

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

Philanthropy

In charity, Canadians trust

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Even after the economy gets better and people's pocketbooks are fuller, Canadian charities could still have trouble raising money because the current crisis has damaged trust in political and business leaders, says a pollster.

He made his comments after his firm conducted a poll showing that having trust in other people, rather than a desire for recognition or other considerations, is a key trait among Canadians who give the most to charities.

The online survey conducted by the polling firm Innovative Research Group shows that a higher proportion of respondents who donated money agreed with the statement that "most people can be trusted."

More than two-thirds (70 per cent) of those who gave \$500 or more in the past year agreed with that statement, while just half of respondents who donated less agreed that most people can be trusted.

Only 35 per cent of those who gave nothing to charity agreed that most people can be trusted.

Conversely, 45 per cent of non-donors strongly agreed with the premise that money raised for charities is squandered by administrative costs, compared to 23 per cent among big donors.

Such findings are noteworthy for the country's charities, who are dealing with an uncertain economy and a shrinking donor base, said Greg Lyle, Innovative Research Group's managing director.

"There's been some stagnation and most of that, we've put down to economic factors," Mr. Lyle said.

"But it may well be that once the economy bounces back and we see incomes grow back the way they did in the past, that the long-term consequences of the loss of confidence in corporate and political leaders may have lasting impact on people's willingness to give.

"That's a really big deal."

While it is well-known that older, wealthier Canadians are the more generous donors, the survey aimed at finding what values or beliefs motivate donors, Mr. Lyle said.

Four in five of the respondents gave to charity last year, 41 per cent of them donating up to \$500 and 38 per cent more than \$500.

Few respondents said they donated because they enjoyed giving money or because it gave social status.

Religion, however, was a factor, with 46 per cent of donors of more than \$500 agreeing that giving is an important part of their faith, compared to the national average of 31 per cent.

“We’re not that religious a country any more but those who are more religious are a disproportionate share of donors,” Mr. Lyle said. “... It’s not the dominant factor but it’s an important secondary factor. And more important than you might think.”

The online survey was conducted between Nov. 17 and 24 from a pre-recruited panel of 1,759 respondents. The results were weighted to make it representative of the Canadian adult population.

Technically, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated for online polls but an unweighted sample of similar size would have a margin of error of 2.34 points, 19 times out of 20.

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