We Are Sikhs: Our Impact. Our Story.

FROM GRASSROOTS TO PRIMETIME: DEVELOPING OUR CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Mindsets do not shift overnight. Real change takes time and requires exposure to new ideas in more than one way. With the goal of educating fellow citizens and sparking conversations around the peaceful, progressive, and tolerant community of over half a million Sikhs who live in the United States, we developed a multi-faceted campaign that brought stories of Sikhs to Americans on their smart phones, in their living rooms, and out in their communities.

Our multi-level approach included:

**We Are Sikhs Television and Digital Ads**
Using messages identified through the most thorough study of Sikh Americans in history, television ads introducing Sikhs of all ages and backgrounds as everyday Americans were produced and aired on national cable television and in target markets. In addition, We Are Sikhs utilized online advertising to further share our videos through Google search, social media, and YouTube.

**www.WeAreSikhs.org and Social Channels**
Our website is one of the first to explain in simple terms the context of Sikhs in America, as well as the core tenets of Sikh religion and history. It provides a place for people to learn and read stories of everyday Sikh Americans after seeing our ads. Our social media channels on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are extensions of the website, providing stories on the contributions Sikhs Americans are making every day in the United States as well as offering updates on events and moments-in-time that are of interest to our audience.

**Earned Media and Grassroots Events**
From garnering the attention of national and local media outlets to inspiring grassroots events at community gurdwaras, We Are Sikhs mobilized individuals and organizations across the country and across party lines to contribute to the conversation on Sikhs in America.

**Third-Party Influencer Engagement**
We built awareness and credibility of We Are Sikhs by hosting meetings with high-profile organizations such as Americans For Tax Reform, American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union, Center for American Progress, and many others on both sides of the aisle.

Pairing far-reaching nationwide publicity with targeted city-based efforts, we set out to reach as many Americans as possible while ensuring our messages were heard the loudest in communities with high Sikh populations.

Each tactic tapped into the power of existing networks and organizations—both within and outside the Sikh community—serving as a real-life example of the unity and inclusion at the heart of the campaign.

**FOCUS ON FRESNO**
We identified Fresno, California as a city where our message stood to have a profound effect on the everyday lives of the Sikhs who live there.

Fresno and the surrounding areas forming California’s Central Valley have been home to Sikhs for over 100 years. The first Sikh gurdwara in the United States was built in the region in 1912, and since then it has become an area with one of the most heavily concentrated Sikh populations in the country. In 2016, two Sikh men living in Fresno—Gurcharan Singh Gill and Amrik Singh Bal—were victims of brutal hate crimes.

In an effort to build a safer future for the hundreds of Sikh families who call the region home, we worked with local gurdwaras to launch the Fresno component of the national We Are Sikhs campaign. This localized approach allowed us to use many of the same tactics as the national campaign, such as digital and television advertisements and earned media placements, while also going deeper at a grassroots level through influencer outreach and community events.

While gauging mindset shifts at the national level would have been difficult, in Fresno we were able to conduct comprehensive perception polls before and after our ad campaign, allowing us to clearly see changes in perceptions toward Sikhs among residents who had seen our ads versus those who had not.

“The campaign’s power comes from storytelling. As Sikhs, we have to tell our story in order to build a new future for Sikh American youth—one where they can focus more on becoming class president and focus less on making it through the day without being bullied. As Americans, we have to tell our story because through these interactions we contribute to the hard work of fulfilling America’s promise of one nation united.”

— Dr. Rajwant Singh, cofounder, National Sikh Campaign
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OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Taking place from April 2017 to July 2017, We Are Sikhs achieved significant and measurable progress toward our goal of increasing Americans’ knowledge on who Sikhs are and what values and contributions we bring to the United States.

We informed Americans on the facts of Sikhism.

59 percent of Fresno residents—a clear majority—say they know at least something about Sikhs who live in America. The proportion of residents who saw the ads are nearly twice as likely to say they know at least something about Sikhs who live in America (78 percent) than those who did not see the ads (40 percent).

More Americans feel confident about their knowledge of the religion. 58 percent of Americans who saw our ads know that Sikhism is an independent religion, and 61 percent know it originated in India—a dramatic increase compared to just 34 percent who knew these facts before the campaign.

We shifted perceptions on the values Sikhs represent.

54 percent of Americans who saw our ads reported “warm” or “very warm” feelings toward Sikhs, while just 29 percent of those who did not see the ads reported these positive associations.

The perceptions on Sikhs in America that showed the most dramatic polling increases reflected key themes of the campaign. In our Fresno polling:

- 67 percent who saw ads feel Sikhs believe in equality and respect for all people. (31 percent higher)
- 60 percent who saw ads feel Sikhs have American values. (25 percent higher)
- 68 percent who saw ads feel Sikhs are good neighbors. (33 percent higher)

We mobilized influential voices to speak up for Sikhs in America.

We won bipartisan support from government and private sector leaders, including California State Senator Andy Vidak, U.S. Congressman Jim Costa, and even President Barack Obama’s administration. Organizations ranging from the American Conservative Union to the Islamic Networks Group joined our movement and lent their voices to our cause.

“Thousands of Sikhs call California home. We must always welcome people of diverse backgrounds and religions.” – Xavier Becerra, Attorney General of California

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

To measure impact at the national level, we used reach as a key indicator—how many Americans heard our messages? How many stories did we generate in the media, and which leaders were speaking with key demographics on our behalf?

At the local level in Fresno, we were able to go a step further and measure how our campaign influenced individual perceptions on Sikhs in America. Through randomized phone polling conducted by Hart Research Associates among non-Sikh Fresno residents before and after the We Are Sikhs ad campaign ran locally, we acquired comprehensive data on what people know and how they feel about Sikhs.

Though local in scope, this data offers important insights that validate the larger We Are Sikhs campaign—exposure and education can and do positively shift Americans’ perceptions on Sikhs.