

# **SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED**

## **What the public thinks of charity direct mail**



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## Foreword

Since the early 1990s, fundraisers have developed direct mail as a key tool to raise money for their work. Its use has enabled charities not only to reach individuals who want to support their work but also to encourage these individuals into becoming regular and long term financial supporters. Its importance in establishing reliable income streams for charities over the past thirty years cannot be under estimated.

Direct mail can take many forms but at its core, it is effectively a way for charities to communicate in writing with people in order to encourage them to give donations. While many of the larger charities and voluntary sector organisations will have highly developed strategies and staff devoted solely to direct mail activities, it will also be used by much smaller voluntary sector organisations, even if this amounts to just an annual letter written by the Chief Executive to an identified group of individuals living in their community. It is in effect a universal fundraising method.

As direct mail involves a two way process with the general public, it is important for the fundraising sector to know their views on how it is currently being used. What people think of current practices in direct mail can usefully contribute to its future development. Moreover, because it is such a common fundraising method, its use and perceived misuse can have an impact on public trust and confidence in fundraising generally.

This is why the Fundraising Standards Board has conducted this research. Our overarching remit is to encourage best practice in fundraising in order to maintain and build public trust and confidence in how charities go about raising money. Moreover, if the self-regulatory scheme is to be a power for good in the long term, it is vital that the public is engaged in the development of standards of practice of particular fundraising methods.

The fact that the Institute of Fundraising is developing a Code of Practice on Direct Mail makes this research timely. It is appropriate that the public's views – who are a key stakeholder – inform the development process and indeed, the content of the Code. This research has taken soundings from both regular givers and the general population. It has raised some challenges and produced some key findings that the Fundraising Standards Board considers are important to the evolution of the practice of direct mail and to maintaining public trust and confidence in its use as a fundraising method.

Jon Scourse

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jon Scourse', written in a cursive style.

Chief Executive

## Executive Summary

Direct mail is a long established fundraising method whereby charities and voluntary organisations contact individuals in writing to encourage them to give a donation to the good cause they represent or the need they work to address. A Code of Practice to guide its use is currently being developed by the Institute of Fundraising and in recent years, a number of issues relating to the use of direct mail have attracted media attention. The Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB) has in its remit the commitment to conduct research into appropriate fundraising issues for the benefit of its members. It was therefore considered timely, topical and relevant that direct mail form the subject matter of the FRSB's first ever research project.

The research was conducted in two parts. The first involved asking the general public about their experiences of charity direct mail through nfpSynergy's Charity Awareness Monitor (CAM) which is a regular survey of the public's knowledge and awareness of charities and their activities. These respondents are referred to as CAM respondents throughout the report. The second involved eight of the FRSB's member organisations surveying donors (established and/or regular givers) on their experiences of and opinions on direct mail. These respondents are referred to as FRSB respondents throughout the report. Both parts of the research focused on the recipient of direct mail rather than the sender. In total, over 2000 people of different ages from all over the UK took part in this research project, providing a representative and credible sample study of people's experiences and views on direct mail and its use.

It is important to note that this is attitudinal research, focusing on people's perceived behaviour and reaction rather than their actual behaviour and reaction. Organisations that read the report might wish to analyse the findings alongside any information they have about how their supporters actually behaved or responded to direct mail appeals.

Key findings:

### People's views of direct mail practices:

- People want charities to respect their wishes and to feel that they are in a mutually beneficial relationship
  - 88% of FRSB respondents and 85% of CAM respondents would stop giving if a charity kept contacting them after being asked not to
  - 77% of FRSB respondents and 63% of CAM respondents want some say in how often charities contact them
  - Nearly two thirds of both cohorts expect charities to respect their privacy and follow the rules applying to direct mail more than businesses do
  - Only 14% of FRSB respondents think it always or sometimes acceptable for charities to "sometimes swap lists of names and addresses of donors with another charity in order to find more people who might want to help fund their work"

- The content of direct mail matters
  - 69% of CAM respondents and 75% of FRSB respondents think it is never or rarely acceptable for charities to exaggerate when trying to encourage giving<sup>1</sup>
  - 73% of FRSB respondents and 55% of CAM respondents consider that it is sometimes or always acceptable that charities may use shocking or distressing images in their direct mail material (although 30% of CAM respondents found it rarely or never acceptable)
- People doubt the motivations for including gifts in direct mail appeals
  - 93% of FRSB respondents and 88% of CAM respondents think money spent on gifts might be better spent on the cause
  - 70% of FRSB respondents and 69% of CAM respondents think charities put gifts in to make people feel guilty about getting something for nothing
  - 16% of FRSB respondents and 29% of CAM respondents think putting gifts in direct mail as an incentive to give a donation is acceptable
- Most people do not appear to respond to letters containing gifts

Apart from one age group (over 75s), which is already donating to good causes, most FRSB respondents stated that they will not give a donation to a charity that has sent them a gift

- People who give regularly appreciate why charities use direct mail
  - 74% of FRSB respondents said they were happy to be contacted by direct mail by charities that had their name and address
  - 53% think that direct mail is a good way for charities to raise money for their work
  - 50% do not mind charities contacting them on a regular basis as they know they have to raise money for their work (12% strongly disagreed with this statement)
- People who give regularly are receptive to innovation in fundraising
  - nearly two thirds of respondents from both cohorts (65%) agree strongly or slightly that charities are right to try different ways of encouraging people to give money to them
  - a significant minority of both groups of participants – approximately a quarter – agree strongly or slightly that “anything which encourages people to give to good causes is justified

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<sup>1</sup> Only 1% of FRSB respondents and 2% of CAM respondents thought it always acceptable that “charities may sometimes exaggerate when trying to encourage you to give to them

## **On receiving and responding to direct mail:**

- Members of the public say they receive approximately 6 pieces of direct mail every 3 months
- Donors indicate that they receive on average nearly 3 letters a year from their chosen charity asking them to donate money
- Large amounts of direct mail ends up in the bin  
A third of CAM respondents indicated that they do not read a third of the charity direct mail they receive
- People are concerned about the environmental impact of direct mail. The statement “charities that send lots of direct mail are not being environmentally friendly” elicited strong or slight approval from 81% of CAM respondents and 80% of FRSB respondents.
- Direct mail that is addressed to the recipient is more likely to be read  
Two thirds of CAM respondents advised that they read all or some of the letters addressed to them
- Unaddressed mail is just as likely to elicit a donation of equivalent value  
The average amount given by CAM respondents to either type of direct mail is approximately £11.00
- The content of direct mail encourages people to give only in a minority of cases  
Over three quarters of CAM respondents gave because they usually supported the cause or because of personal or family experience; a third gave because of what was written in the letter
- There is potentially a balance to be struck when considering the number of times a year to contact donors  
In considering how to attain best value and the best rate of response in terms of donations made, up to four mailings a year appear to provide that balance.
- Too many direct mail appeals may well result in very little return at all  
Five or more letters a year to FRSB respondents appear more likely to result in no donations being made and in fewer people opting to give the maximum number of times

## **On donors:**

- People who give to good causes regularly are more likely to be women and be over 65

## **In conclusion**

There are perhaps a number of general conclusions to be drawn from this research. Firstly, direct mail is still a useful way of encouraging people to give to good causes. People are still receptive to it as a way of giving for the first time to an organisation or as a way of giving regularly to that organisation. Yet, for all that, the way it has evolved to date does not appear to find particular favour with the giving public. The findings suggest that there is a need for guidance on particular practices that ensure they are deployed in a way that promotes best practice and consequently

engenders public confidence. Thirdly, there is an opportunity for change that would enable direct mail to continue to develop as a useful fundraising method. The potential reception for innovation amongst givers is heartening and points to direct mail having a potentially successful future.

Finally, one of the keys to the future and indeed, to improving direct mail's current effectiveness is supporter care, donor care, stewardship, relationship fundraising. Whatever name it is given, it amounts to the same thing: putting the person that gives money to support good causes at the heart of the giving relationship. It is clear – not only from the findings in this research but from the messaging from leading fundraisers and sector commentators – that this is a vital component for maintaining and building public trust and confidence in the deployment of direct mail as a fundraising tool. Indeed, it is a vital component in maintaining and building public trust and confidence in fundraising more generally: that is why principles such as openness, respect and accountability are at the heart of the Fundraising Standards Board's Fundraising Promise. Ensuring that people have the confidence to give is fundamental to all that charities and the fundraising sector do, now and in the future.

***“Most fundraising today is stereotyped, aimed at the lowest common denominator, the victim of formulae and formats designed by marketing people for easy mass reproduction. This is clearly unwise. Nonprofits need to avoid stale, repetitive fundraising approaches that dismay and deter donors.***

***So fundraisers nowadays should all aspire to be mini Isaac Newtons, to spread light into every corner of their creativity and communications thereby to illuminate that which is currently hidden but which, if we only have eyes to see it will show us how we will fundraise in the future.”<sup>2</sup>***

#### **Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

Is there a tension between techniques that work in fundraising terms but that eat into the goodwill capital of donors in the longer term? How do we make fundraising in the future sustainable?

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Burnett, [Shaping Fundraising's Future Part 2](#), Contributions magazine, Jan/Feb 2006 and also on [www.kenburnett.com](http://www.kenburnett.com)

The Fundraising Standards Board is grateful to nfpSynergy and Scotinform Ltd for conducting the research and for their general advice and support.

The Fundraising Standards Board also wishes to thank those member charities that gave up valuable time and resources to enable their donors to participate in the research. They are:

Action Aid	The Donkey Sanctuary
FARM Africa	Hope and Homes for Children
Kidney Research UK	Sense Scotland
SSPCA	VSA (Voluntary Service Aberdeen)

**Whilst these charities have commented on the content of the report, the conclusions reached are those of the FRSB and do not necessarily represent the opinions or experiences of any of the charities involved.**

# Background and Methodology

## About the Fundraising Standards Board

The Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB) administers the scheme for the self-regulation of fundraising in the UK. We strive to encourage the highest standards of fundraising practice by all fundraising organisations, regardless of their size and status.

Our scheme logo, displayed by all members, is a mark of reassurance to the public that they are committed to being honest, legal and open in their fundraising activities. As well as broadcasting our members' high standards of fundraising, we underpin this with a complaints process.

Our role also enables us to carry out or commission research into relevant fundraising methods, practices, trends and other matters of interest to the public and to organisations raising funds for good causes and to disseminate the results of that research. Indeed, we make a commitment to our members that we will do so.

## About direct mail

At its core, direct mail involves businesses and organisations writing to individuals to encourage them to respond. Businesses such as retailers use direct mail to encourage people to buy their products. Charities in the UK use direct mail to encourage people to give donations to good causes.

Across all sectors, almost £2 billion was spent on direct mail in 2005 and direct mail accounted for 17.2% of the amount spent on advertising in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Charities continue to spend considerable amounts on direct mail as a way of raising funds.

Of the top ten sectors spending on direct mail in the year to June 2007, only two – charities and retail – spent more on direct mail than they did a year previously. Between 2006 and 2007 charities expenditure on direct mail grew by 7.3% while the overall expenditure on direct mail fell by 10%.

The amount spent by the top 14 spending charities on direct mail between July 2006 and June 2007 was approximately £70 million. The most spent by any charity was just over £6 million. Within that, some charities used direct mail solely on acquisition – the process of finding new people to give to their organisation; others spent mainly on retention – the process of encouraging people who already to give to their organisation to give again or give more; most though spent on both processes.<sup>4</sup>

Direct mail is therefore big business in the advertising sector in general and in the charitable fundraising sector in particular. At some point every individual household in the UK will receive a letter or some other written communication from a charity asking people to give money to support its work. And at some point, many will respond with a donation.

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<sup>3</sup> Nielsen Media Research, <http://www.nielsenmedia.co.uk/coverage/directmail.html>

<sup>4</sup> Nielsen Media Research as reported in Harvest, Oct 2007 from Andrew Papworth

## About the research

This is the first research project undertaken by the Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB). The use of direct mail by charities to raise funds was chosen as the research topic because it is topical: the Institute of Fundraising is shortly to issue a Code of Practice for fundraisers to follow. As a fundraising method used by many charities and voluntary sector organisations, it is also relevant to a wide cross-section of the FRSB's membership. Moreover, some practices in the use of direct mail regularly attract the attention of the media and of sector commentators. The FRSB therefore considered that it was appropriate to ascertain the public's views on direct mail to usefully inform the voluntary sector's current and future use of this established fundraising tool.

This report focuses on the issues and findings relating specifically to direct mail. Part of the research also explored some broader matters relating to charitable giving by individuals and these findings will be produced in a separate report.

## Methodology

The research was carried out in two parts. The first part was undertaken by nfpSynergy through its charity awareness monitor (CAM). The CAM is a regular tracking survey of the public's knowledge, understanding, attitudes and awareness of charities and their activities. The FRSB has subscribed to nfpSynergy's syndicate and consequently has the opportunity to place questions on charity related issues. The fieldwork for this CAM survey was undertaken between 31<sup>st</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> August 2007. A nationally representative sample of 1000 adults aged 16 and over and who live in mainland Britain was surveyed using an online questionnaire. The fieldwork was undertaken for nfpSynergy by Research Now.

The second part of the research was undertaken by the Fundraising Standards Board with the assistance of eight of its charity members. These organisations undertook to send a questionnaire to 600 of their donors on their database. The participating charities were:

Action Aid  
The Donkey Sanctuary  
FARM Africa  
Hope and Homes for Children  
Kidney Research UK  
Sense Scotland  
SSPCA  
VSA (Voluntary Service Aberdeen)

A total of 4800 self-completion questionnaires were sent out, 1232 were returned using freepost envelopes, giving a response rate of 26%. This response rate compares favourably with the average response rate for market research of this type. The charities participating in the research were based throughout the UK, some operating only in one region or country. The organisations are of different sizes and operate in a range of sectors. Each charity was asked to send the survey to a sample of their donors comprised as follows:

- 200 donors who had been giving to their charity for less than 1 year
- 200 donors who have been giving to their charity for between 1 and 3 years
- 200 donors who had been giving for over 3 years

Within each of those groups of 200, the participating charities were also asked to select people who donate on different frequencies, where they could determine this. So each group of 200 was to include:

- 60 donors who make a donation once a year

- 70 donors who make a donation several times a year
- 70 donors who make a donation on a regular basis ie monthly, quarterly etc.

This weighting was to ensure that the survey was completed by a cross-section of donors, with the aim of providing a more accurate picture of the experience and views of people who had and who do respond to direct mail.

Scotinform Ltd was retained to provide guidance in the drafting of the questionnaire and to process the data so that findings were robust and independent. They printed and issued the survey forms with fieldwork being undertaken between 7 and 21 September 2007.

The two parts of the research combine to provide a comprehensive snapshot of both the general population and the giving population of the UK. In total, over 2000 people took part in this research, ensuring that its findings can be held to be representative and authoritative. However, it is important to state that this research is largely attitudinal: it explores the views and opinions of people, rather than analysing statistics and data. In many instances, the findings reflect the perceived behaviour or reaction of respondents rather than their actual behaviour or reaction. Organisations that read the report might wish to analyse the findings alongside any information they have about how their supporters actually behaved or responded to direct mail appeals.

**The Fundraising Standards Board is extremely grateful to all the participating charities, nfpSynergy and Scotinform Ltd for their support and assistance in developing and carrying out this research and in the production of this report. Whilst these charities and organisations have commented on the contents of the report, the conclusions reached are those of the FRSB and do not necessarily represent the opinions and experiences of any of the charities involved.**

## The profile of respondents

The CAM survey is designed to provide a representative sample of the general population. The FRSB survey probably provides a more realistic demographic reflection of people who give regularly, and do so by responding to direct mail appeals.

**Table 1: Age profile of all respondents**

Base: all respondents in FRSB survey and CAM wave

Age:	% (FRSB)	% (CAM)
16 - 24	1	14
25 - 34	4	17
35 - 44	12	19
45 - 54	17	15
55 - 64	27	14
65 – 74	20	
65 plus		20
75 plus	17	

While the CAM wave had a generic category for 65 +, the FRSB survey differentiated between pensioners under 75 and those over 75. The total percentage of pensioners in the FRSB survey is very much larger than those who took part in the CAM wave: 37% compared to 20%.

The gender of participants in nfpSynergy's CAM wave (CAM respondents) was balanced with 51% being female and 49% being male. Respondents to the FRSB survey for donors (FRSB respondents) were predominantly female (72%), again reflecting the profile of those known to be donating to charity.

CAM respondents were asked to identify their socio-economic status using established classifications: the FRSB survey took a slightly different approach, asking people to identify their occupation.

**Table 2a: Socio-economic definition of CAM respondents**

<b>CAM respondents</b>	
<b>AB</b>	<b>24%</b> (higher or intermediate managerial, administrative or professional)
<b>C1</b>	<b>28%</b> (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial etc)
<b>C2</b>	<b>19%</b> (skilled manual workers)
<b>DE</b>	<b>29%</b> (semi-skilled & unskilled workers; state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers)

**Table 2b: Occupation of FRSB respondents**

<b>FRSB respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
working full time	24
working part time	12
self employed	6
retired	49
looking after family/home	5
out of work due to disability/illness	2
full time education	1

When FRSB respondents were asked which ethnic category they would describe themselves as, 96% of respondents said that they were 'white British' and 2% said that they were 'other white'. They were also asked if they would describe themselves as having a disability; 17% of respondents stated 'yes', which is higher than the national average but in keeping with the higher age profile of respondents.

# Receiving and responding to direct mail

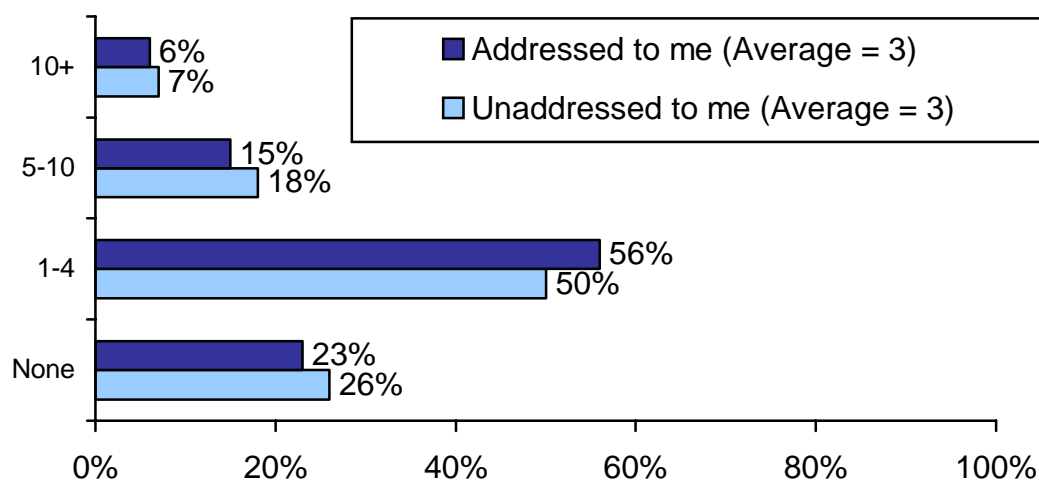
## The numbers of letters received

Both parts of the research focused on people's experiences of direct mail. The first area explored was the amount of direct mail received and whether or not this had led people to respond by making a financial donation. The research also aimed to differentiate between the effectiveness of addressed and unaddressed direct mail. The findings from both surveys are largely similar.

In the CAM survey, a majority of respondents stated they had received between one and four pieces of both addressed and unaddressed direct mail in the last three months, as table 3 shows:

**Table 3: Amount of direct mail respondents received**

Base: all CAM respondents (1000 adults 16+ Britain)

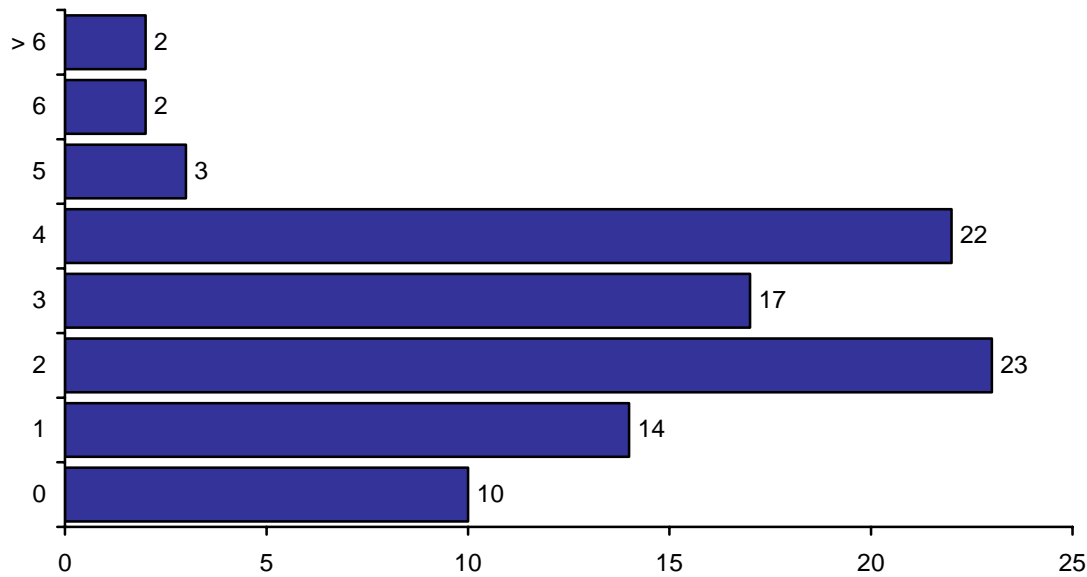


Approximately a quarter of respondents indicated that they had received no direct mail at all and less than 10% that they had received more than 10 pieces of addressed and unaddressed mail.

A slightly different question that only considered addressed direct mail was asked of established donors: "how many times a year does the charity sending you this survey contacts you by letter asking for money?" The average number of letters respondents said they received over the past year is 2.6.

**Table 4: Number of letters received by FRSB respondents**

Base: All FRSB respondents (1232 adults 16+ UK)



Most respondents stated that they had been contacted by the charity sending them the survey form either twice or four times in the past year. Just over 2% claimed to have been contacted more than six times in the last year while 10% stated that they had not received any letters at all.

### How much people read

In the CAM wave, people were asked how much direct mail they read. Perhaps unsurprisingly more people read mail that was addressed to them, with nearly two thirds (63%) reading all or some of the addressed letters and under a third reading all or some of the unaddressed ones. Nearly a third indicated that they did not read any of them, which would appear to chime with recent research that suggests that charities have the worst record for unopened mail of all sectors using direct mail with one in three letters ending up in the bin unopened.<sup>5</sup>

### How many responded with a donation

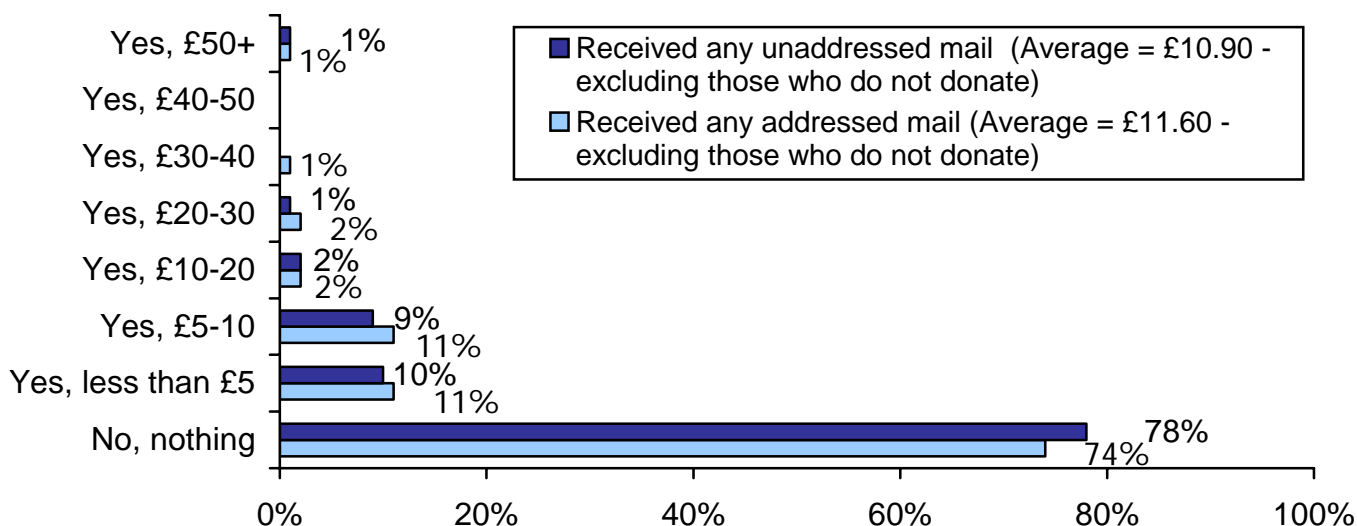
*“I can’t send much as I’m an OAP living on my own and I’ve got a rescue dog to keep as well”  
(FRSB survey respondent)*

Whether or not the direct mail item was addressed or unaddressed appeared to make little difference to CAM respondents when it came to making a donation: table 5 sets out the results, indicating only marginally more people giving in response to an addressed piece of direct mail.

<sup>5</sup> Nielson Media Research, *ibid*

**Table 5: The amounts donated by respondents to addressed and unaddressed mail**

Base: CAM respondents who read all or some addressed and unaddressed direct mail



Moreover, the amount given in response was very similar. Perhaps the most significant finding is the numbers saying they were not motivated or prompted to give anything at all with approximately three quarters of CAM respondents making no donation. However, it should also be noted that these figures (shown in table 6) represent a very small number of those who participated in the research – it discounts the three quarters who gave nothing at all.

Participants were also asked “why did you give money to this cause?” Over half of CAM respondents who made a donation answered that they did so because they usually supported this cause and a further 27% said they did so because of personal or family experience related to the cause. Just under a third said they made a donation because of what was said on the letter or leaflet they received. So in a majority of responses, people were not giving as a result of what they had read.

It is to be expected that people will be motivated into giving by a cause or personal/family experience that they know about. But what about all the good causes that people do not have some kind of link or connection with? Finding new people to make donations – known as recruiting donors – is costly and challenging. At the same time, charities also want to encourage people who have already given to them to do so again – known as retaining donors. Direct mail appeals can be written differently to meet different purposes – a cold mail, for example, to a set number of households in order to find new donors can take a very different approach from a targeted, addressed letter asking someone who gave once to give again (a warm mailing).

Yet, at its most basic, a direct mail appeal has to enable charities to communicate their link to the cause they represent and further, to communicate the need for people to give to them in order to assist them in addressing this cause. Many commentators urge charities to become more effective and indeed, innovative at communicating the cause and the need to individuals through direct mail. There are some excellent examples of organisations doing this – of exploring different ways of not only persuading people to open the envelope but also to read the contents - but the findings in this research suggest that there is potential for making the link between organisation, cause and need more explicit and hence, more successful at securing a donation.<sup>6</sup>

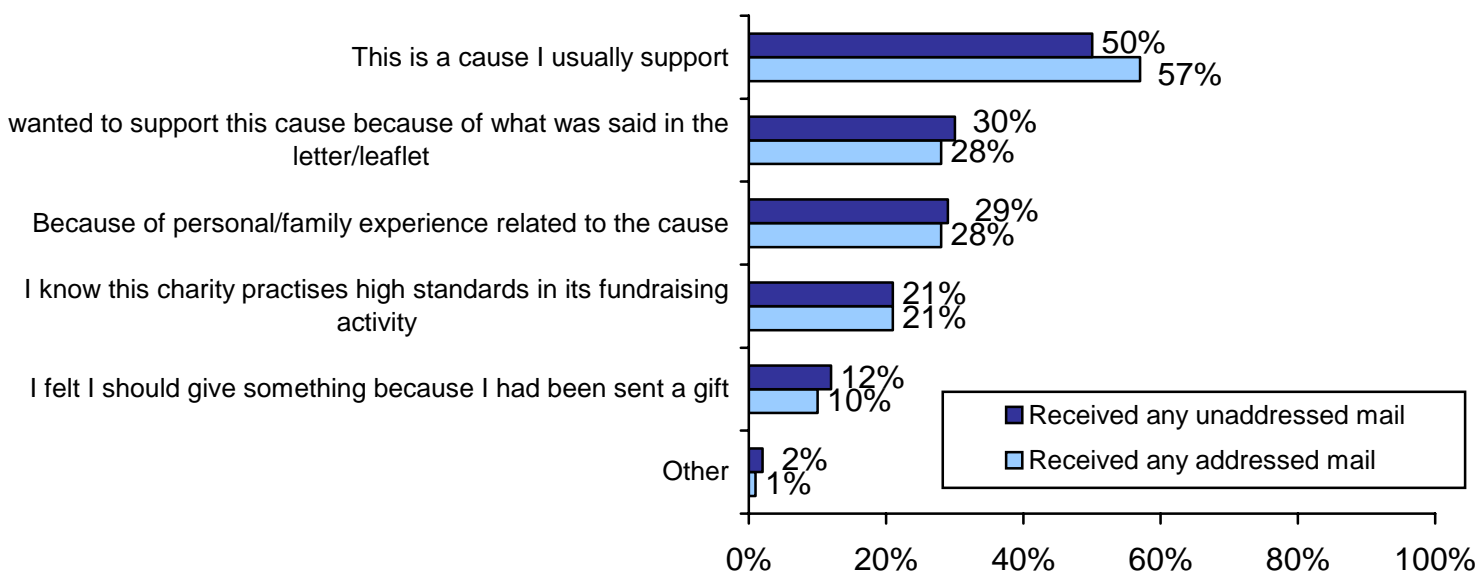
<sup>6</sup> Stephen Pidgeon (Chairman of TargetDirect) highlighted best practice and innovation in his presentation to the Institute of Fundraising Scotland's Convention; Ken Burnett, Relationship Marketing, (Chapter 10 pp 189 – 193), White Lion Press 2002

## Challenges for charity fundraisers:

How can lesser known causes and organisations use direct mail to encourage people to support their work? Is there a need to explore and experiment with the content of direct mail in order to communicate the link between organisations, cause and need more successfully?

**Table 6: Reasons for making a donation**

Base: CAM respondents who donated as a result of reading addressed or unaddressed mail



## And how much goes in the bin

The level of non-response to direct mail contact among FRSB respondents was generally lower: less than a third said they gave nothing at all. Given that these are people already giving to these particular charities – they are in effect “warm donors” – this should be expected. The findings suggest that direct mail can still be an effective fundraising tool, particularly among people who are established givers.

But as many commentators and analysts have remarked, the future for direct mail is uncertain. The increasing popularity of the mail preference service, whereby people opt out of receiving unsolicited mail, means that the opportunities for recruiting new donors are becoming more limited. Moreover, there is now a wide range of ways a person can make a donation to charity and importantly, make regular donations –much more than when direct mail first began to be used by fundraisers. Many of these appear to be more resource efficient at generating donations and regular giving in the long term. At the same time, the findings in this research suggest that there might also be issues relating to the current practice of direct mail that are conspiring to make it a less effective fundraising method.

## Getting the balance right

The research produces some interesting findings relating to the frequency of mailings, providing confirmation of what many in the sector may already suspect – that there is a balance to be struck in getting the number of mailings right to achieve the best value and the best rate of response in terms of donations made.

The FRSB survey asked people to think about how many times they are contacted by the charity sending them the survey per year. It then asked people to indicate how many times they responded (see Appendix II). The intention was to encourage people to think about their relationship with a particular charity and also to think about their behaviour in relation to direct mail.

**Table 7a: Numbers of letters received vs. total number of responses with a donation**

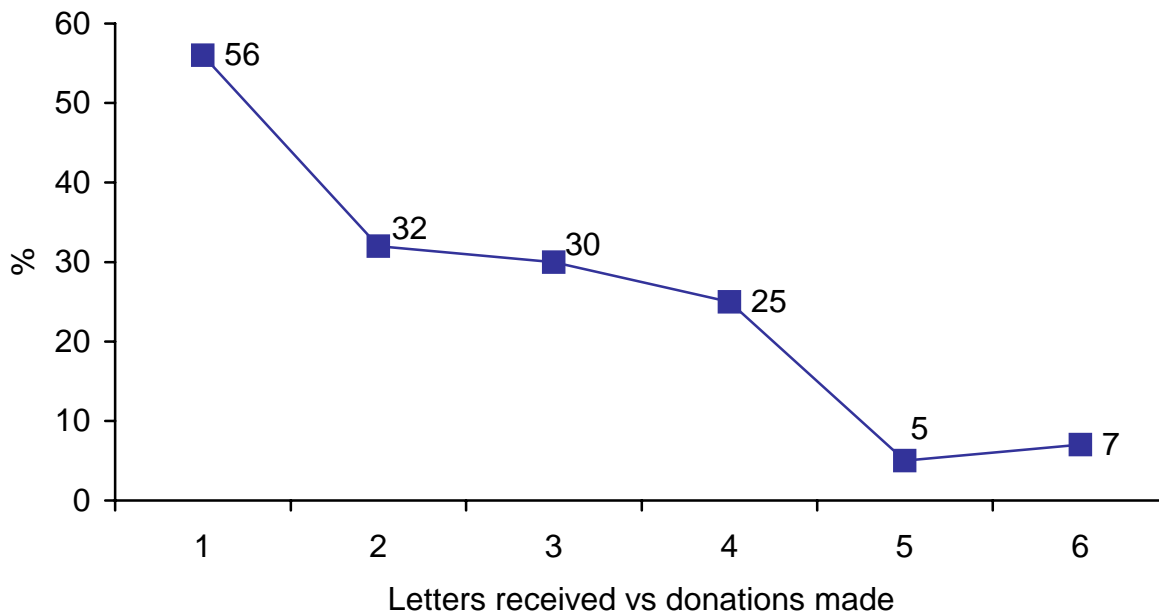
Base: FRSB respondents that received letters – findings for over 6 mailings not included because too low to be statistically meaningful

Letters Donations	1	2	3	4	5	6
0	36%	29%	23%	22%	22%	43%
1	<b>56%</b>	32%	26%	19%	22%	10%
2		<b>32%</b>	18%	23%	24%	7%
3			<b>30%</b>	8%	19%	23%
4				<b>25%</b>	5%	3%
5					<b>5%</b>	3%
6+						<b>7%</b>

Table 7a illustrates two trends. Firstly, the percentage of people who don't respond with a donation is highest when a very low or very high number of letters is sent each year. The second trend indicates that smaller numbers of letters sent per year result in more maximised donations. In other words, people sent two letters are more likely to make donations twice than four letters are likely to result in four donations being made. This is also illustrated in table 7b.

**Table 7b: Percentage of letters received resulting in the same number of donations**

Base: FRSB respondents that received letters



These results appear to suggest that the frequency of mailings does have a relationship with the pattern and level of giving. Response levels to up to four mailings per year appear to yield a reasonable result, but there is a decline once this is exceeded. The sample base for five and six mailings was quite small and for over six mailings was very small, and any conclusions should be treated with caution. However, there does appear to be some evidence that more mailing evokes a lower overall response.

Of course, the unknown factors are the value of each donation and the cost of each mailing. Charities will be able to factor in their own data and draw their own conclusions.

**Case study: How one charity enabled donor choice and how it conducts its direct mail appeals.**

Some of our donors tell us that they cannot always cope with the number of appeals they receive and find them confusing and wasteful. So in Spring 2006, accompanying our newsletter, we printed a questionnaire on the reverse of the letter to the donor to ask them *“How Are We Doing?”* By using an existing mailing, we received no negative comments about wasting resources.

One of the seven questions we asked regarded the frequency of our mailings – which did make us a little nervous that people might opt out altogether. Therefore, we carefully worded the question to ensure our donors felt they were making positive choices:

**Case study cont'd ...**

**Do we contact you at the correct time of the year?**

Spring, Easter Appeal  
Summer, Holiday Appeal  
Autumn, Autumn Raffle  
Winter, Christmas Appeal

Most of our donors who responded ticked the first box to say that they are happy with how often we contact them. Others ticked the appeals they wish to receive and we have ensured that their records have been amended to meet their wishes. Now, not all donors receive every appeal: only the Christmas Appeal is sent to all our active donors.

Getting the balance right by taking account of donors' wishes and targeting appeals by recency, frequency and value actually saves costs in producing packs and on postage. By asking the right people at the right time we have found that income has increased even though each appeal has been sent to fewer donors.

**Is there such a thing as too much direct mail?**

Another way to attempt to establish an optimum mailing level is by looking at the averages. The mean number of letters received is 2.64 and the mean response rate is 1.39. So FRSB respondents are stating that on average, they send a donation to more than half the letters they receive, but the mean response rate falls the more letters that are sent. At four letters a year, the mean response rate is 1.94 which is less than half the number of letters received. And when five letters are received a year, the mean declines slightly again to 1.81

The findings in this research do seem to suggest that less may sometimes be more. Indeed, sending more than five letters a year might actually discourage people from giving at all. Respondents who claimed to have been contacted over eight times a year by one of the participating charities had the highest non-response rate at two-thirds.

***"I think too many mail appeals actually puts people off" (FRSB survey respondent)***

***"..for a long time I have been concerned about the volume of appeals etc that come through the mail and now by email...." (FRSB survey respondent)***

It is too easy for organisations that use direct mail to raise funds to consider their activities from their own point of view, rather than the donor's. What constitutes a reasonable number of appeals for one organisation may not be thought so by a donor that supports several charities and receives letters from them all each year.

As an example, the mean level of mailings from this research is 2.64 per charity per annum per FRSB respondent. We also know from the research that the average number of charities supported is 3.96 – so therefore they are receiving between 10 and 11 mailings per annum. This of course does not include any cold mailings or other appeals through other sources.

**Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

Is there a formula to be developed and deployed that

- takes into account a number of relevant factors, such as the desire to maximise the number of donations
- provides an optimum number of times to write to donors in a year in terms of rate of return
- and that also incorporates the views, wishes and experiences of the donor?

## People’s attitudes to direct mail practices and issues

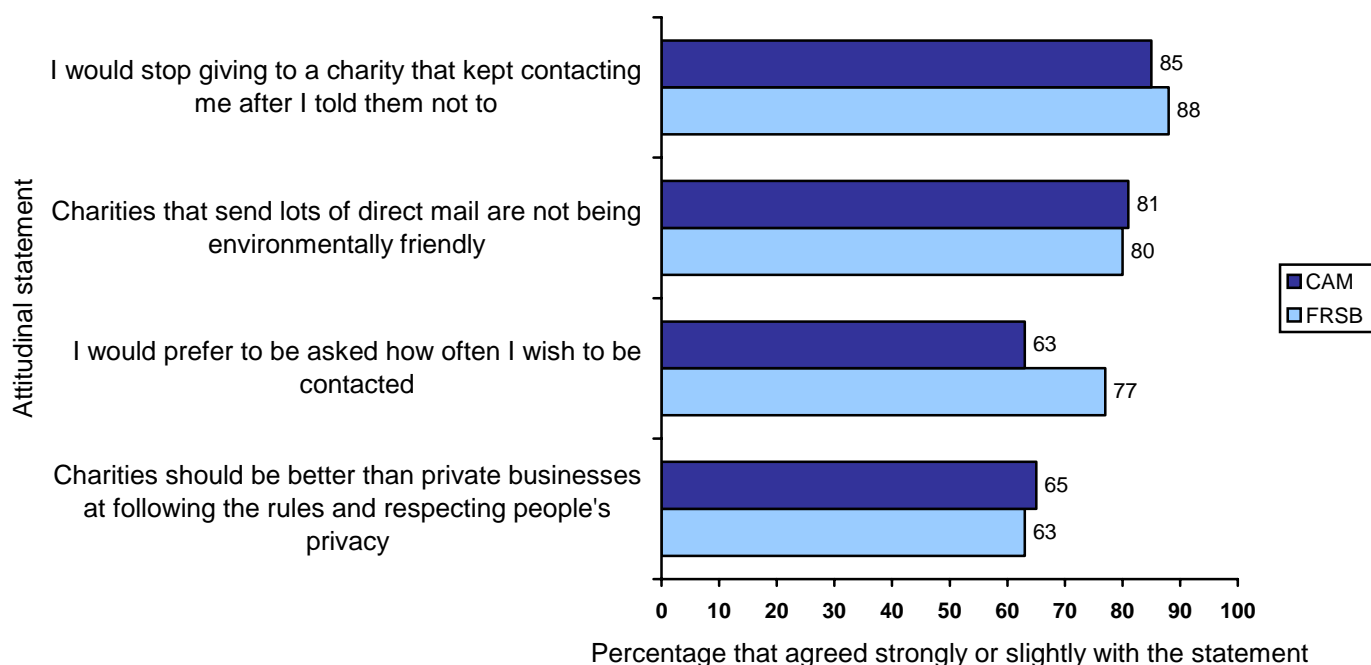
What people think about direct mail?

In both surveys, people were presented with a series of statements about direct mail and asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Not all the statements were asked in both surveys the FRSB also explored some very specific established donor issues. Yet on three of the four main issues tested, the results were remarkably similar, no matter whether the person responding was a member of the general public or an established giver.

From this part of the research it is clear that people want charities to respect their wishes, are concerned at the environmental impact of direct mail and would like more influence in the relationship they have with charities.

**Table 8: Attitude statements with highest levels of agreement**

Base: CAM and FRSB respondents



The statement that attracted the most agreement from both cohorts was “I would stop giving to a charity that kept contacting me after I told them not to”. 85% of CAM respondents and 88% of FRSB respondents strongly or slightly agreed with this statement.<sup>7</sup> Such a level of agreement suggests that respect is a key issue for both the general public and people known to give to good causes. This response is reinforced by the findings to other similar statements.

A statement was also included to establish to what extent people would like to be contacted. In the CAM wave, it was presented to respondents as “I would like to be asked how often I should receive mail from charities I already support” and 63% strongly or slightly agreed.<sup>8</sup> In the FRSB survey, it was phrased slightly differently – “I would prefer to be asked how often I wish to be contacted” – and elicited strong or slight agreement from 77% of respondents.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the strength of feeling among established givers was greater than it was with the general public: 53% of FRSB respondents strongly agreed compared to 26% of CAM respondents.

<sup>7</sup> Among CAM respondents, 61% strongly agreed and 24% slightly agreed; among FRSB respondents, 78% strongly agreed and 10% slightly agreed;

<sup>8</sup> 26% of CAM respondents strongly agreed and 37% slightly agreed

<sup>9</sup> The breakdown is 53% strongly agreeing and 24% slightly agreeing

Not only are respondents suggesting that they expect to be respected but they also appear to be indicating that they are looking for a mutually beneficial relationship with charities, with dialogue rather than monologue.

Within the sector, it may be considered that charities enjoy a “special status”, a unique standing in people’s affections, implying greater leniency with the rules on direct mail that apply to the commercial sector. This research suggests otherwise. Nearly two thirds of both groups surveyed strongly or slightly agreed that “Charities should be better at following the rules and respecting people’s privacy than private businesses are”.<sup>10</sup> If there is any sense of charities occupying a unique status, it would appear to suggest stricter rather than more lax conditions in terms of behaviour!

Taken together, these findings indicate a clear sense that respect matters and that people want to be engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship with charities. People expect charities to at the very least play by the rules that apply to other users of direct mail. It is therefore appropriate that the Institute of Fundraising is shortly to issue a Code of Practice on Direct Mail for fundraisers to follow.

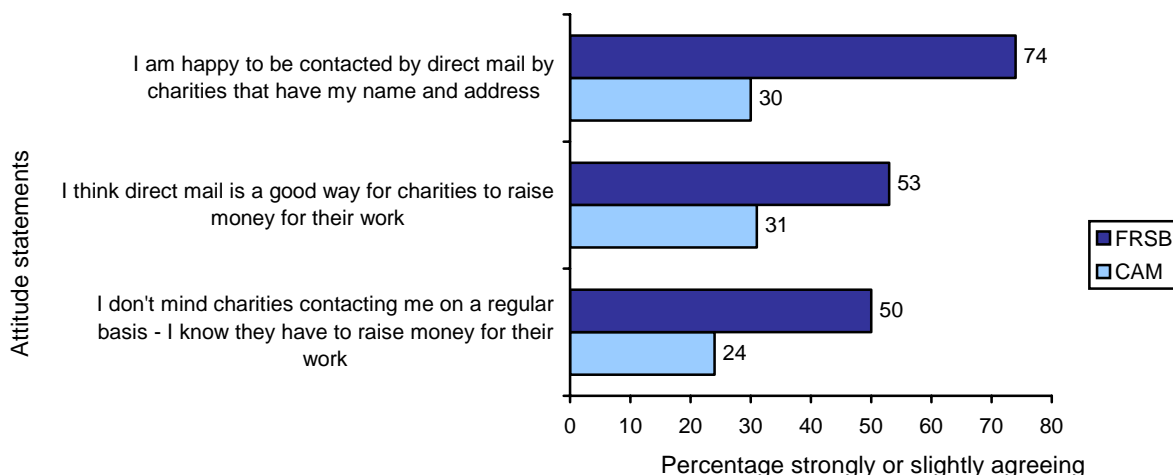
**Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

How can charities establish mutually beneficial relationships with donors?  
 In practical terms, how can they be put at the heart of the giving relationship? How is the relationship to be maintained?

**People who give regularly are more likely to appreciate contact**

**Table 9: Attitude statements showing where FRSB and CAM respondents had different levels of agreement**

Base: FRSB and CAM respondents



<sup>10</sup> Among CAM respondents, 35% strongly agreed and 30% slightly agreed; among FRSB respondents, 36% strongly agreed and 27% slightly agreed

There is evidence from this research suggesting that when charities “get it right” donors are much more receptive to what they do in fundraising terms and why they do it. There was divergence of opinion between FRSB and CAM respondents over contact and the use of direct mail generally. The statement “I am happy to be contacted by direct mail by charities that I have given my name and address to” was strongly agreed with by over a third (36%) of FRSB respondents but only by 5% of CAM respondents.<sup>11</sup>

This finding suggests a number of issues. Firstly, it has implications for charities’ use of direct mail in finding new donors known as “cold mail” it is when people are sent a letter for the first time by a particular charity to encourage them to donate money. The general public appears to be saying that it objects to charities writing to them personally if the individual concerned has not actually given them permission to do so. More and more people now opt to restrict the amount of access external organisations have to their contact details – by opting into the mail preference service, by not allowing their entry on the electoral register to be displayed publicly and by opting out of marketing mailings from companies and third parties. This makes it harder for charities to write personally to potentially new donors seeking their support.

One way charities have traditionally approached this issue is by using reciprocal mailing lists. Yet, this practice of charities swapping lists of names and addresses of donors to find more potential donors was considered rarely or never acceptable by over three quarters of FRSB respondents. Only 2% of respondents considered it always acceptable and 12% sometimes acceptable for charities to “sometimes swap lists of names and addresses of donors with another charity in order to find more people who might want to help fund their work”: 53% considered this practice “never acceptable”. What remains unknown is if more people would find it acceptable where they have consented to their name and address passed on. It is an issue charities themselves might want to test with their donors. But as it stands, this finding appears to confirm that people value their privacy highly and only want charities contacting them by letter if they have permitted those particular charities to do so by providing their contact details.

The second conclusion is a much more positive one that can provide reassurance for charities using direct mail to raise funds. The strength and level of agreement among FRSB respondents, who are established givers, suggests that when people start giving on a regular basis, their awareness of what charities do and why they do it increases. They appreciate why they are being contacted and know why charities want to keep their name and address on file, a situation a less committed or occasional supporter might be more sceptical about.

Other findings appear to support the assertion that when people know more about what charities do and how fundraising works, they are more relaxed about contact and being asked for donations. While only a quarter of CAM respondents strongly or slightly agreed with “I don’t mind charities contacting me on a regular basis – I know they have to raise money for their work”, half of FRSB respondents did so.<sup>12</sup> Of course, it should be noted that half of established givers disagreed with the statement although only 12% did so strongly. It again suggests that engaging with donors on when and how often to contact them might be appropriate.

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<sup>11</sup> 36% of FRSB respondents strongly agreed with this statement with a further 38% slightly agreeing; only 5% of CAM respondents strongly agreed with a further 25% slightly agreeing

<sup>12</sup> Of FRSB respondents, 16% strongly agreed and 34% slightly agreed with this statement; of CAM respondents, 3% strongly agreed and 21% slightly agreed

Finally, just over half of FRSB respondents agreed strongly or slightly that direct mail is a good way for charities to raise money for their work compared to less than a third of CAM respondents.<sup>13</sup> And even allowing for the fact that over a quarter of established givers disagree slightly (13%) or strongly (9%), this finding might suggest that when people know what direct mail is being used for, they have a much more favourable attitude towards its use.

### **But everyone appears to want greener charities**

Attitudes converge again when considering the environmental impact of the use of direct mail. The statement “charities that send lots of direct mail are not being environmentally friendly” elicited strong or slight approval from 81% of CAM respondents and 80% of FRSB respondents.<sup>14</sup> Given the current political focus on environmental concerns, charities should consider rigorously how and when to use direct mail to raise funds.

#### **Challenges for Charity Fundraisers:**

How should charities address current environmental concerns surrounding the use of direct mail?

### **What people really think**

The copy and image content of direct mail also really matters. Honesty is the key.

- 69% of the general population and 75% of regular givers think it is never or rarely acceptable for charities to exaggerate when trying to encourage giving<sup>15</sup>

If people are indicating that they do not like exaggeration, it can be taken as read that they would absolutely not accept being lied to. There would appear to be little tolerance for over-statement and hyperbole. Trust and confidence in what charities do and say is important to enable them to make a connection with the giving public.

But the use of shocking or distressing images in direct mail materials is less of a problem.

- 73% of established givers and 55% of the general public considered that this is sometimes or always acceptable.

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<sup>13</sup> 16% of FRSB respondents strongly agreed with the statement “I think direct mail is a good way for charities to raise money for their work” and 37% slightly agreed; 4% of CAM respondents strongly agreed and 27% slightly agreed

<sup>14</sup> 44% of CAM respondents strongly agreed with this statement and a further 37% slightly agreed; 48% of FRSB respondents strongly agreed and 32% slightly agreed

<sup>15</sup> Only 1% of FRSB respondents and 2% of CAM respondents thought it always acceptable that “charities may sometimes exaggerate when trying to encourage you to give to them

Within that finding, 55% of FRSB respondents and 47% of CAM respondents considered it sometimes acceptable that “charities deal with very difficult and upsetting issues and may use shocking or distressing images in their direct mail material”.

Moreover, given that nearly a third (30%) of CAM respondents also found it rarely or never acceptable, it would seem that charities should exercise caution and only use such images after careful consideration and when they believe it is genuinely necessary to make their point.

## The use of gifts in direct mail

In both surveys, we explored the extent of the use of gifts in direct mail and also people's attitudes to their use. While over a third of CAM respondents claimed they had received direct mail containing a free gift, 1 in 5 of FRSB respondents said they had. Most people though said they had not received a gift or an incentive to give in any recent direct mail.

### Do gifts work?

The inclusion of a gift appeared to have little impact on whether or not people gave in response to that direct mail appeal. Only 5% of FRSB respondents said they made a donation as a result of receiving the gift with 44% making a donation but stating they would have done so if there had been no gift. Interestingly, 46% did not give anything which is a much higher non response rate than the 31% level of non response to direct mail generally that is highlighted elsewhere in the report.

The over 75s are most likely to make a donation because they received a gift – 12% of them do so, with younger age groups more likely to make a donation anyway (60% of 25 to 34 year olds) or to make no donation (62% of 35 to 44 year olds).

### Challenges for Charity Fundraisers

Do gifts result in more people giving? Are they an effective way of motivating a younger audience to give? Should they be used to motivate age groups that are already more likely to be regular givers?

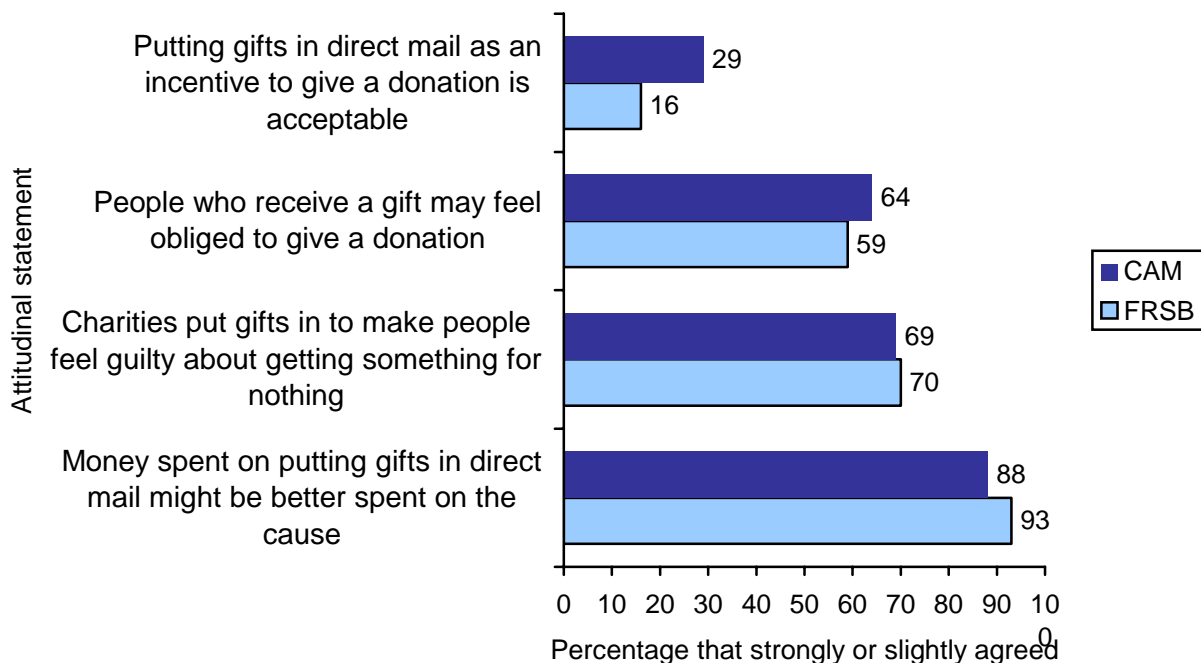
When is it appropriate for charities to incentivise people to give through direct mail? And how should that be achieved?

### What people think of the use of gifts?

Both cohorts were presented with similar attitudinal statements about direct mail with gifts. The findings show that participants in both parts of the research have very strong opinions about their use, few of them particularly positive.

**Table 10: Attitude statements on gifts in direct mail – highest levels of agreement**

Base: FRSB and CAM respondents



The vast majority of both groups agreed strongly or slightly that “money spent on putting gifts in direct mail might be better spent on the cause”. A similar proportion of respondents in both surveys (approximately 70%) strongly or slightly agreed that “charities put gifts in to make people feel guilty about getting something for nothing” and two thirds strongly or slightly agreed that “people who receive a gift may feel obliged to give a donation”. Interestingly, while the total percentage of respondents approving these statements in each group is similar, FRSB respondents are much more likely to agree strongly indicating stronger feelings and definite opinions on these three statements among established givers<sup>16</sup>.

Yet, people’s concerns are not borne out by experience: very few people from either cohort stated that they actually made a donation as a result of receiving a gift in direct mail. Most respondents from both surveys also say that they think putting gifts in direct mail is unacceptable. Yet, there are many charities that include gifts/premiums/incentives regularly in direct mail appeals because they do lead to higher response rates than appeals without them. What is required now perhaps is a quantitative study that compares what people say they will do and what they actually do in terms of responding to direct mail with gifts.

Given what this research tells us, it would be appropriate to consider the passion with which some people, particularly people who are already giving regularly, presented their opinions on gifts. Moreover, it is worth considering what people think are the motivating factors behind individuals responding to direct mail appeals that contain gifts – guilt and obligation – and what commentators suggest are desirable emotional bases for successful long term donor strategies.<sup>17</sup> If charities are to use gifts appropriately and successfully, they might wish to consider more carefully the circumstances in which they should be included in a direct mail appeal, and indeed the type of gift/incentive used. Alan Clayton, Managing Director of Cascaid, suggests this formula:

<sup>16</sup> On the statement “charities put gifts in to make people feel guilty...”, 41% of FRSB respondents agreed strongly and 29% agreed slightly, while 32% of CAM respondents agreed strongly and 37% agreed slightly; the statement “people who receive a gift may feel obliged to give a donation” was agreed strongly with by 23% of FRSB respondents with 36% agreeing slightly while 17% of CAM respondents agreed strongly and 47% agreed slightly

<sup>17</sup> John Grain Associates suggest in their Principles of Donor Care that “donors want to feel good about giving you a donation”, that “donors want to be inspired” and that “donors judge you on every interaction”; [www.johngrainassociates.com/downloads.htm](http://www.johngrainassociates.com/downloads.htm), Principles of Donor Care Articles 1 - 3

“Premiums work well for the donor and lifetime value if:

- They have a high perceived value
- They have a low perceived cost
- They are useful
- They are mission related
- They are lumpy”.

### **Time to try something new?**

Although gifts in direct mail is a practice largely disliked or at least disapproved of, participants in the research indicated that they were not hostile to change and potentially new practices. Nearly two thirds of respondents from both groups (65%) agree strongly or slightly that charities are right to try different ways of encouraging people to give money to them. And while participants are not quite at the stage of anything goes, a significant minority - approximately a quarter - agree that “anything which encourages people to give to good causes is justified”. So while many do not consider the inclusion of gifts in direct mail as appropriate, people, including established givers, are happy to see charities exploring new and different ways of encouraging people to donate to them. And while innovation clearly costs in terms of the resources required to get a new fundraising initiative off the ground, there is an audience apparently ready and willing to be receptive to new ideas and new practices in direct mail.

#### **Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

How can fundraisers make the case for an innovation budget while at the same time satisfying demands to meet short term targets? How can fundraisers share the risk of investing in new and untested techniques?

***“Most fundraising today is stereotyped, aimed at the lowest common denominator, the victim of formulae and formats designed by marketing people for easy mass reproduction. This is clearly unwise. Nonprofits need to avoid stale, repetitive fundraising approaches that dismay and deter donors.***

***So fundraisers nowadays should all aspire to be mini Isaac Newtons, to spread light into every corner of their creativity and communications thereby to illuminate that which is currently hidden but which, if we only have eyes to see it will show us how we will fundraise in the future.”<sup>18</sup>***

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<sup>18</sup> Ken Burnett, Shaping Fundraising’s Future Part 2, Contributions magazine, Jan/Feb 2006 and also on [www.kenburnett.com](http://www.kenburnett.com)

# Conclusions, key findings and recommendations

## Conclusions and key findings

*“We fundraisers ought to pause, once in a while, from our endless round of appeals, mailings, events and promotions, and try to see what our stream of commercialised asking looks like from the point of view of our donors..... Perhaps we annoy more people than we inspire. What a terrifying thought.”<sup>19</sup>*

Direct mail is an established fundraising practice, used widely in different forms. But some concerns have been expressed recently about current practices and indeed, its long term future as an effective and efficient method by which charities can raise funds. At the same time, the Institute of Fundraising is producing a Code of Practice on direct mail for fundraisers to follow. It was therefore considered important to add the views of the public to the mix, particularly as the sector has now entered the era of self-regulation of fundraising in the UK. Considering the public's views of particular fundraising activities will form an important part of the sector's collective efforts to maintain and build public trust and confidence. Following the example of Professor Adrian Sargeant <sup>20</sup>, the FRSB's research aimed not only to reach the general public, but also, people who are known to give regularly to good causes. Of particular importance for this research is that many of the people who took part in the surveys, have responded to direct mail, and continue to do so, in order to donate to charity.

The aim of the research is to provide fundraisers with some useful findings to inform their current and future practice. It should be noted though that the research is largely attitudinal – focusing on people's opinions – and should be considered alongside appropriate quantitative research. A useful exercise for fundraisers working in this area would be to look at the behaviour of their own individual givers. This report highlights what people say they do; analysis of a donor database would show what they actually do. Taking both together might provide the most useful insight into developing future direct mail activity.

Moreover, while some of these findings bring something new to the table; some simply add to the weight of evidence from other research studies; and others reinforce the advice provided to fundraisers on “relationship fundraising” and donor care.<sup>21</sup> However, it is the global nature of these findings on direct mail that should give most food for thought. It is believed that this is the first time such a large cross section of the general public and of committed givers in the UK – over 2000 people in total - have been asked their views on the use of and practices involved in direct mail fundraising. Without them direct mail would not work so their opinions ought to be seriously considered in the future development and use of direct mail. Attention should also be given to the analysis of the correlation between the number of times a charity writes to a donor and the number of times a donor responds; people's opinions of the practice of using direct mail as a fundraising tool and in particular, in the use of gifts in direct mail. All these findings should be considered by fundraisers planning a development strategy that uses direct mail to recruit and retain donors.

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<sup>19</sup> Ken Burnett, Relationship Fundraising, (Chapter 14, page 323); White Lion Press 2002

<sup>20</sup> To find out more about Professor Sargeant's research and to view current reports and presentations, visit [www.charitablefundraising.org](http://www.charitablefundraising.org)

<sup>21</sup> Ken Burnett, *ibid*; also worth a look [www.johngrainassociates.com](http://www.johngrainassociates.com) for their Ten Principles of Donor Care

## Key Findings

### People's views of direct mail practices

- People want charities to respect their wishes and to feel that they are in a mutually beneficial relationship

If they have asked a charity to stop contacting them, respondents in this research indicated they would be unhappy if that does not happen. Indeed, they may stop giving. They also want some say in how often a charity contacts them asking for money. And while people who regularly give are happy to be contacted by charities they have given their name and address to, many do not want their contact details passed on so that another charity can contact them.

The key to understanding why a “give and take” relationship is important to establishing long term giving patterns from people is to look at what happens in its absence. A recent presentation by Professor Adrian Sargeant explored why donors terminate their support by considering “defection” in the context of other situations. The biggest reason customers defect from a supplier or retailer is because of a lack of interest from the supplier. Using another analogy, that of “50 ways to lose a lover”, reasons cited include ignoring them, lying to them and a failure to deliver on promises.<sup>22</sup>

This is a key finding from the research. Respect matters. People want charities they give to, to treat them as partners in a relationship. They want some say in how and when they are contacted. They expect charities to respect them as donors and to engage them in their work.

The concept of donor care is not a new one, yet the findings of this research appear to suggest that it is not in evidence in the use of direct mail to elicit donations: “supporter care is still given too much lip service and not enough genuine thought and attention by the vast majority of fundraisers”<sup>23</sup>. But the concept is clearly still a relevant one: “it’s not too late to put donors at the centre of our activities and to allow their generosity and commitment to drive our relationship with them”<sup>24</sup>

#### **Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

How can charities establish mutually beneficial relationships with donors? In practical terms, how can they be put at the heart of the giving relationship? How is the relationship maintained?

<sup>22</sup> Professor Adrian Sargeant, taken from his AFP presentation [Keeping Donors Loyal Nov 2007](#)

<sup>23</sup> John Grain, [Principles of Donor Care Article 3](#) [www.johngrainassociates.com/downloads.htm](http://www.johngrainassociates.com/downloads.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Ken Burnett, *ibid* (Chapter 14, pg 329)

- The content of direct mail matters

“That means no fluff, no faked sincerity, no obtuse language, no promises you can’t keep”<sup>25</sup>  
 The findings from this research reinforce advice from leading fundraisers and commentators. Do not exaggerate – the vast majority of the general public and indeed established givers really do not like it (three quarters of FRSB respondents consider it never or rarely acceptable to exaggerate when trying to encourage giving). Trust and confidence in what charities do and say is important to enable them to make a connection with the giving public.

Yet, 50% of people surveyed do not mind the use of shocking or distressing images: in appropriate circumstances, and when deployed carefully, they clearly have a role to play in direct mail appeals

- People doubt the motivations for including gifts in direct mail appeals

Most respondents agreed either strongly or slightly that people might give in response to a letter containing a gift because they felt obliged to or because they felt guilty for getting something or nothing. Is this the most appropriate reason for giving to charity?

At the same time, a majority felt that the money spent on gifts might be being wasted. It is worth noting that waste and money not getting to the cause are regularly given as reasons why many people stop giving to charity altogether (or at least justify to themselves why they do not give).<sup>26</sup>

**Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

Do gifts result in more people giving? Are they an effective way of motivating a younger audience to give? Should they be used to motivate age groups that are already more likely to be regular givers?

When is it appropriate for charities to incentivise people to give through direct mail? And how should that be achieved?

- Most people do not appear to respond to letters containing gifts

Apart from one age group (over 75s), which is already donating to good causes, most FRSB respondents stated that they do not give a donation if the letter contains a gift. Charities that send letters to donors containing gifts can point to results that indicate otherwise. It is proposed that more detailed guidance for and scrutiny of current practice is required to determine what works and why it works. That way best practice in the use of gifts can be developed, promoted and deployed.

- People who give regularly have a better appreciation of why charities use direct mail

The findings also appear to demonstrate that donor care works. FRSB respondents (established and/or regular givers) had much higher approval ratings than CAM respondents (the general public) for statements about being contacted regularly by

<sup>25</sup> Ken Burnett, *ibid* (Chapter 14, pg 329)

<sup>26</sup> nfpSynergy’s *Scottish Charity Engagement Monitor*, June 2007

charities, charities using direct mail to elicit donations and understanding why charities contact them regularly. When charities “get it right”, people who regularly give to good causes appear to be more receptive and more aware of what they are doing and why they do it. They appreciate why charities contact them asking for money. They appreciate why direct mail is used as a way to contact them. And those charities that send an appropriate number of letters – not so many that it puts people off – appear to reap the rewards.

- People who give regularly are receptive to innovation in fundraising

People, particularly those already giving to good causes, say they would be happy to see charities exploring new methods that encourage people to give to them. The message is clear – there is room for change in how charities use direct mail and indeed, other methods and activities, to raise funds. Innovation is surely essential to avoid decline in the efficacy of direct mail and to enable sustainable fundraising activity. Fundraisers keen to break the mould might want to consider adopting the principle of the 90 degree shift, espoused by Ken Burnett.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

How can fundraisers make the case for an innovation budget while at the same time satisfying demands to meet short term targets? How can fundraisers share the risk of investing in new and untested techniques?

#### **On receiving and responding to direct mail**

- Members of the public receive approximately 6 pieces of direct mail every 3 months
- Donors indicate that they receive on average nearly 3 letters a year from their chosen charity asking them to donate money
- Large amounts of direct mail ends up in the bin  
A third of CAM respondents indicated that they do not read a third of the charity direct mail they receive.
- People are concerned about the environmental impact of direct mail.  
The statement “charities that send lots of direct mail are not being environmentally friendly” elicited strong or slight approval from 81% of CAM respondents and 80% of FRSB respondents.

In light of the increasing acceptance of environmental issues as well as the obvious cost implications for their organisations, fundraisers might wish to think more carefully about how they conduct direct mail appeals

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<sup>27</sup> Ken Burnett, Shaping Fundraising's Future Parts One and Two, Contributions magazine Jan/Feb 2006 or at [www.kenburnett.com](http://www.kenburnett.com)

## Challenges for charity fundraisers

How should charities address current environmental concerns surrounding the use of direct mail?

- Direct mail that is addressed to the recipient is more likely to be read  
Two thirds of CAM respondents advised that they read all or some of the letters addressed to them. This suggests that targeting works, but
- Unaddressed mail seems just as likely to elicit a donation of equivalent value  
The average amount given by CAM respondents to either type of direct mail is approximately £11.00
- The content of direct mail encourages people to give only in a minority of cases

According to this research, people are more likely to be motivated to give because of the cause or experience (over 3/4s) and not because of the content of a letter (1/3). Direct mail enables charities to communicate their link to that cause and to ask people to give to them in order to address the cause. It seems like stating the obvious but is it? Communicating all of this, of making the link between the cause, the organisation and the letter must surely result in more effective appeals.

### Challenges for charity fundraisers:

How can lesser known causes and organisations use direct mail to encourage people to support their work? Is there a need to explore and experiment with the content of direct mail in order to communicate the link between organisations, cause and need more successfully?

- There is potentially a balance to be struck when considering the number of times a year to contact donors

In considering how to attain best value and the best rate of response in terms of donations made, up to four mailings a year appear to provide that balance. Moreover, organisations might want to consider the relationship from the donor's point of view – they might be receiving multiple mailings throughout the year from several charities, all of them asking for money

- Too many direct mail appeals may well result in very little return at all

Less may sometimes result in more. If five or more letters a year are sent, more letters will result in no donations at all and there appears to be less opportunity to maximise the number of donations. Pester power does not work and can in fact have the opposite effect. As one commentator puts it, "There are clearly problems with charity direct mail. There's too much of it. Not enough of it gets opened. Its response rates are suffering. It's unpopular. And yet, many charities have to rely on it."<sup>28</sup> Entering into a direct mail relationship with donors clearly must involve more than just bombarding them with appeals for money.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Papworth, Harvest Newsletter Oct 2007

### **Challenges for charity fundraisers**

Is there a formula to be developed and deployed that

- takes into account a number of relevant factors, such as the desire to maximise the number of donations
- provides an optimum number of times to write to donors in a year in terms of rate of return
- and that also incorporates the views, wishes and experiences of the donor?

### **On donors**

- People who give to good causes regularly are more likely to be women and be over 65

There are perhaps a number of general conclusions to be drawn from this research. Firstly, direct mail is still a useful way of encouraging people to give to good causes. People are still receptive to it as a way of giving for the first time to an organisation or as a way of giving regularly to that organisation. Yet, for all that, the way it has evolved to date does not appear to find particular favour with the giving public. The findings suggest that there is a need for guidance on particular practices that ensure they are deployed in a way that promotes high standards and consequently engenders public trust and confidence. Thirdly, there is an opportunity for change that would enable direct mail to continue to develop as a useful fundraising method. Donors in particular appear to keen to see new ideas tried out: this is heartening and points to direct mail having a potentially successful future.

Most importantly, one of the keys to the future and indeed, to improving direct mail's current effectiveness is supporter care, donor care, stewardship, relationship fundraising. Whatever name it is given, it amounts to the same thing: putting the person that gives money to support good causes at the heart of the giving relationship. It is clear – not only from the findings in this research but from the messages from leading fundraisers and sector commentators – that this is a vital component for maintaining and building public trust and confidence in the deployment of direct mail as a fundraising tool. Indeed, it is a vital component in maintaining and building public trust and confidence in fundraising more generally: that is why principles such as openness, respect and accountability are at the heart of the Fundraising Standards Board's Fundraising Promise. Ensuring that people have the confidence to give is fundamental to all that charities and the fundraising sector do, now and in the future.

### **Challenges for charity fundraisers:**

Is there a tension between techniques that work in fundraising terms but that eat into the goodwill capital of donors in the longer term? How do we make fundraising in the future sustainable?

CAM research carried out by



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With thanks to the participating charities



## Appendix I

### nfpSynergy CAM Questionnaire

#### ASK ALL

#### GRID – ONE ANSWER PER COLONM

**Q7.** Charities often send mail to large numbers of supporters or potential supporters to ask for donations. Such direct mail can either be addressed to you by name or have no address on it at all. Can you estimate how many pieces of direct mail you have received from charities in the last 3 months?

	Direct mail that was addressed to me	Direct mail that was unaddressed
None		
1-3		
5-10		
10+		

#### ASK ALL

#### MC

**Q8.** Did you read any of them? Please tick all that apply.

- I read all the ones addressed to me
- I read all the ones that were not addressed
- I read some of the ones addressed to me
- I read some of the ones that were not addressed
- I did not read any of them

#### ASK ALL

#### MC

**Q9.** As a result of reading any charity direct mail, did you give to the charities they were from, and if so how much  
(tick all the boxes that apply)

- No, nothing
- Yes, less than £5
- Yes, £5-10
- Yes, £15-20
- Yes, £20-30
- Yes, £30-40
- Yes, £40-50
- Yes, £50+

#### ASK IF YES ANYWHERE IN QUESTION 9

#### MC

**Q10.** Why did you give money to this cause? (Tick all that apply)

This is a cause I usually support

I felt I should give something because I had been sent a gift

I wanted to support this cause because of what was said in the letter/leaflet

I know this charity practises high standards in its fundraising activity

Because of personal/family experience related to the cause

Other (please state what)

**ASK ALL**

**SC**

**Q11.** Did any of your charity mail include a free gift?

Yes

No

Can't remember

**ASK ALL**

**GRID – ONE ANSWER PER ROW**

**Q12.** To what extent do you agree with the following statements about direct mail?

	Agree strongly	Agree slightly	Not sure	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
I am happy to be contacted by direct mail by charities that have my name and address					
Charities that send lots of direct mail are not being environmentally friendly					
Because of the special nature of the work they do, charities should not have to follow the same rules about direct mail that apply to businesses					
I think direct mail is a good way for charities to raise money for their work					
Unaddressed mail is junk mail					
I would prefer to be contacted only at certain times of the year by my chosen charity (ies)					
I would stop giving to a charity that kept contacting me after I told them not to					
Charities that break data protection law ie use someone's details without authorisation should be disciplined					
Charities should be better at following the rules and respecting people's privacy than private businesses are					
I don't mind charities contacting me on a regular basis – I know they have to raise money for their work					
I would like to be asked how often I should receive mail from charities that I support already					

**ASK ALL**

**GRID – ONE ANSWER PER COLONM**

**Q13.** To what extent do you agree with the following statements about direct mail with gifts?

	Agree strongly	Agree slightly	Not sure	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
Charities are right to try different ways of encouraging people to give money to					

them

Putting gifts in direct mail as an incentive to give a donation is acceptable

People who receive a gift may feel obliged to give a donation

Money spent on putting gifts in direct mail might be better spent on the cause

Charities put gifts in to make people feel guilty about getting something for nothing

Anything which encourages people to give to good causes is justified

**ASK ALL**

**GRID – ONE ANSWER PER ROW**

**Q14.** How acceptable do you find the following direct mail practices?

Always acceptable	Sometimes acceptable	Not sure	Rarely acceptable	Never acceptable
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Some charities deal with very difficult & upsetting issues and may use shocking or distressing images in their direct mail materials

Charities may sometimes exaggerate when trying to encourage you to give to them

## Appendix II

### FRSB Donor Questionnaire

## Survey of Donors

### 1. Current Charity Donations

**Q1** When did you last give to charity? Please tick one box only.

- In the last three months
- 3 - 6 months ago
- 6 - 12 months ago
- 12-18 months ago
- 18-24 months ago
- More than 24 months ago

**Q2** How many charities do you regularly give to? Regularly means that you give more than 'one off' donations; for example this could be once a year, every month or some other timescale. Please tick one box only.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- more than 5

**We would like you to tell us how you give to the charity that has sent you this survey. Thinking of this charity that you gave to please answer the following questions.**

**Q3** How did you start giving to this charity? Please tick one box only.

- The charity contacted me by telephone
- The charity wrote to me personally
- A representative came to my door
- I signed up to giving to them on the street
- I responded to an unaddressed letter that came in the post
- I responded to an insert that came with a newspaper or magazine
- I responded to a TV, press or radio advert
- I bought a charity Lottery ticket
- I bought from the charity's gift catalogue or charity Christmas cards
- I gave money or signed up to their mailing list through their website
- I sponsored someone to do an event
- Other - please specify

Don't know/can't remember

- Q4 How do you give to this charity now? Please tick all boxes that apply.**
- I give a regular amount through my bank eg once a year, monthly or every quarter
  - I occasionally respond to letters the charity sends me
  - I give money when the charity phones me
  - I buy from the charity's gift catalogue or charity Christmas cards
  - I buy charity Lottery tickets
  - I give through their website
  - I give money out of my salary
  - I attend events that raise money for the charity
  - I have made provision in my will
  - I raise money myself by getting sponsored or holding an event
  - I sponsor people for an event
  - Other - please specify
- 
- Don't know/can't remember

- Q5 Approximately how many times a year does this charity contact you by letter asking for money? Please tick one box only.**
- |             |                          |                       |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| None        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Five times            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Once        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Six times             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Twice       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Seven times           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Three times | <input type="checkbox"/> | Eight times           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Four times  | <input type="checkbox"/> | More than eight times | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- Q6 How many of these letters do you respond to (ie give to the charity as a result of receiving the letters)? Please tick one box only.**
- |             |                          |                       |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| None        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Five times            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Once        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Six times             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Twice       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Seven times           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Three times | <input type="checkbox"/> | Eight times           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Four times  | <input type="checkbox"/> | More than eight times | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- Q7 Have any of these letters contained a gift, eg a pen, a coin etc? Please tick one box.**
- Yes  Please answer Q8
  - No  Please skip to Q9
  - Can't remember  Please skip to Q9

- Q8 Did you give to the charity as a result of receiving this gift? Please tick one box only.**
- Yes, I gave as a result of receiving the gift
  - Yes, I gave, but I would have given if there had been no gift
  - No, I did not give anything
  - Can't remember

- Q9 Gift Aid is a scheme that allows charities to claim back tax from the Government on the money you give to them. Which of these options best describes your use of Gift Aid?**
- I always gift aid donations to my chosen charity/ies
  - I sometimes gift aid donations to my chosen charity/ies
  - I have used gift aid, but only once or twice
  - I applied for gift aid myself and pass it on to charity/ies
  - I do not use gift aid/am not eligible for gift aid

## 2. Direct Mail from Charities

Charities send lots of mail to people every year asking them to give money to fund their work. Some are addressed directly to people, others are not addressed. Charities call this fundraising activity "direct mail". We want to know what you think about direct mail generally and how charities use it to raise money.

**Q10** To what extent do you agree with the following statements about direct mail? Please tick one box for each statement.

	<i>Agree strongly</i>	<i>Agree slightly</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree slightly</i>	<i>Disagree strongly</i>
I am happy to be contacted by direct mail by charities that have my name and address	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charities that send lots of direct mail are not being environmentally friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Due to the special nature of the work they do, charities should not have to follow the same rules about direct mail that apply to businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think direct mail is a good way for charities to raise money for their work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am happy to give to appeals where my donation is used for any aspect of a charity's work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would prefer to be asked how often I wish to be contacted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would stop giving to a charity that kept contacting me after I told them not to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to give money to charities for specific appeals or projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charities should be better than private businesses at following the rules and respecting people's privacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't mind charities contacting me on a regular basis - I know they have to raise money for their work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q11** How acceptable do you find the following direct mail practices?

	<i>Always acceptable</i>	<i>Sometimes acceptable</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Rarely acceptable</i>	<i>Never acceptabl e</i>
Some charities deal with very difficult and upsetting issues and may use shocking or distressing images in their direct mail materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charities may sometimes exaggerate when trying to encourage you to give to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charities sometimes swap lists of names and addresses of donors with another charity in order to find more people who might want to help fund their work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q12 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about direct mail with gifts? Please tick one box for each statement.**

	<i>Agree strongly</i>	<i>Agree slightly</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree slightly</i>	<i>Disagree strongly</i>
Charities are right to try different ways of encouraging people to give money to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Putting gifts in direct mail as an incentive to give a donation is acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People who receive a gift may feel obliged to give a donation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Money spent on putting gifts in direct mail would be better spent on the cause	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charities put gifts in to make people feel guilty about getting something for nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anything which encourages people to give to good causes is justified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 3. About You

**In this section we are trying to find out about you. All information will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only.**

**Q13 Are you?**

- Male   
 Female

Other -   
 please specify

**Q14 Which of the following age groups are you in?**

- Under 16       45 - 54   
 16 - 19       55 - 64   
 20 - 24       65 - 74   
 25 - 34       75 plus   
 35 - 44

**Q17 Please write in the city/country that you currently live in**

**Q18 Would you describe yourself as having a disability?**

- Yes   
 No

**Q15 Which of these best describes your current situation?**

- Working full time   
 Working part time   
 Self employed   
 Retired   
 Unemployed   
 Out of work due to disability/illnes   
 Looking after home/family   
 In full time education   
 Other- please specify

**Q16 Which of these best describes yourself?**

- White British   
 Other white   
 Mixed   
 Black British   
 Other Black   
 Indian   
 Pakistani   
 Bangladeshi   
 Chinese

**Thanks you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it no later than 14th/21st September 2007 in the freepost envelope provided.**

If you would like to receive a copy of a summary of the findings from this research, please fill in your contact details below. These details will be held by Scotinform solely for the purposes of sending you a copy of the report and will not be used for any other purpose.

Name .....

email.....

Or Address

.....

Please return all completed questionnaires to: Scotinform Ltd, Freepost RLZG-UCTA-RRTT, 12 b Timber Bush, Edinburgh EH6 6QH

## Appendix III

### About the Fundraising Standards Board

- The Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB) is the new body running the self-regulation of fundraising scheme in the UK. Its aim is to ensure the public has confidence in giving to charity and to maintain and improve standards in fundraising.
- The public now has a scheme in place that will uphold best fundraising practice and that will also offer an independent complaints process in the event of any problems.
- The establishment of the FRSB was funded by the Office for the Third Sector and the Scottish Executive as a result of the Buse Report in 2005 which recommended a framework for the self-regulation of fundraising
- £8.9bn is raised by charities every year and 100,000 people are employed in fundraising throughout 57,000 fundraising organisations
- Since its public launch in February year, the FRSB has signed up nearly 750 charities, fundraising organisations and suppliers as members in all four nations of the UK. This represents over 30% of total voluntary giving and includes the majority of large charities such as NSPCC, RNLI, BBC Children in Need as well as a wide range of medium and small organisations. These members, who have committed to the FRSB Fundraising Promise are now including the 'tick' logo on their fundraising materials
- The FRSB is now handling complaints from the public and the results of adjudications will be published on the website soon. The concerns being dealt with are mostly around direct marketing