

# **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

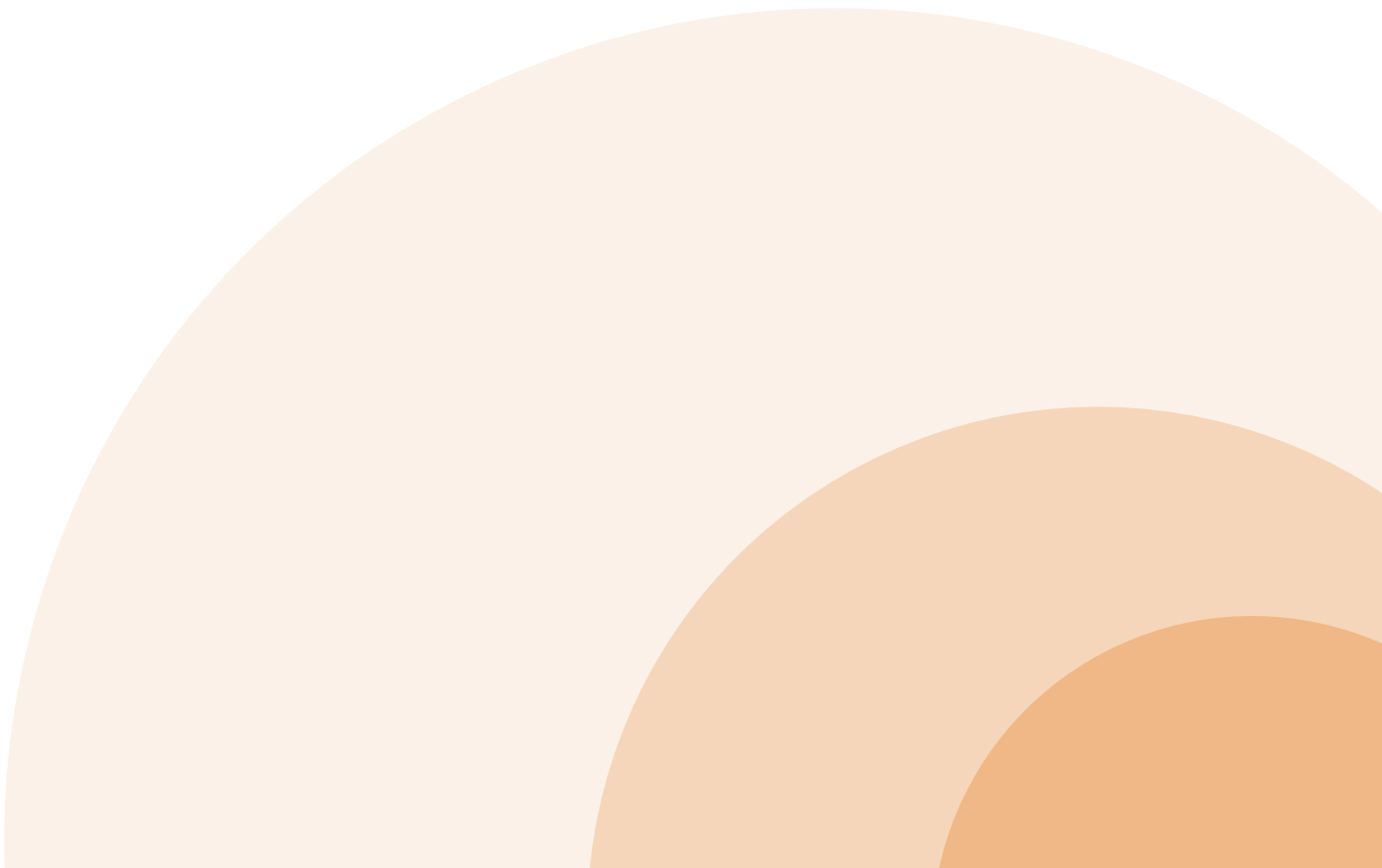
## PORTFOLIO STRATEGY



HUMANITY  
UNITED

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# INTRODUCING THE STRATEGY



The Public Engagement team is excited to share our very first portfolio-level strategy, a milestone that weaves the work from three formerly independent teams into a cohesive whole. Rooted in Humanity United's (HU) organizational strategy and guided by the belief that the wisdom and experience of those closest to the issues we work on should be at the forefront in naming solutions, this strategy is the result of extensive consultations with partners and colleagues, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.

At its core are three systems – international institutions, U.S. foreign policy, and public interest media. We intend to influence these systems through two pathways: 1) centering communities with lived experience to change the structures of the systems in which we work, and 2) influencing policy outcomes to ensure greater accountability.

In aligning our bodies of work as one portfolio, we believe our combined Public Engagement portfolio can more effectively support our partners and contribute to HU's mission of cultivating conditions that transform human exploitation and violent conflict into enduring peace and freedom.

We view this strategy as a living document that we will continue to adapt as our team monitors key signals, drivers, and future scenarios. We also have an accompanying learning plan that will help us reflect regularly on changes in our systems and new potential pathways that may emerge.

**– THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM**



# WHO WE ARE

*The Public Engagement portfolio is comprised of three teams:  
Independent Journalism & Media, Policy & Government  
Relations, and Strategic Communications.*

## IJAM

The **Independent Journalism & Media (IJAM)** team invests in journalism organizations and networks that align with HU's mission and programs. This team is grounded in the belief that high-quality, independent journalism is necessary for reporting on complex and hidden subjects, holding those in positions of power accountable, and producing content that inspires change.

## PGR

The **Policy & Government Relations (PGR)** team influences governments and institutions to pursue policy change that addresses conflict and exploitation. This is achieved through various advocacy strategies, including leveraging our communications channels and establishing sustained relationships with policymakers, coalitions, survivors, and those affected by marginalization or violence.

## COMMS


The **Strategic Communications (Comms)** team increases the reach and influence of HU and its partners through the use of traditional and social media outreach, skills training, and content and editorial development while also maintaining HU's public-facing brand and reputational capital.

Aligned with HU's mission and program strategies, the Public Engagement portfolio convenes actors across sectors to build shared understanding and create incentives that mobilize action through HU and its sister organization Humanity United Action (HUA). Collectively, our portfolio's work is deeply rooted in centering the voices of those most impacted by conflict and exploitation.



# OUR VISION

*Our vision is a world where peace and freedom endure because shifts in U.S. and international narratives, policies, and norms are driven by people with lived experience of conflict, exploitation, and injustice.*



To realize this vision, we seek to foster an enabling environment for systemic reforms that advance peace and freedom, led by those most affected by conflict and exploitation.

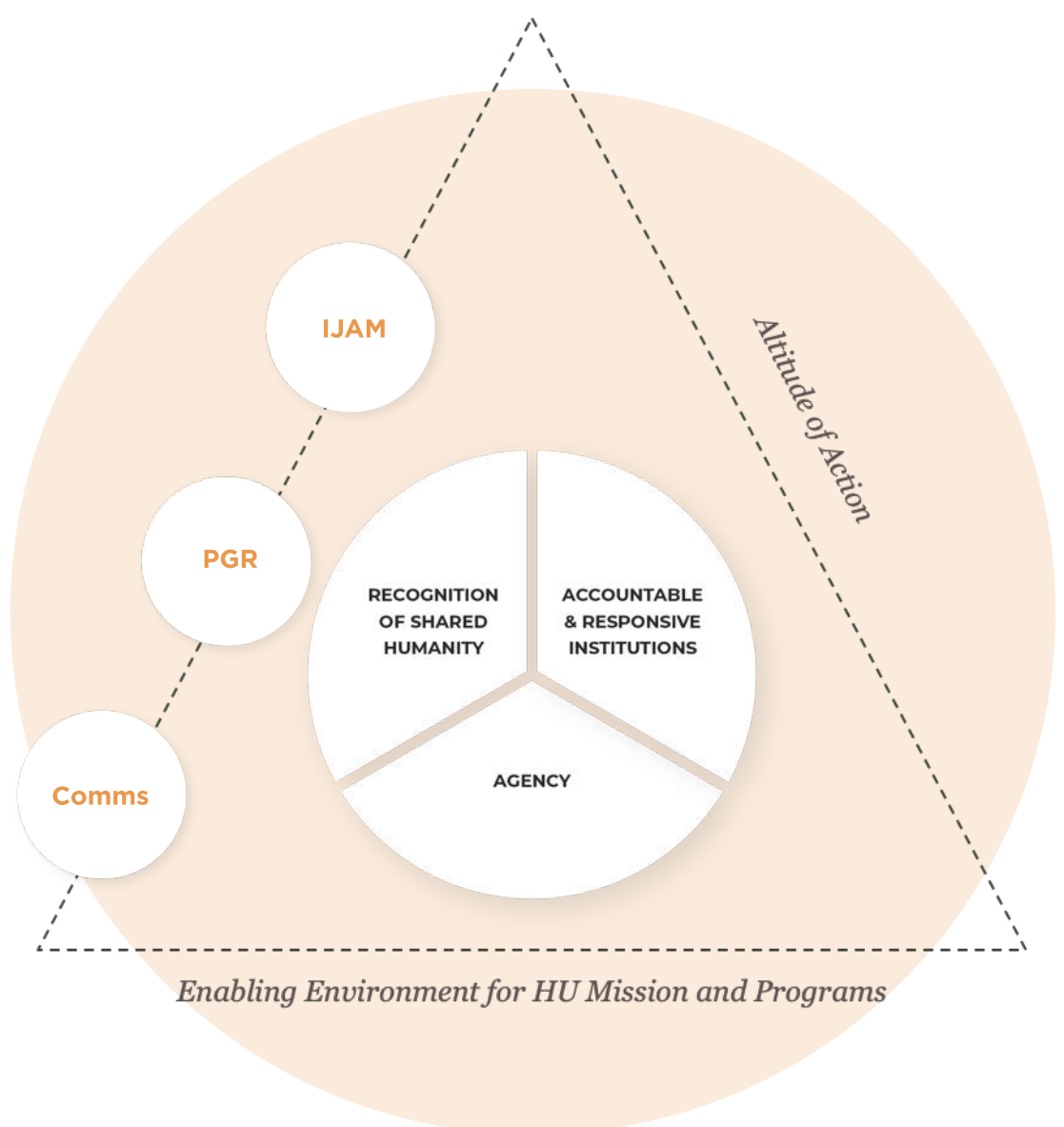
While recognizing the need for a systemic shift in approach, we are also mindful of the potential for tokenization or overreliance on one or a small group of these voices. At the same time, there has been a longstanding overreliance on the voices of those who are credentialed and therefore in positions of power. That is why we will continue to be intentional about acknowledging our own power while continuously learning about where we are best placed to show up in our role as funders and conveners, and as a portfolio made up of individuals with our own lived experiences.

**In choosing to center “lived experience,” we recognize and honor the diversity of perspectives among people affected by conflict, exploitation, and injustice. For our partners, this can include (but is not limited to) surviving forced labor, trafficking, violence, or other forms of exploitation; having geographic or ideological proximity to conflict or war; being an individual in regions where we invest.**

# OUR APPROACH

*We acknowledge that as an institution with influence, financial capital, and privilege, HU both holds power and plays an important role in advancing human dignity and changing the systems that enable violent conflict and human exploitation.*


The Public Engagement portfolio is intentional and thoughtful about when, where, and why we use our own influence directly within these systems. We engage with government, media, and philanthropy to hold those in positions of power accountable and to advance a world where peace and freedom for all humanity are realized. Our strategy is deeply rooted in HU's organizational strategy, which focuses on three core conditions: agency, accountable and responsive institutions, and recognition of shared humanity.




Our work takes place at various altitudes (at the systems and program levels) to create an enabling environment around these three core conditions. This strategic alignment enables us to advance HU's mission and programmatic priorities effectively.

To achieve our goals, we use a mix of specific tactics which may vary depending on our desired outcome: grantmaking, strategic communications, fostering thought leadership, enabling convenings, direct advocacy, nurturing coalitions and networks, and providing technical support to our colleagues and grantees.

Each team within the Public Engagement portfolio – and the portfolio as a whole – closely collaborates with HU’s Peacebuilding and Forced Labor & Human Trafficking portfolios, as well as the Racial Justice & Equity program. This collaboration focuses on mutually aligned goals that strengthen our collective efforts and enhance our ability to effect change toward our shared mission.



*In addition to working with partners and across teams within HU, we also collaborate with and seek to influence other funders to support our partners’ work or to join us in maximizing impact.* →



# HOW WE WORK WITH OTHER FUNDERS



## CO-FUNDING WITH ANOTHER INSTITUTION

### *Funding for journalism partner, Capital B*

As one of its earlier donors, HU joined other foundations in supporting Capital B at its inception.



## LEVERAGING HU FUNDS

### *Funding for Tariff Act Legal Fund and Global Tariff Act Advisory Group (TAAG)*


HU provided seed funds for TAAG and the Tariff Act Legal Fund. Two years later, following a donor briefing, other donors committed significant funds to both initiatives.



## INFLUENCING HOW DONORS FUND

### *Shaping USG funding priorities and models*

Through an MOU with USAID, HU is working with the Center for Violence Prevention to better engage proximate peacebuilders in localization efforts. Similarly, HU has been engaging other U.S. government institutions to influence how they fund journalism, transitional justice, and labor programs.



## EXPANDING FUNDS IN THE PEACEBUILDING AND TRAFFICKING FIELDS

### *Appropriations Advocacy*

Through our sister organization, HUA, we have collaborated with our partners to drastically increase the amount of funds the USG provides to specific peacebuilding and anti-trafficking accounts at the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Labor.

Historically, HU has influenced other funders, mobilizing them to support our partners' projects or to join us in using our collective voice to maximize impact. For our part, the Public Engagement team collaborates with other funders and has successfully galvanized them in support of our partners. As our partners have sought to expand their projects beyond HU's funding, we have led donor roundtables and have also engaged other foundations in our education and advocacy efforts. We know from experience that the Public Engagement portfolio can play a catalyzing role in the systems we seek to influence and help shape the perspectives of donors.

Beyond being proactive in influencing funders to support our partners through their financial support, we and our HU colleagues are working to influence how U.S. government agencies, including USAID, meaningfully implement their localization agenda. We are eager to influence how the U.S. government – the largest provider of bilateral foreign assistance – centers peacebuilders and survivors and creates practices that better fund those closest to the issues.



# SYSTEMS WE SEEK TO INFLUENCE

*Through rigorous and continued learning, the Public Engagement portfolio has identified three systems which we are uniquely positioned to influence that contribute directly to realizing HU's mission:*

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Our portfolio has been deeply immersed in these three systems, and we recognize that by strategically engaging with them in collaboration with partners and other donors, we can have greater success with cultivating the conditions for peace and freedom.

We have also witnessed a greater ability to effect change in areas that the Forced Labor & Human Trafficking (FLHT) portfolio, the Peacebuilding (PB) portfolio, and the Racial Justice and Equity (RJE) program are interested in by focusing on broader system-level influence. We work alongside our FLHT, PB, and RJE colleagues to enhance their and their partners' abilities to influence the systems in which they work.

01

**U.S. FOREIGN  
POLICY**

02

**PUBLIC  
INTEREST MEDIA**

03

**INTERNATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS**

# U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

01

**The United States is the largest bilateral donor of foreign aid in the world and uses aid as a key tool in implementing foreign policy.** The U.S. also plays a central role in global trade, multilateral engagement and in the global financial system. As a global power, U.S. foreign policy decisions have the potential to be forces for good or ill. When driven by democratic values, U.S. foreign policy has contributed to the advancement of peace and freedom, including on topics that HU has specifically worked on; at other times, U.S. foreign policy has caused great harm. As a result, we believe that influencing U.S. foreign policy is central to shaping policies that affect the vast majority of the world's population.

**We recognize that as a U.S.-based organization we have a responsibility to ensure that the U.S. government is informed by and responsive to communities with lived experience of conflict and exploitation.** We also have the privilege of proximity and access to actors within this system, which include the U.S. executive branch and Congress, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks.



Consequently, influencing this system is vital for HU's work of advancing policies that reduce global fragility and cultivate the conditions for peace and freedom.

Within this system, there is a longstanding practice of designating individuals as "experts" based on either the power they already hold or their position of privilege. The default approach has been to draw upon these perceived experts rather than prioritizing the perspectives and expertise of those with lived experience. Those who are directly affected by conflict and exploitation often have limited access to decision makers or opportunities for leadership themselves, resulting in policymakers being disconnected from the issues and systems they influence with limited accountability. We seek a system that develops and implements policy which is led and informed by those with lived experience to foster an environment that enables systemic reforms that advance peace and freedom.

Despite its significance, policy change is only one step on the road to a more peaceful and free society. Funding and implementing policy changes can be a critical but less visible barrier to durable change. Meaningful change requires engagement with all of the actors within this system and it manifests differently depending on who they are and the power they wield.



The Public Engagement portfolio deploys a variety of partnership models to influence U.S. foreign policy and finds targeted opportunities to engage actors on HU's long standing areas of focus.

In the years since Humanity United and our sister organization, Humanity United Action were founded, the U.S. government has provided billions of dollars in funding to address our issue areas – particularly on forced labor and conflict prevention – and these issues continue to garner strong bipartisan support in Congress, even as political polarization deepens. At the same time, the rapidly shifting global dynamics require a refresh of these policies to tackle new challenges in a more effective manner. Ensuring U.S. foreign policy continues to prioritize and make progress toward addressing our issue areas will mean finding more effective ways to bring in new perspectives, including those with lived experiences, to help shape new solutions while continuing to build new bipartisan champions within Congress and future administrations to create and implement policy changes. Through HU and HUA, the Public Engagement team will continue efforts to build expansive coalitions, nurture relationships, and weave networks to marshal action toward peace and freedom.

# PUBLIC INTEREST MEDIA

02

Responsible, independent journalism is critical for generating accurate, fact-based information that helps us make sense of the world around us. It contributes to a deeper understanding of complex issues, influences policies and shapes their agendas, and holds those in power to account. It also affects how we see and understand issues through the choices made about who is platformed, who is presented as an expert, who is telling the story, and who has access to these stories. Sustained and persistent reporting is designed to uncover abuses, investigate wrongdoing, offer solutions, and amplify the voices of the people most affected. It also provides context and narrative on issues and serves as an important tool for advocacy organizations to raise awareness of their findings and to provide background on the issues they prioritize. The media is influenced and seeks to influence elites in many systems, including policymakers, NGOs, and corporations.

Internationally, there are opportunities to engage in journalism in meaningful ways, including collaborations between local newsrooms around the world and larger organizations to center local voices and shape narratives.

However, this system is under threat, changing rapidly and losing ground as a result of technology, changing business models, and shifts in ownership of media organizations.

We seek to influence the current structure and dynamics of the public interest media system, with a focus on shifting norms and practices. This includes centering communities with lived experience in reporting, sourcing, and staffing, encouraging collaboration and learning, and investing in trauma and duty of care to ensure journalists are supported in their work. We also seek to directly support and increase quality investigative journalism and reporting on issues relevant to peace and freedom. We believe that high quality journalism plays a critical role in influencing U.S. foreign policy, international institutions, forced labor and human trafficking, peacebuilding, and racial justice and equity. We aim to utilize the power of social and digital media to reach new audiences and enable a deeper human connection to stories.

# INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

03

While international institutions seek to foster peace and justice worldwide, the system often falls short in practice. Instead, it prioritizes security and government actors, often at the expense of meaningful participation from civil society and those with lived experience. This focus contributes to a competitive system that reflects the preferences and ideas of established powers, undermining efforts for peacebuilding and collaboration for justice.

In this environment, power politics are increasingly prominent, exemplified by the rise of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) who want to build significant political coalitions to rival western powers within the global system. We have seen challenges to the legitimacy of established rules and leadership within global governance, signaling a dispute over the direction of international affairs.

This contention is further illustrated by the lack of consensus on existential challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and failures of diplomatic responses to crises in regions like Ethiopia, Sudan, the Middle East, and Ukraine.

These issues underscore a fractured international system, where strategic competition between global powers exacerbates challenges for developing countries. However, these fractures also present opportunities for reform, albeit against a backdrop of shrinking civic space and increasing authoritarianism.

For the Public Engagement team, the increasing acknowledgment of Africa's agency in influencing global dynamics offers an opportunity for the centering of communities with lived experience to change the structures of the international systems. To harness this opportunity, we seek to influence this system by providing support to African civil society organizations to engage with and influence the African Union and Regional Economic Communities that are engaged in shaping global dynamics. This support builds on HU's long-standing work on the continent, with several HU partners immersed in peace and security programming, as well as efforts to influence policy outcomes of the various African institutions. We will also continue to identify emerging opportunities to reform international institutions, aiming to place communities with lived experience at the heart of our efforts. This will involve methods such as futures forecasting and collaboration with our portfolio colleagues and partners.

# PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

The Public Engagement portfolio works to advance HU's three core conditions (agency, accountable and responsive institutions, and recognition of shared humanity) through two strategic pathways: centering communities with lived experience to change the structures of the systems in which we work and influencing policy outcomes to ensure greater accountability.

## PATHWAY 1

**We work to expand the voices that are being heard and where they are present.** We believe that expanding who is included and valued in policy conversations and media coverage can have a significant impact, given the reach and influence of these systems we are working to influence.

This pathway seeks to create an enabling environment for peace and freedom and aligns with the work of other HU portfolios and programs as well as peer funders. We aim to elevate the voices of civic actors and survivors, ensuring that they will be respected and listened to in places where their voices have the potential to be the most transformative.

## PATHWAY 2

**We seek changes in policy, practice, and resource allocation within our systems of focus to cultivate the conditions for peace and freedom.** To achieve this, we are focused on influencing policy adoption and improving policy implementation in U.S. foreign policy institutions, international institutions, and public interest media.

We work through coalitions, direct advocacy, communications, and journalism. This pathway seeks to make key institutions accountable and responsive to those most impacted by human exploitation and violent conflict.



# HOW WE LEARN



The Public Engagement portfolio is committed to engaging in ongoing learning to steadily improve our understanding of the three systems and two pathways to change. The learning at the portfolio level complements and informs the learning each team already engages in that is more specific to their areas of work.

Our learning practices are designed to make our strategies more resilient against future changes, more effective in the present and help us to adapt and pivot as necessary.

## FUTURES THINKING

The world we're living in today is unlikely to look the same in the next decade. To help future-proof our strategy, the Public Engagement team worked with Dot Connector Studio to consider scenarios for two different time periods: the period right after the 2024 U.S. Presidential elections and a 15-year forecast. We examined probable, best-case, and worst-case scenarios and the obstacles or opportunities that might arise as we pursue our proposed strategy. We asked ourselves "What strategic changes are required to prepare for this future?" We hope to continue to utilize futures thinking to adapt our strategy as needed depending on how different signals and drivers play out in our systems.

## LEARNING APPROACH

The learning process will be supported by dedicated Public Engagement staff time and HU's Strategy, Learning & Impact team. Learning will leverage insights gathered informally (and formally as needed) from grantees, partners, and other HU staff. Learning practices will also leverage the Futures scenarios already developed along with new insights gathered along the way.

As our partners shared in the consultation process, a cohesive strategy that brings together our portfolio's individual teams amplifies our individual efforts and provides a stronger foundation to support their work. We are looking forward to using this deliberate and collaborative process as we implement our strategy, work alongside other programs within HU, and accompany our partners in their work.







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