

Public trust and confidence in charities: analysis of findings

Mori's report has provided us with rich data, which provides an opportunity for further analysis and reflection. The Charity Commission is keen to ensure that there is wide dialogue on the findings, and how they might be used to further improve public trust and confidence in charities. To that end, we intend to hold a seminar to discuss the findings in more detail later this year.

In the meantime, we have noted that:

- Overall trust and confidence in charities has increased slightly but significantly since 2005, from an overall trust score of 6.3 in 2005 to 6.6 in 2008. This is good news for the charity sector, donors, beneficiaries and the Charity Commission, and shows a healthy level of trust and confidence in charities, particularly with only doctors and the police scoring higher levels of trust and confidence. Further promotion of this latest research could in itself help build trust and confidence in charities, and the Commission and charities themselves could consider additional ways to use this information in general communications to donors, and the public at large.
- It is important to identify and fully explore the key attitudes and perceptions that the public have about charities; so that the Commission can effectively target these and continue the work to increase public trust and confidence. Charities may find it helpful also to take note of the key drivers of public trust and confidence as well as the key drivers that the public say make them trust charities less, and look at their activities in relation to these.
- It is also important to note that just fewer than three in five people (59%) admit to knowing very little about how charities are run and managed, indicating that for many, overall trust and confidence in charities is based on (as highlighted in the 2005 report) an 'inherent belief' in charities. This inherent belief can work both in sector's favour and against it. Therefore care must be taken when considering options to address negative inherent beliefs in charities, as there is a risk of adversely affecting positive inherent beliefs.
- The public says that charities making a positive difference to the cause they work for is the most important quality of a charity. Analysis indicates that it is in fact the belief that charities spend their money wisely and effectively that is the main driver of overall trust. This contradiction in the public's views means that it will be important for the Commission to focus on, in order to ensure that overall public trust and confidence in charities continues to increase.
- The survey shows that the most important reason people gave for trusting a charity *more* is if they have seen or experienced what the charity does, showing that greater personal interaction and first-hand experience helps drives trust in charities. This may be useful for charities to bear in mind when considering how donors and potential donors are able to interact and experience for themselves the work that a charity does.
- The survey has shown that although people are still not asking questions when giving to charities, overwhelmingly they expect charities to be clear about how they spend their money and report on what they have achieved, and **not** knowing how charities spend their money is the most common reason for people trusting charities less. This is something charities may wish to explore by looking at how accessible they make information to the public about how they spend money.

- The clearly strong public desire for information on charity spending and their desire for published annual information on what a charity has achieved should be a wake-up call to all those charities who still do not file accounts on time. Too many charities continue not to take this seriously enough and the negative impact on levels of trust and confidence is obvious. The Commission is already taking a more active approach to charities that consistently default on their accounts, and proposed changes to the layout of the register of charities will make it more obvious where charities are in default. The belief that a reasonable proportion of charitable donations go to the end cause is another important driver of overall trust and confidence in charities. Helping to improve the public's perception therefore, about such things as administration costs, will be a key element in improving overall trust and confidence.
- For many in the charity sector it will be good news that more people are giving via direct debit or standing order, because of the benefits this brings in terms of gift aid, ability to plan based on knowing what people's monthly commitments are, and knowing that a regular direct debit is going to be in most instances more valuable to a charity than one-off donations.
- The public perception of fundraising techniques is something however that charities and fundraisers need to consider. If 1 in 10 people have said that charities using fundraising techniques that they don't like makes them trust a charity less, this needs exploring further. There may also need to be further research on the forms of fundraising that seem to be less liked. With a significant proportion of people agreeing that charities are using more dubious forms of fundraising techniques, there needs to be more research into why people hold this belief and what, if any, specific methods or examples of fundraising have triggered any negative view of current charity fundraising methods. Also, greater public awareness of the standards and good practice which fundraisers already have to adhere to may be beneficial, such as those provided by the Institute of Fundraising, and knowledge of how the Fundraising Standards Board encourage fundraisers to act on complaints made by members of the public.
- The importance of increased levels of giving of time and goods as well as money should not be undervalued as signs of trust and confidence in charities. Indeed, although the percentage of people who say they give time and goods is lower than the percentage of people who say they have given money, donating time or goods in most cases requires a higher level of effort and 'buy-in' from the person involved. Charities can build on these positives and look for further ways to engage people.
- There is clearly work for the Commission and the sector amongst Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups who express lower levels of trust in charities, are more likely to think charities are unprofessional and are less likely to see themselves as beneficiaries. Further research is needed to identify why trust and confidence is lower amongst these communities and if the drivers of trust are different. However people from a BME background are much more likely to have more trust in charities that provide services overseas. There may be a link here with the key finding that people trust charities more if they have had experience of or seen the work of a charity themselves.
- It is positive that awareness of the Commission has increased significantly since 2005, and of those of the Commission, a higher proportion feel they know it well. The Commission now needs to look at how to increase awareness amongst the public above 54%, which may include more public-facing communications. The strong endorsement from the public about the importance of its role affirms the importance of having a well resourced and effective regulator - over half feel the Commission's role is 'essential', and a further almost two in five feel it to be 'very important'.