

Study, "Taking the Pulse of Americans' Attitudes Toward Charities," provides insight into the public's perceptions of the nonprofit sector and its beliefs concerning the role nonprofits play in society. "For more than a decade, Americans have consistently expressed high levels of support for charities," IS says. "While this is good news for the nonprofit sector, the survey also shows that the public was less likely in 1999 to believe that charities are honest and ethical in their handling of donated funds."

### OTHER FINDINGS

- 76% agree charities play a major role in making communities "a better places to live"
- 62% agree charitable organizations play an important role in speaking out on important issues
- 32% believe charities are wasteful in their use of donated funds – good news for nonprofits as that figure is down from 39% in 1994
- 63% believe local charities make better use of donated money than national charities – 18% believe the opposite
- Overall, confidence in religious institutions has increased from 44% in 1988 to 61% in 1999. The sector notes that the late 80s were a time rocked with religious scandal, e.g., Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker
- Confidence in federated charitable appeals increased to 45% in 1999, up from 31% in 1992

IS also found that, when measured against levels of confidence in other institutions, Americans expressed high confidence in nearly all charitable organizations, e.g., youth development groups (72%) and human service agencies (68%), as opposed to major corporations (29%), the feds (27%) and Congress (22%).

### CONFIDENCE UP IN OTHER SECTORS, ALSO

The survey notes rising confidence in both the private and public sectors since 1994. The media is an exception – percentages of people who trust the media have declined.

Charitable institutions rank higher on the trust meter than gov't institutions. "This appears to be at least partly due to the fact that many charitable institutions do not have public parallels." The EPA and nonprofit environmental groups share the same concerns but operate differently. In public and private education, confidence levels are similar.

The report is part of ongoing scholarship concerning public opinion and the public sector. (For more information, call 202-467-6100 or visit [www.IndependentSector.org](http://www.IndependentSector.org))

### ITEM OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **Condit Photo Proves That Cropping Is As Mighty As Digital Technology.** While digital imaging has made photo-doctoring easier and more effective than early methods such as airbrushing (pr 3/26), the Chandra Levy case proves that a few snips of the scissors can do plenty of damage. Consider the photograph of Gary Condit and Levy standing closely together. Turns out the *NY Daily News* cut out Levy's friend and former Condit intern, Jennifer Baker. Featuring only Condit and Levy carried implications weighty enough to have Condit demand the paper print the photo in its entirety and remove it from its Website.

## SHOULD PUBLIC OPINION COUNT WHEN POLLS DON'T ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

"Don't make too much out of opinion polls," says John Samples, director of the Cato Center for Representative Government. This is the message of the Center's study, "Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls." In it, author Robert Weissberg, a professor of political science at the U of Illinois, argues that **public opinion polling measures the wishes and preferences of respondents, neither of which reflects the costs or risks associated with policy.** As a result, polls are useless to policy-makers who must pay attention to trade-offs among values, second-best possibilities and unexpected risks. Weissberg advises policy makers to simply ignore polls and focus on their own judgment.

"Modern polling can give us back only what citizens know the moment the phone rings," he says. Unfortunately, in the interests of time and money, pollsters tend not to screen out people with deficient knowledge, resulting in "a pervasive dumbing down of the entire enterprise." Recent survey results on stem cell research point out what he means.

### POLLS ON STEM CELL RESEARCH

All sides are citing poll results to support their positions, says Adam Clymer in the *New York Times* article, "The Unbearable Lightness Of Public Opinion Polls." He states flatly that American public opinion on the subject doesn't exist and offers this evidence from various polls:

He states flatly that American public opinion on the subject doesn't exist and offers this evidence from various polls:

- 70% favor stem cell research – Juvenile Diabetes Foundation
- 69% favor and 23% oppose it – NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll
- 58% support it – a Gallup poll for CNN and *USA Today*
- 24% support it – Conference of Catholic Bishops

So which findings should the public believe? **Wording of questions is the usual suspect for wide variations in results.** The Bishops' poll included a critical line that read, "the live embryos would be destroyed in their first week of development." The question, written by the Bishops' chief lobbyist, Richard Doerflinger, also uses phrases like "your federal tax dollars" and speaks only of "experiments." As professor of political science at Ohio State University, Herbert Asher, said, "the question is loaded."

A crucial finding in the Gallup poll explains the rest: Before having the issue explained to them, **57% of the public said they did not know enough** to say whether they favored or opposed stem cell research. But after pollsters offered some information and pressed for opinions, people expressed opinions. "Americans are acquiescent so they'll give you an answer," said Bernard Roshco, a former editor of *Public Opinion Quarterly*. "Sometimes, the pollsters are measuring phantoms, and the politicians are calling on them for support," concludes Clymer.

## WORDING OF HEADLINES CAUSES MORE CONFUSION

During Congress's tax debate last April, the AP reported the same set of survey findings – 48% support Bush's plan and 32% oppose it – *using two different headlines*:

- Poll: Bush Tax Cut Has Some Support
- Poll: Bush Tax Plan Lacks Support

This led Colleen Porter and Allan Rivlin, sr. vp at Peter D. Hart Research and contributing editor of the *National Journal*, to ask polling experts what they think when they hear or see terms like:

- a majority? (does it mean 50% or more?)
- a clear majority? (60% or more?)
- an overwhelming majority? (75% or more?)
- almost two-thirds (or three-quarters?)
- virtually unanimous? (95% or more?)
- consensus? (100% or more?)
- widespread? (doesn't seem very rigorous, could this mean anything?)
- most? (51% or more?)
- some? (usually less than 50%, suggests a lot less than 50%?)
- a significant minority? (anything between 15 - 49%, but does it depend on the number of choices involved?)

What should the rules-of-thumb be? How many agree with the meanings in parentheses? Pollsters are still working on it.

## WHAT POLITICAL ADVISERS TELL CLIENTS ABOUT MEDIA RELATIONS

Three political advisers explain how politicians can get on the radio, how phones and the Internet complement each other and how to blunt eleventh-hour attacks.

### GETTING ON THE RADIO

Being on a live radio talk show allows a candidate to speak directly and more fully to voters about his or her ideas and, if it is a call-in show, to interact with listeners. "Earned radio is the optimal use of a candidate's retail campaigning time," says Dan Patlak, public information officer for the Cook County Board of Review. But, he adds, a candidate must be up to the task: a) clear on thoughts, b) eloquent enough to communicate to the average radio audience, c) prepared to answer tough questions without appearing confused or irritated and d) capable of making accurate statements.

Patlak reviews basic steps in choosing relevant radio stations and scheduling a candidate. He advises speaking to the receptionist initially to find out the names and phone numbers of the hosts and producers of possible shows. When later calling the news director, producer and morning hosts, he suggests calling them before 8:00 a.m. "If they don't come to the phone, leave a message and call again in a few hours. No matter what, **don't give up unless you have personally spoken to a decision-maker and been given a flat-out 'no' for a particular program.**" Weekend programs should also be checked out; hosts for these are frequently different from weekday shows and are eager to find interesting guests.

## "DEFENSE CALLS"

Squabbling among competitors, like Microsoft's CEO Bill Gates and Netscape's CEO James Barksdale, is not that different from political campaigns. Knowing something about one of the oldest political dirty tricks, the last-minute attack against opponents in the waning hours of a campaign, may be useful in the business arena. Politicians are urged to pre-purchase political telemarketing time to respond almost immediately and even one-up the opposition.

Politicians try to respond with a positive emotional message and aim their message to targeted groups. To save time, it's a good idea to prewrite several script options and to gather any material necessary to support the defense-call strategy. This may include prerecorded endorsements from high-profile politicians and/or celebrities. To be successful, politicians seek to reach about 65% of the chronic voting population of the district.

Some of these techniques are applicable to businesspeople as well when they face political battles on issues. The possibility of pre-purchasing political telemarketing time, however, can only be applied if the time of a legislative vote is known.

## PHONES AND THE INTERNET COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER, THE DENVER MUSEUM OF ART DISCOVERS

To whip up support for the city's \$62.5-million bond initiative to expand the museum, the Denver Museum of Art used the typical e-mail and tv program. When polls showed the race would be close, it called upon Winning Connections, a Washington, D.C.-based telephone and Internet voter contact firm, to conduct a GOTV (get-out-the-vote) phone program. The firm identified supporters and undecideds, informed them of the initiative and gave compelling reasons to vote "yes." It made 50,000 phone calls.

The new element in the phone program was to **ask each respondent for his or her e-mail address**. Subsequent e-mail allowed the Museum to tell voters everything that couldn't be told to them through any other medium and to deliver five important points, such as the fact that more than 94% of the Museum's collection was in storage, out of the public's view. Two newspapers, the *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News*, agreed to allow direct links from the Museum site to their endorsement of the initiative. The Museum sent out seven rounds of e-mails, including a personal appeal from Denver Museum of Art director Lewis Sharp and a GOTV reminder on election eve.

Proving the success of the campaign, voters in November 1999 approved the bond initiative. A new wing, designed by Berlin-based Daniel Libeskind, will be completed in 2005, Deanna Person, the Museum's pr director, told pr. The Museum has one of the best western art collections in the country. It also has 40,000 pieces of pre-Colombian art, more of which can now be exhibited.

## MORE THAN GOV'T AND BUSINESS, CHARITIES EARN THE PUBLIC'S TRUST; RELIGION IS BACK IN GOOD GRACES AND YOUTH PROGRAMS TOP THE LIST

Charities are more effective in providing services than they were five years ago and public confidence in them is at an all-time high. D.C.-based Independent Sector (IS) recently surveyed 2,553 U.S. adults with a sampling error of + or - 2% to find out **public attitudes toward giving**. IS reports **confidence to be at its highest level since it began polling in 1985**, citing results that show 62% of Americans agree that "charities are more effective now in providing services than five years ago."