

## Technique Awards

### Best Use of Research or Measurement



#### Winner

*American Red Cross and Harris Interactive: Targeted market research drives significant changes to fundraising practices*

The tragedies of September 11, 2001 elicited an overwhelmingly generous flood of donations to the American Red Cross, and focused public attention on how the organization raises money to fund its disaster response. But a lack of knowledge of the Red Cross' processes and misunderstanding of its fundraising messages created problems.

Realizing that donations and the trust of the general public are vital to meeting its goals, the Red Cross undertook a major market-research study with donors, the general public, and nonprofit thought leaders in order to gain a better understanding of how to improve its fundraising messaging. Planning took place under the director of the Board of Governors and the Red Cross' development, communications, and marketing departments. Harris Interactive was selected as the vendor for the research, and the market-research unit of the Red Cross managed the project.

From February to March 2002, 12 focus groups were conducted in seven cities, including Baltimore, Birmingham, AL, Boston, Charleston, WV, Houston, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. The cities were selected to represent a range of urban and suburban populations, degrees of local disasters, diversity, and both medium and large populations. Two types of donor audiences were identified, including those who contributed money to the organization prior to September 11, and those who had never before supported the Red Cross. Two public-opinion polls followed, each with 1,000 respondents, designed to test the clarity and persuasiveness of the revised messaging that evolved out of the focus groups. Those surveyed were asked to listen to 30-second radio ads and respond to questions about the potency of the message. After reviewing the research, the Red Cross consulted with nonprofit opinion leaders to glean their views on proposed changes to fundraising approaches. Those consulted included the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, GuideStar, and others.

The key findings of all this research were brought together to create the revised fundraising strategy called Donor DIRECT - D[onor] I[n]tent] RE[cognition] C[onfirmation] T[rust], which was announced internally at the Red Cross' national convention in June 2002, and to the public during a press conference at the headquarters in Washington, DC.

Favorable media coverage followed, and subsequent public-opinion polling found that 21% of respondents had heard of changes to the fundraising strategy. Moreover, the Red Cross has seen the positive effects on donors and local media following other disasters. During the Colorado wildfires of summer 2002, which occurred after new policies were put in place, the Red Cross saw an increase in undesignated donations to the Disaster Relief Fund, more favorable media coverage, and a successful wrap-up of donations at the appropriate time.