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**CHARITIES CONTINUE TO ENJOY HIGH LEVELS OF TRUST,
BUT NEED TO BE BETTER AT TELLING THEIR STORY**

Charities continue to enjoy high levels of trust, according to a study released today, but need to be better at telling Canadians about how they operate.

The Muttart Foundation, a private foundation based in Edmonton, today released *Talking About Charities 2008*, a national public-opinion poll conducted for it by Ipsos Reid Public Affairs. This was the fourth iteration of the study, with previous reports being released in 2000, 2004 and 2006.

Almost 3,900 people took part in a 20-minute telephone survey asking about charities and issues affecting charities. With a sample of this size, results are considered to be accurate to within a margin of 1.6%, 19 times out of 20.

More than three-quarters of respondents said they trust charities “some” or “a lot,” a number that’s held steady over the four iterations of the study. The same 77% of respondents said they had “a lot” or “some” trust in leaders of charities – a level that places charity leaders behind only nurses and medical doctors.

But the study also raised some issues that should be of concern to the charitable sector, according to Muttart Foundation president Marion Gracey.

After respondents were asked about how much trust they had in charities – a lot, some, a little or none – they were asked why they responded as they did. Respondents were then divided into two groups, those who reported a lot of trust in charities and those who gave some other answer.

Slightly more than 2,700 respondents were in the latter group, saying they had some trust, a little trust or no trust at all in charities. When asked why, 30% of them said because they weren’t sure where the money is really going.

“This is a number that should give us serious cause for concern,” said Mrs. Gracey. “The use of charitable donations, and other revenue, is a fundamental issue for charities. To have this many people say they aren’t sure where the money is really going underlines the importance of charities becoming better at telling their story.”

Consistent with results in previous iterations, respondents said there continues to be a significant gap in how charities perform at providing information about essential aspects of their operation.

Almost all respondents – 96 to 98% -- said it was important that charities provide information on how they use donations, the programs and services they deliver, their fundraising costs, and the impact of their work on Canadians.

Yet, only 29% say that charities do an excellent or good job of providing information about how they use donations, 26% said they did an excellent or good job of providing information about their fundraising costs, 38% said they did an excellent or good job of providing information about the impact of their works and only one half said they did an excellent or good job of providing information about the programs and services they deliver.

“Canada’s 83,000-plus charities have an important role in the country,” said Bob Wyatt, executive director of The Muttart Foundation. “They are operating in almost every community, in a variety of endeavours, all aimed at ensuring a high quality of life. They have an incredible story to tell, but the results say they aren’t doing a good enough job of telling it.”

The importance of charities is something that clearly resonates with respondents. Of the 3,863 people interviewed, 93% said that charities are important to Canadians, while 85% said charities generally improve our quality of life. Three-quarters of respondents said that charities understand the needs of Canadians better than government does, while 70% said charities are better than government at meeting the needs of Canadians.

Respondents also said they believe that the views of charities on issues of public concern should be listened to. Sixty-four per cent of respondents said that such opinions have value because they represent a public-interest perspective. About one-third disagreed, saying that such opinions don’t have value because they only represent the perspective of a particular interest group.

The full text of Talking About Charities 2008 is available on The Muttart Foundation’s website at www.muttart.org. The website also contains breakdowns of results by provinces and by various demographic groups.

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