

Introduction

The Muttart Foundation, a private foundation based in Edmonton, Alberta, commissioned Ipsos Reid to conduct the fourth wave of a survey on public opinion about charities and issues relating to charities. The first wave was conducted in 2000, the second in 2004, and the third in 2006.

This report examines Canadians' attitudes towards charities, the role they play in Canadian society, and their fundraising and advocacy activities. The report also looks at how Canadians' views have changed since the first, second, and third waves of this study were conducted.

Survey Method

Ipsos Reid was commissioned by the Muttart Foundation to conduct the fourth wave of a survey on public opinion about charities and issues relating to charities. This fourth wave of *Talking About Charities* follows previous research studies on Canadians' opinion toward charities undertaken by the Muttart Foundation in 2000, 2004, and 2006. A total of 3,863 telephone interviews were conducted with Canadians over the age of 18 across Canada between April and June 2008; this is a similar number of respondents to those surveyed in past waves of the study. Potential survey respondents were screened out if they or someone in their household worked for a charity. Quotas were imposed to ensure that there was adequate representation in each province to conduct a provincial analysis. The results were then weighted according to household size and provincial distribution. With this sample structure, the overall national results are considered statistically accurate within $\pm 1.6\%$, nineteen times out of twenty. The margin of error is larger for provincial results and other sub-groups of the data. Full details on the sampling method, including the provincial samples and margins of error have been provided in Table 1 of Appendix C – Survey Method.

	Sample Size	Margin of Error
NFLD	203	$\pm 6.9\%$
PEI	201	$\pm 6.9\%$
NS	300	$\pm 5.7\%$
NB	300	$\pm 5.7\%$
Quebec	605	$\pm 4.0\%$
Ontario	751	$\pm 3.6\%$
Manitoba	301	$\pm 5.7\%$
Saskatchewan	301	$\pm 5.7\%$
Alberta	401	$\pm 4.9\%$
BC	500	$\pm 4.4\%$
TOTAL	3,863	$\pm 1.6\%$

Analysis Strategy

Aside from an overall assessment of national views on charities, the study examines whether or not public opinion about charities and their activities varies according to province and socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, education, household income and religious attendance. It also examines whether people's opinions about charities and their activities vary according to their familiarity with charities, their level of trust in charities, and whether or not they made a charitable donation in 2007.

Statistical analyses were conducted to determine whether there are significant variations in responses that are attributable to provincial and socio-demographic characteristics, familiarity with charities, and donor behavior. Variations are presented only if they are found to be statistically significant and of substantive importance. Additionally, analyses were conducted to determine whether there has been a significant change in public opinion on these issues since 2000. Some of the questions included in the 2000, 2004, and 2006 studies were changed or deleted in the present survey. Comparisons are shown only when the same questions were asked in the 2000, 2004, and/or 2006 waves of the study. Additionally, some questions have been explored in this year's study for the first time.

For the majority of questions in the survey, the percentage of respondents who answer "Don't know" or who do not provide answers is two percent or less. All data presented in the study are based on the number of people who were asked the question (i.e., findings include all respondents to each question).

Organization of the Report

The report focuses on Canadians' overall opinions about charities and their practices. In each of the sections that follow, the national results are presented first followed by provincial, socio-demographic and other significant differences in the findings.

The report explores Canadians' perceptions and opinions of charities and their activities, and how these opinions have changed over subsequent survey waves in the following areas:

- Familiarity with and perceived importance of charities;
- Trust in charities and their leaders;
- Fundraising;
- Information provided by charities;
- Monitoring charities; and
- Advocacy activities.

Appended to the report are a copy of the questionnaire, the summary results, and a detailed description of the survey method.

Key Findings

Overview

With some exceptions, this year's findings closely match those of 2006, and in many cases those of 2004. Greater differences can be found in comparison to 2000 data, most of which reflect trends that began after that year. In some cases, however, such trends have reversed, bringing levels back to those of 2000.

Most Canadians feel they are at least somewhat familiar with the work carried out by charities and the role they play. As in 2000, 2004 and 2006 a high proportion of Canadians believe that charities are important, play a key role in meeting the needs of Canadians, and improve their quality of life.

Similarly, the level of trust that Canadians have in charities overall has held constant over the past several years, with a strong majority of Canadians trusting charities at least somewhat.

Not only do Canadians trust charities, they also trust leaders of charities. In fact, of all professions asked about in the study, only nurses and medical doctors are trusted by more Canadians than are leaders of charities.

Amongst those who have only some, little, or no trust in charities, the most commonly cited reason for not having more trust is uncertainty regarding where the money is really going.

One of the key areas impacted by trust is fundraising, an activity on which charities generally invest a great deal of time and effort. Although the proportion of Canadians who feel that charities do not have sufficient funds to meet their objectives has declined since 2004, a majority of Canadians still hold this view. And while virtually all Canadians agree that it takes significant effort for charities to raise the money they need to support their cause, Canadians do have concerns when it comes to certain methods of fundraising.

Most Canadians agree that there is a need for greater transparency regarding charities' spending practices. As in past years, virtually all Canadians agree that charities should be obligated to disclose how donors' contributions are spent.

In addition to greater transparency in charities' spending practices, most Canadians also feel that more attention should be paid to how charities fundraise. One of the more controversial fundraising methods used by some charities is the hiring of commission-based professionals who fundraise on behalf of the charity. A strong majority of Canadians find it somewhat or very unacceptable for charities to use this fundraising method. Underscoring these concerns, most Canadians feel that more attention should be paid to the amount of money charities spend on hiring professionals to do their fundraising, as has been increasingly the case since 2000. But Canadians are divided over whether or not legal limits should be set on how much money charities can spend on fundraising.

Some charities raise money through running a business. Most Canadians support charities earning money through business activities, as long as the money goes to the

charity's cause. Concerns over charities running businesses continue to stem from views that, when charities run business ventures, it is possible that money could get lost on the business instead of being used to help Canadians, or that business ventures may take too much time away from the charity's core cause.

Canadians continue to feel it is important for charities to provide them with information about their activities. Almost all Canadians think it is important for charities to provide information on how they use donations, the programs and services they offer, their fundraising costs, and the impact of their work on Canadians. However, only half of Canadians or less feel that charities actually do a good job in providing each of these kinds of information.

There is consistent lack of knowledge among most Canadians regarding organizations that are responsible for monitoring the activities of charities. More than half of Canadians incorrectly think that there is no organization or agency responsible for keeping watch over charities' activities. Even among those Canadians who correctly believe that there is an organization charged with monitoring charities' activities, few are able to name any organization that actually has this responsibility.

Canadians' opinions have been changing regarding who they feel should be responsible for watching over the activities of charities. More Canadians now than in 2000 and 2004 think a government agency should be responsible for monitoring charities' activities. Conversely, the proportion of Canadians who think an independent organization that is not part of either the government or the charity should be responsible for monitoring activities of charities is lower than in 2000 and 2004, as is the proportion who believes the charity's board of directors should have this responsibility.

Advocacy is another area of activity in which many charities engage. A majority of Canadians feel that the opinions expressed by charities on issues of public concern have value because they represent a public interest perspective. Although a majority of Canadians agree that laws should be changed to permit charities to advocate more freely for the causes their organization supports, the proportion who strongly agree with this view remains smaller than in 2004.

Canadians hold differing views on various methods employed by charities to speak out about a cause, with some methods viewed as being more acceptable than others in the eyes of Canadians. Very large majorities of Canadians find it acceptable for charities to advocate for their cause using softer tactics, such as speaking out on issues such as poverty and the environment, meeting with government officials, using research results to support a message, and placing advertisements in the media. Meanwhile, substantially fewer Canadians view more assertive means, such as holding legal protests or demonstrations and blocking roadways, as acceptable. There has been a substantial increase from 2000 in the proportion of Canadians who feel it is acceptable for charities to hold legal street protests/ demonstrations, while the acceptability of organized letter writing campaigns has decreased since 2000. There has also been a decrease from 2004 in the proportion of Canadians who feel it is acceptable for charities to block roadways and engage in other non-violent acts.

The main findings of the study are highlighted below.

Familiarity with and Trust in Charities

- Most Canadians (79%) feel they are familiar with charities, yet few have a high degree of familiarity with them (17% very familiar).
- A majority of Canadians (77%) trust charities, with 27 percent trusting them a lot. Trust in charities has remained about the same since 2000.
- Amongst those with only some, little, or no trust in charities, the most commonly cited reason for not having more trust in charities is uncertainty about where the money is really going (30%).
- Of the ten types of charities asked about in the study, Canadians are most likely to trust hospitals a lot or some (88%), followed by charities that focus on children/children's activities (86%), health prevention/health research (85%), education (80%), social services (77%), protection of animals (73%), and protection of the environment (72%). Churches (67%), as well as churches and other places of worship (65%) are next, followed by charities that focus on the arts (63%) and international development (59%). Religious organizations are last, with 45 percent (excluding churches and other places of worship) and 44 percent (excluding churches).
- Trust in leaders of charities is similar to the level of trust in charities, with 78 percent of Canadians saying they trust leaders of charities and 25 percent saying they trust them a lot. Only nurses (96% trust a lot/some) and medical doctors (93% trust a lot/some) are more trusted than the leaders of charities.

Views on the Role of Charities

- Virtually all Canadians (93%) agree that charities are important to Canadians, with half (51%) strongly agreeing. Importance of charities has remained consistent over the past several years.
- Nearly nine in ten (86%) agree that charities generally improve the quality of life of Canadians.
- The majority agree that charities understand the needs of Canadians better than the government does (75%), and that charities do a better job meeting the needs of Canadians than the government does (70%).
- More than half of Canadians (56%) agree that charities should be expected to deliver programs and services the government stops funding.

Views on Fundraising

- Although most Canadians (76%) feel that charities are generally honest about the way they use donations, almost three-quarters of Canadians (72%) believe there are too many charities trying to get donations for the same cause.
- A majority of Canadians (62%) think charities have too little money to meet their objectives, which is a similar result as in 2006 (64%), though a decrease from 2004 (70%). Only seven percent feel charities have too much money, and one in four (26%) think charities have about the right amount of money to achieve their goals.
- Overall, most Canadians (60%) feel it is appropriate to have some of the funds raised go towards the charities' operating expenses, as long as they are reasonable.
- Virtually all Canadians (94%) think charities should be required to disclose how donors' contributions are spent.

- Canadians are evenly divided in their views on whether or not there should be legal limits on how much money charities spend on fundraising. Half (52%) believe there should be a legal limit set on the amount of money charities can spend on fundraising, while the other half (47%) feel charities should be able to decide for themselves.
- Many Canadians, however, do have objections to charities hiring commission-based fundraisers, with 64 percent feeling this practice is unacceptable.
- A majority of Canadians (74%) think commission-based fundraisers should always be required to indicate that they are receiving a percentage of donations raised, while 18 percent feel commission-based fundraisers should be required to disclose this information only when asked; seven percent do not think commission-based fundraisers should be required to reveal this information at all.
- Canadians are more supportive when it comes to charities running businesses in order to raise funds: 83 percent agree that charities should be able to earn money through any type of business activity they want as long as the proceeds go to their cause.
- However, Canadians do have concerns about charities becoming involved in business ventures, with 74 percent feeling that when a charity runs a business, money could get lost on the business instead of being used to help Canadians; half (52%) feel that when charities run businesses, it takes too much time away from their core cause.
- Seven in ten Canadians (70%) feel charities that run a business as a means of fundraising should not have to pay taxes on the business income.

Views on Information Provided by Charities

- Canadians continue to place great importance on the information charities provide to the public. Almost all Canadians think it is important (very or somewhat) for charities to provide information on how they use donations (98%), information about the programs and services the charities deliver (98%), information about charities' fundraising costs (97%), and information about the impact of charities' work on Canadians (96%).
- However, Canadians do not feel charities do a good job in providing these types of information to the public. Half of Canadians (51%) think charities do an excellent or good job in providing information about the programs and services they deliver; 38 percent say the same about information regarding the impact of charities' work on Canadians; 29 percent think charities do an excellent or good job providing information on how they use donations; and 26 percent say the same about information regarding charities' fundraising costs.
- Half of Canadians (49%) say they would like more information about the work charities do, even though it may require more money to be spent on communications.
- When considering making a donation to a particular charity, Canadians are most likely to research that charity by reading printed material they have received from the charity (80%). Other sources include the charity's website (62%), followed by a website of someone who regulates charities (53%), looking at the charity's financial statements (49%), and calling the charity and asking for more information (44%).

Views on Monitoring Charities

- Nearly all Canadians (94%) agree that more attention should be paid to the way charities spend their money; three in five (62%) strongly agree.
- Nine in ten Canadians (90%) agree that more attention should be given to the amount of money that charities spend on program activities, with just under half (47%) agreeing strongly.
- A strong majority of Canadians (88%) think that more attention should be paid to the amount of money charities spend on hiring professionals to do their fundraising; just over half (56%) strongly agree.
- Nearly nine in ten (87%) agree that more attention should be paid to the way charities raise money, with four in ten (42%) agreeing strongly.
- Although Canadians place great importance on the monitoring of charities, only 31 percent are aware that there are organizations that monitor charities' activities, while 53 percent believe there is no such organization or agency and 15 percent are unsure.
- Of the 31 percent who are aware that there is an organization watching over the activities of charities, four in five (76%) are not able to name it. The most frequently mentioned organizations are the Canada Revenue Agency/The Charities Directorate (8%) and the federal/provincial government (8%).
- Just under two in three Canadians (63%) think that there should be an independent non-governmental organization or agency monitoring the activities of charities.

Views on the Advocacy Activities of Charities

- Nearly two in three Canadians (64%) think that the opinions that charities express on issues of public concern have value because they represent a public interest perspective.
- Seven in ten Canadians (69%) believe that the laws should be changed to permit charities to advocate more freely for the causes in which they are involved; however, more than eight in ten (83%) think that charities should be required to present both sides of an issue when engaged in advocacy activities.
- Canadians find some advocacy activities of charities more acceptable than others. Virtually all Canadians find it very or somewhat acceptable for charities to speak out on issues like the environment, poverty or healthcare (95%), meet with government ministers or senior public servants as a way to speak out about their cause and try to get things changed (94%), and use research results to support a message (92%). Nine in ten (90%) find it very or somewhat acceptable for charities to place advertisements in the media (90%); just over eight in ten (83%) feel the same about organizing letter-writing campaigns. Fewer (62%) find it acceptable for charities to hold legal street protests or demonstrations, and only one in four (27%) find it very or somewhat acceptable for charities to block roadways, or engage in other non-violent acts. These findings are very similar to those of 2006.