and user-generated-content.
- Leverage our leadership within Congress and across the bridging, problem-solving, and pro-democracy fields to build collaborative communities across those areas of work.

Build Sustainable Scale

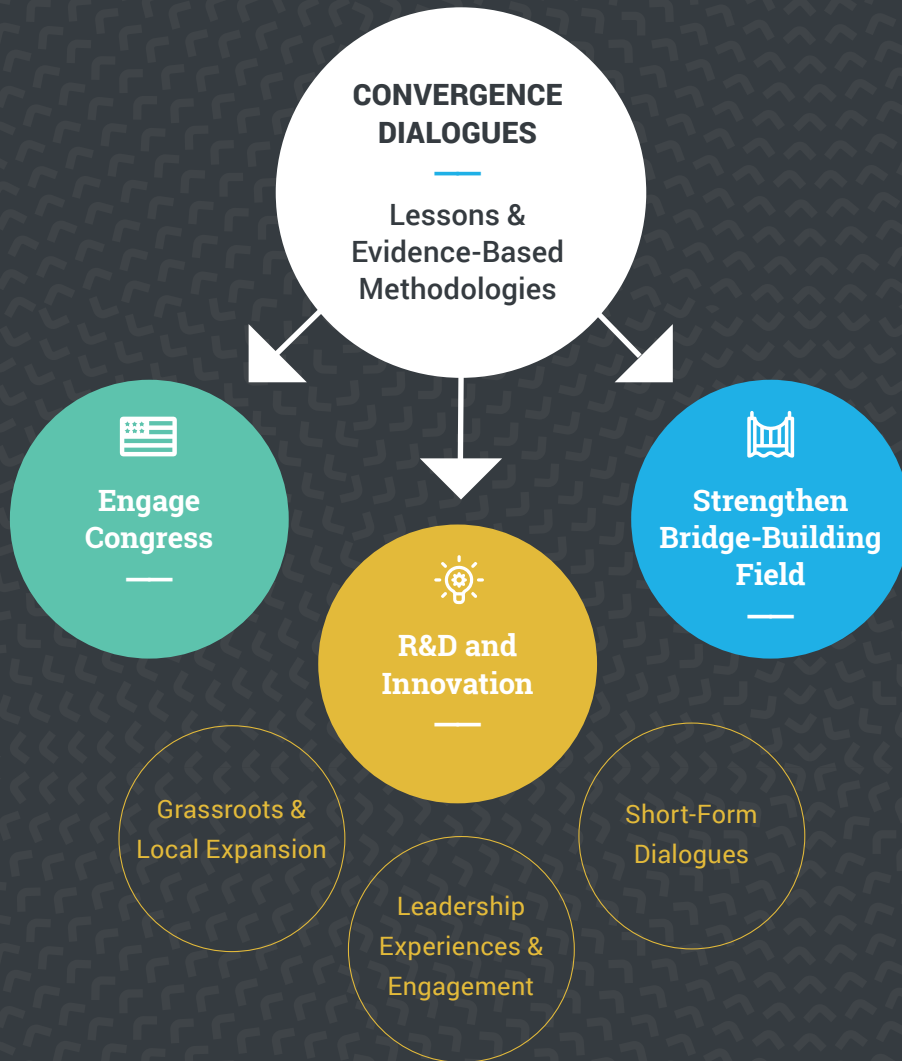
- Expand the reach and utility of the lessons and methodologies from the flagship Convergence Dialogues to adjacent programming, supporting bipartisanship in Congress, strengthening collaboration in the bridge-building field and piloting new R&D prototypes and innovations.
- Increase both the dollars and number of investments in programming and communications, as well as in fundraising and operational capacity.
- Prioritize investments in long-term growth of sustainable capacity over one-time initiatives.
- Cultivate long-term funding relationships centered on ROI and lifetime value.

"For the many Americans who have lost faith in our institutions, it's powerful to see decision-makers demonstrate a genuine commitment to solving problems. Every day, Convergence proves that resolution of our nation's most intractable disagreements is possible and builds a foundation of consensus for all of us at every level of civic life."

JILLIAN YOUNGBLOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CIVIC GENUIS

Expanding Our Impact & Reach

Bridge-Building, Collaboration, and Evidence-Based Methodologies



5-Year Goals

The crises around toxic polarization and dysfunctional problem-solving are likely to worsen in coming years, making Convergence's expertise more urgently needed than ever. However, maximizing the benefit of that expertise to America requires nothing short of organizational transformation, expanding our capacity and increasing our impact. In pursuit of the above strategy, here are the goals that will, by the end of 2027, accomplish that transformation:

1

Establish impact areas for the majority of Convergence's programs.

The following impact areas demonstrate our commitment to solving problems and catalyzing collaboration on the issues that are most timely and critical to the future of our nation:

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Emerging from a global pandemic, addressing problems related to health and wellbeing - including disparities in our health care systems, declining mental health, and inadequate systems of care for families and aging populations who need them – is a top priority for many, and one where Convergence already has a strong track record. Current Convergence programming in this area includes *Guns & Suicide Prevention* and *Reimagining Care for Older Adults*.
- **Economic Opportunity:** The U.S. economy's inability to support conditions in which Americans can thrive and achieve upward mobility threatens the foundations of our society. Building off past successes in this area, Convergence is committed to making a strong impact on this fundamental crisis and a whole host of related ones, including unemployment, housing, financial insecurity, racial disparities, and more. Current Convergence programming in this area includes *Pathways to Better Jobs* and *Supports for Working Families*.

- **Democracy and Civic Engagement:** Public faith in our democratic institutions and the systems that support them has been severely shaken in the past several years. Addressing problems related to democracy and civic engagement – including electoral reforms, bipartisanship in Congress, and disinformation – will be critical to our ability to overcome polarization and solve the other problems future generations demand. Current Convergence programming in this area includes *Civil Service Modernization* and *Digital Disinformation* and will soon include *Policy Affairs*.

Convergence will remain open to taking on issues that do not fall within any of these impact areas if it represents a unique opportunity for making an impact on a timely and relevant issue otherwise stuck in gridlock.

"I am a great admirer of the work of Convergence. I think they do exactly what our diverse democracy needs right now: create spaces where people of diverse identities and divergent ideologies find common ground so we may have a common life together."

EBOO PATEL, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT,
INTERFAITH AMERICA

2

Complete 20 Convergence Dialogues.

Convergence will:

- Triple our pace of launching new Dialogues and the number of Dialogues we undertake simultaneously.
- Cultivate a broader community of stakeholders invested in each Dialogue's success, beginning with the up-front due diligence.
- Plan for and execute the regular release of deliverables throughout the Dialogue.
- Develop detailed communications and implementation plans to support the success of each Dialogue.

3

Expand our work with Congress into a full Policy Affairs agenda.

Convergence will:

- Deepen strategic engagement and relationship-building in Congress, deepening bipartisan collaboration.
- Pursue adoptions of Dialogue policy recommendations.
- Engage leaders in the Administration
- Build legislative and executive relationships at the state level.
- Enlist policy leaders in the work of bridge-building, and bipartisan collaboration.

4

Enhance our leadership role strengthening the bridge-building field.

As a mature leader with a well-honed methodology in this relatively young but growing field of bridge-builders, Convergence has a unique opportunity to increase the relevance, recognition, and impact of our collective work. Through collaborative dialogue to support collective priorities, **Convergence will:**

- Convene field leaders to collaboratively plan and prioritize collective work.
- Socialize best practices and methodologies among the varied bridging organizations and initiatives.
- Promote the field among key audiences to grow its capacity, awareness, influence, and resources.
- Identify especially effective colleague organizations within the field and test partnering with them.



5-Year Goals

5

Develop, test, and mature new opportunities to leverage Convergence’s approach.

Convergence will:

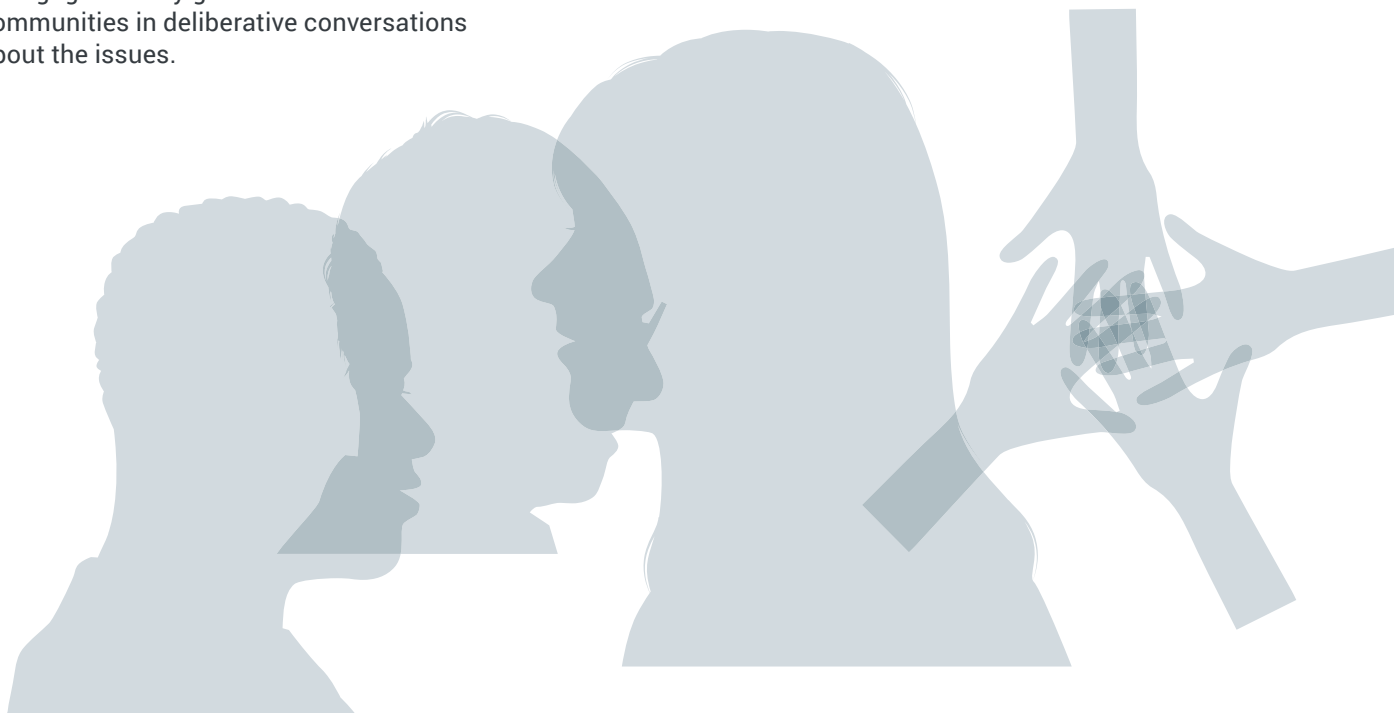
- Test modified and new programming that expands the use of our insights, practices, and methodologies in new contexts and with expanded reach.
- Develop prototypes for creating new revenue streams and building new efficiencies into our work.
- Convene and test short-form dialogues to accomplish more limited objectives than our year-long, flagship Convergence Dialogues.
- Create and test leadership development programming for engaging leaders in experiences, skill-building, and consultative support in the work of bridge-building and collaboration.
- Test new models for engaging the business sector in bridging and collaborative problem-solving work.
- Pilot new ways to open Convergence Dialogues to engagement by grassroots and local communities in deliberative conversations about the issues.

6

Become an “avatar of hope” for those disillusioned by toxic polarization and dysfunctional problem-solving.

Convergence will:

- Call attention to the consistency and hopefulness of Convergence’s ongoing success, and to the evidence-base and best practices that support our programming and methodology.
- Leverage the groundswell of attention to polarization and bridging to expand our thought leadership and promote the unique results of our methodologies.
- Attract new audiences and build cause-oriented communities around impact areas.
- Expand our base of supporters and followers through digital and events-driven communications, storytelling, social media engagement, distribution partnerships, and dynamic, interactive content.





Conclusion

Convergence's strategy for the next five years is ambitious.

We expect to increase the number and impact of Convergence Dialogues, deepen our work supporting bipartisan collaboration in Congress, strengthen and widen the emergent field of bridge-building to overcome the divides in America, and accelerate our prototyping and learning.

To meet the moment and accomplish these goals, our work will require significant additional support – \$30M over five years – to sustain the kind of programming needed to help us build greater cohesion and collaboration.

We hope you will join us in working for a country that values and promotes collaboration over conflict and builds a stronger, more sustainable future for generations to come.

"As a young person, Convergence gives me hope because it is focused on solving problems and putting the country first. At a moment when our country needs urgent solutions, Convergence is answering the call with nonpartisan deliberation and policy resolution."

**MANU MEEL, BOARD MEMBER,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BRIDGE USA**

Closing Thoughts from the Board Chair

Dear Friend of Convergence,

We are at a critical moment in our nation's history and the stakes are high.

Our country is divided. People are losing faith in our institutions as well as in each other. In fact, 70% of Americans believe toxic polarization is a top concern, and that we've become so polarized as a nation that we cannot solve major issues that impact our everyday lives and the lives of future generations.

It is easy to lose hope. To throw your hands up and believe there is nothing that can be done. And yet, at Convergence, we know much can be done. Because, for over a decade, Convergence has been consistently at work proving a truth that most people no longer believe – that we can work together across differences to build trust, to find common ground, and to create meaningful, positive change through collaborative dialogue and problem-solving.

Through our process, we have seen arch enemies turn into allies and spur breakthrough action on America's toughest challenges such as economic mobility, healthcare, and education, among many others.

Not only *can* this be done, but Convergence Dialogues have accomplished this with extraordinary consistency. Our work has generated sizeable and consistent impact on the ground, including strengthening national, state, and local policies, as well as influencing private sector business practices. Networks and partnerships born out of this process have succeeded at re-shaping national conversations and philanthropic priorities. Our participants are always surprised by the unique relationships they foster; the fresh, innovative ideas they build on common ground; and the successful pathways to public and private implementation they achieve.

This is why, to decrease the division and tension that has become so harmful and disruptive, and to help build enduring solutions to some of our toughest challenges, Convergence is expanding our footprint to take on more issues and to bring collaborative dialogue to new sectors and communities.

We are doing this because the future of our country demands it.

Our 5-Year Strategy introduces bold aspirations and innovations to meet the moment we're in, and deeply reflects what Convergence always has and always will stand for: that bridge-building is the solution to solve our most intractable problems.

We hope you will join us as we seek to forge a stronger, more collaborative, and resilient country.

Sincerely,



Jean Molino
Chair



"What I saw was that people and groups with divergent points of view on big problems agreed on ends but disagreed on means. They literally had no place to sit down and discover that underneath it all, there were potentially powerful areas of common ground. Once you recognize this and you see the humanity of people, you can't stereotype them and dismiss their point of view."

ROB FERSH, CONVERGENCE FOUNDER

CONVERGENCE



Visit convergencepolicy.org for more information.