THE MAKING OF A MOVEMENT

This is a story about what is possible when a group of committed individuals transforms their deeply held convictions into action. It is not easy to change hearts and minds, but that is exactly what a group of everyday Sikh Americans set out to do when we began the National Sikh Campaign in 2014.

Rallied to action by the 2012 mass shooting in an Oak Creek, Wisconsin Gurdwara that sent shockwaves of grief and fear throughout Sikh communities—and sustained by the belief that Sikh values truly reflect the core tenets of the American ethos—the individuals behind the National Sikh Campaign volunteered countless hours, weeks, and years assembling what would become the most extensive awareness campaign ever coordinated for Sikhs in America.

Yet we were not alone on this journey. In the pages of this report, you will meet the people and organizations—both within and outside the Sikh community—who committed time, words, resources, and energy to setting the record straight on who Sikhs are and what values we stand for.

Through multi-faceted outreach at the national and local levels, We Are Sikhs shared stories, facts, and messages with Americans from diverse backgrounds to promote increased understanding of this largely misunderstood religion.

In cities like Fresno, California, the needle is already moving: nearly 80% of residents who saw our campaign ads report knowing “some” or “a great deal” about Sikhs in America. Nationally, the campaign generated over 500 stories in the media and won the support of local and national government leaders, as well as prominent institutions ranging from the National Council of Churches to the Center for American Progress.

HOW DID WE DO IT?
Read on to learn the answers to these questions and more:

• What impact did we have, and whose perceptions of Sikhs changed most?
• How did we mobilize key leaders from across the political spectrum?
• Why is one of our ads called “funny neighbors,” and what made it our most effective?
• What’s next for We Are Sikhs?
On August 5, 2012, a white supremacist fatally shot six Sikhs and injured several others as they gathered to prepare a community meal inside their place of worship in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. This dark and harrowing day was not the first time Sikh Americans suffered violence at the hands of fellow countrymen ignorant to the peaceful identity of the Sikh community. Painfully, it wouldn’t be the last.

While Sikhs endured discrimination throughout their immigrant experience to the United States beginning in the early 1900s, the false association of turban-wearing Sikhs with terrorism in the years following September 11th marked a heightened level of widespread bigotry and hate.

In July 2014, the National Sikh Campaign recruited Hart Research Associates to conduct a qualitative and quantitative research study on Americans’ perceptions of the Sikh community. We wanted to go beyond the most striking incidents of violence and discrimination and better understand—what do everyday Americans know and think about Sikhs?

The results were dramatic: most Americans don’t know who Sikhs are or what we believe in:

- While 99% of American men who wear turbans are Sikh, just one in 10 Americans could identify a man wearing a turban as a Sikh. Americans were much more likely to identify turban wearers as Middle Eastern or Muslim.
- 60% of Americans said they “know nothing at all” about Sikhs.
- 31% of Americans claim they have never seen a Sikh before, and nearly 70% have never interacted personally with a member of the Sikh community.
- While 16% of Americans feel cool or cold toward Sikhs, the majority (56%) feels neutral.

The last point illustrates the opportunity we have as Sikh Americans to positively influence a significant number of Americans who are simply unaware of our faith.

The greatest challenges facing Sikhs in America stem from a lack of awareness about our faith and values. By working with Hart Research Associates, a national leader in research methodology, we were able to gather insights on Americans’ perceptions of Sikhs with unprecedented rigor and technical sophistication.

Hart Research Associates has conducted polling for prominent institutions including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Nations Foundation, and Harvard University. The Chief Pollster who led the research for our study was Geoff Garin, Chief Strategic Advisor to the 2008 Hillary Clinton presidential campaign.

By incorporating existing reports such as Turban Myths conducted by the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) and Go Home, Terrorist, conducted by the Sikh Coalition, Hart Research Associates was able to build on and strengthen a long history of Sikh American studies.

“I don’t know anything about Sikhs. It’s the first time I’ve ever heard that word. I’m judgmental about it, and I’ll admit it.” – Focus group participant, Chicago
We Are Sikhs: Our Impact. Our Story.

FINDING THE WORDS TO MAKE OUR MESSAGE HEARD

In addition to helping our team better understand the extent of Americans’ knowledge of Sikhism, our study also investigated how core tenets of Sikh faith could be used to create messages that would resonate with the average American and leave the greatest impression with listeners.

The results showed that while most Americans know little or nothing about Sikh Americans and some feel uncertain or anxious upon seeing Sikhs, there is enormous potential to enhance positive feelings toward Sikh Americans through education and awareness building:

- A description of Sikh religion, beliefs, and history in America evokes a strong, positive reaction—nearly two in three survey respondents (65%) rated their feelings as highly favorable (ratings of 8-10 on a 0-10 scale) after hearing the description, including initially skeptical audiences such as Republicans and Americans who did not attend college.

- The most effective messages connect Sikhism with American values, particularly equality and religious freedom, and describe how Sikhs embody the quintessential American immigrant story.

After completing the most thorough perception study on Sikhs ever conducted in the United States, we had determined the messages that would help us turn the dial on awareness and tolerance of Sikhs in America. Armed with key insights and strategies, we set out to take action on making the We Are Sikhs campaign a reality.

Messaging significantly increases positive attributes associated with Sikh Americans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Pre-Messaging</th>
<th>Post-Messaging</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They regularly experience prejudice and discrimination</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>+35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are generally hard workers</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>+33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are generally generous and kind</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>+35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are generally good neighbors</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>+35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are generally patriotic</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>+42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They generally have American values</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>+42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How We Did It

Pre-campaign polling began with three focus groups of white Americans with mixed education levels and ages in Iselin, NJ and Chicago, IL. Following the focus groups, a national survey of 1,000+ non-Asian Americans was conducted online, allowing respondents to view and react to images of Sikh Americans and engage in interactive exercises to gauge which messages stood out most.

“The fact that Sikh Americans stand for equality and individual rights stands out to me. I feel more positive toward Sikh Americans knowing they have the same ideals as our Founding Fathers.” – National survey participant