

*We Are Sikhs: Our Impact. Our Story.*

## TELEVISION AD PRODUCTION AND BROADCASTING

**B**eginning in April 2017, we launched a first-of-its-kind television ad campaign, bringing the many different faces and voices of Sikh Americans to the living rooms of families across the country.

The ads, featuring Sikhs of different ages, genders, occupations, and even races, focused on the values Sikhs represent, the meaning behind the turban, and the Sikh immigrant pursuit of the American dream. Through pre-campaign perception studies conducted by Hart Research Associates, these themes were identified as having the greatest potential to positively influence Americans' feelings toward their Sikh neighbors.

The messages are told through the voices of Sikhs themselves and the ads use more than just words to convey key ideas—Sikhs are seen living out their values at home around the dinner table with family and out in the community.

The ads reached Americans nationally through placements on CNN's *New Day* and *AC360*, Fox News' *Special Report with Bret Baier*, and Fox Business' *Morning with Maria and Lou Dobbs Tonight*, as well as targeting Fresno, California markets locally, home to one of the nation's largest Sikh populations. The 35,000+ Sikhs who live in Fresno have experienced violence and discrimination at shocking rates, making it a critical community to focus on educating and uniting through this campaign.



### IMPACT

Through pre and post ad campaign surveys in Fresno, we can clearly see the achievements and progress of our campaign.

### REACHING NEW AUDIENCES:

**54%** of Fresno residents recalled seeing or hearing something on TV or in the media about Sikhs in the United States. Most were able to recall seeing commercials about how Sikhs share American values.

### SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS:

Of those who saw the ads, their perception of Sikhs as embodying American values grew substantially.

### BUILDING AWARENESS:

**57%** of residents who saw the ads would associate a bearded man wearing a turban with Sikhism, compared to just 26% of residents who did not see the ads.

### BUILDING CONNECTIONS:

The proportion of respondents who said that they know a Sikh American personally grew across all demographics following the campaign, including a 23% increase among women over 50.

### WHY MIGHT THIS BE?

- Now more aware about Sikhs, viewers realized that they do in fact know someone who is Sikh—they just never made the connection.
- Our commercials were successful in helping viewers connect with Sikhs on an individual level, a key step in overcoming divisive stereotypes.

## PROPORTION SAYING EACH QUALITY DESCRIBES SIKHS WHO LIVE IN AMERICA VERY WELL.

(Rating of 8 to 10 on a zero-to-10 scale)

	Saw Ads	Did Not See Ads
They generally are good neighbors	68%	38%
They generally are generous and kind	64%	41%
They believe in equality and respect for all people	67%	36%
They generally have American values	60%	35%
They regularly experience prejudice and discrimination	55%	35%
They generally are patriotic	56%	34%

**“We like Game of Thrones.”**

**“I’m obsessed with Star Wars.”**

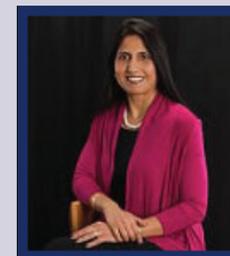
**“I’ve seen every episode of Sponge Bob because that’s what my daughter likes to watch.”**

**These everyday sentiments about pop culture proved to be some of the most memorable quotes from Sikh Americans in our television ads.**

**In order to ensure our ads were clear, compelling, and memorable, we partnered with Hart Research Associates to conduct a national online ad test. The survey presented hundreds of Americans with several versions of commercials we had filmed and produced, asking them what messages they took away from each.**

**The “funny neighbors” ad, featuring a diverse group of Sikh Americans explaining their shared values and favorite television shows, performed best. It evoked positive feelings among 73% of viewers, and also ranked as most likely to capture and hold viewers’ attention. Finding common ground, whether in television shows or values, worked: survey participants reported feeling that “Sikhs are people just like me” and “Sikhs share American values.”**

## MEET AD PARTICIPANT TINA REKHI



**Tina is one of the many Sikh Americans featured in the ad campaign—she works in information technology and is a member of the Washington Sikh Center in Gaithersburg, MD.**

**“Appearing in the We Are Sikhs ads gave me the platform to educate, inform and change perceptions nationwide. It presented me with the opportunity to publicize the core values of Sikhs and broadcast how indifferent we are from our fellow Americans.**

**The day the ads appeared on CNN, I was shopping at The Home Depot with my dad. I was surprised when a few strangers took the time to greet, shake hands, and talk to us—this is not usually the case. They didn’t recognize me from the ad they had seen earlier; they recognized the turban worn proudly by my dad. Their smiles and friendliness radiated tolerance and spoke volumes in making us feel accepted in our very own country, America.”**

## WE ARE SIKHS WEBSITE AND ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

**E**arly on in the campaign, we realized that despite several sources covering the detailed history and theological nuances of the Sikh religion, there was no web content created specifically with the audience of non-Sikh Americans in mind.

In order to serve as a go-to learning hub for individuals with little to no formal knowledge of Sikhs in America, we launched [www.WeAreSikhs.org](http://www.WeAreSikhs.org).

The website uses language that everyone can understand to tell the story of Sikhism's founding and origins, answer frequently asked questions on Sikh beliefs and lifestyle, highlight Sikhs' contributions to the United States, and more. All content was fact checked and approved by knowledgeable Sikh experts.

Inspired by the findings of our 2014 perception study, the website clearly conveys the alignment between Sikh and American values including gender equality, racial diversity, freedom of religion, equality of opportunity, and service to country and community.

In addition to learning about Sikh religion and culture, visitors to the site can:

- Use the Gurdwara Finder to locate the nearest Sikh place of worship
- Register to receive campaign updates and learn about upcoming events
- Sign a petition against hate and intolerance
- Donate to help reach more Americans with stories of Sikhs in America

WeAreSikhs.org will function as a lasting resource for Sikhs to direct curious new friends and acquaintances, and for non-Sikhs to find clear and accurate facts on the beliefs and identity of Sikhs in America.

In order to engage Americans and Sikh community members where they already are—on their smartphones—We Are Sikhs also launched Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages where Sikhs and non-Sikhs actively engage in supporting the campaign and pushing our messages to new audiences. These growing social media communities are the first of their kind, dedicated to addressing the discrimination of Sikhs in America through positive stories and education.

## ONLINE ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS

**WEBSITE**  
WeAreSikhs.org  
**174,856**  
Page Views  
**Three Pages**  
Average Number  
of Pages a  
User Visits

**DIGITAL ADS**  
**6.2 Million**  
Americans Reached  
through Digital  
Ads Nationally  
**4.7 Million**  
Fresno, CA Residents  
Targeted through  
Local Digital Ads



**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
National Sikh  
Campaign  
and  
We Are Sikhs  
Facebook Pages

**73,778**  
Followers

**576,143**  
Likes, Shares  
and Comments  
on Our Posts

**Two Million**  
Video Views

**9.5 Million**  
People Reached  
with  
Campaign Content

## TELLING THE STORIES OF EVERYDAY SIKH AMERICANS

We know that the more familiar people become with the individual members of an unfamiliar group, the more likely they are to see beyond stereotypes and reconsider prejudices. To accomplish this on WeAreSikhs.org, we put the faces and voices of real-life Sikhs of all ages and backgrounds front and center. Through our blog, users meet Preeti and Ruby, first-generation Sikh Americans and college students, Bobby, the proud owner of a trucking company, and many others.

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## GRASSROOTS ACTION AND EARNED MEDIA

**A**fter years of information gathering, preparation, and rollout of the multi-faceted *We Are Sikhs* campaign, one of the most exciting components was the support and contributions of those outside the campaign team.

From media reporters, to political leaders, to volunteers at local gurdwaras, the many individuals and institutions that stood up to be part of this movement helped transform it into something greater than what any of us could have accomplished alone.

500+ news stories highlighting the *We Are Sikhs* campaign were published in local, national, and international media outlets. These sources include:



**“Get to know a Sikh and you will make a new friend.”**

– Jim Patterson, California Assemblyman, in an op-ed encouraging Fresno community members to learn more about their Sikh neighbors

### POWERFUL VOICES SPEAK UP FOR SIKHS

Throughout the campaign, dozens of high-profile leaders representing a diverse array of political affiliations and social ideologies spoke out against the discrimination of Sikh Americans in forums ranging from town hall meetings to Twitter. These included:

**David Axelrod**,  
CNN contributor  
and former Obama  
administration staffer  
**Jon Favreau**,  
Actor and Film Maker  
**Neera Tanden**,  
Advisor, Center  
for American Progress  
**Andy Vidak**,  
CA State Senate

**Melissa Rogers**,  
Director, Faith Dept.  
in Obama administration  
**Jim Costa**,  
U.S. Congressman  
**Xavier Becerra**,  
CA Attorney General  
**David Valadao**,  
U.S. Congressman  
**Randi Weingarten**,  
Head of the American  
Teachers Federation



### SIKHS RESCUE JULY FOURTH FIREWORKS DISPLAY

When the mayor of Visalia, in California’s Central Valley, mentioned to a local Sikh that the city might have to cancel their annual July Fourth fireworks display due to financial concerns, the We Are Sikhs Fresno community stepped up to ensure the show would go on.

The news of the Sikh community’s \$10,000 donation spread quickly, and carried with it the message that Sikhs are indeed patriotic and enjoy celebrating the freedoms of America alongside their neighbors of diverse faiths and backgrounds. Adding to the fireworks display, other grassroots events across the region attracted media attention to the campaign and fostered personal connections among Sikhs and fellow Americans. These included:

- A campaign launch press conference with Fresno Mayor Lee Brand, members of the City Council, and other friends and allies of the community.
- We Are Sikhs’ sponsorship of a Fresno Grizzlies minor league baseball game, with a young member of the Sikh community throwing the first pitch and dozens of Sikhs carrying the American flag out onto the field during the national anthem.
- We Are Sikhs’ sponsorship of a cultural exchange event in Selma, attracting 400+ attendees who learned about Sikhism and other religions and cultures through food, dance, and conversation.



**TYING TURBANS IN TIMES SQUARE**  
In partnership with the Sikhs of New York, We Are Sikhs participated in an event in Times Square where both Sikhs and non-Sikhs wrapped 8,000 turbans on passerby’s heads while teaching them about Sikh values.



### BUILDING TOLERANCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Sikh students in Montgomery County, Maryland hosted after-school events at their local gurdwara to share their faith and culture with teachers. The students developed skills for advocating on behalf of their community and equipped their teachers to be allies for religious tolerance within the school system.

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## KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR CAMPAIGN AND MULTI-FAITH ALLIANCE

**T**he final months of 2015 marked a rise in religious discrimination and violence following deadly terror attacks both abroad and in the United States. In order to promote increased unity among diverse religious and non-religious groups during this distressing time, *We Are Sikhs* spearheaded a nationwide alliance of over 15 faith and civil rights non-profits to join forces for peace.

With leadership from the National Sikh Campaign, this interfaith coalition launched *Know Your Neighbor*, a campaign encouraging citizens to reach out and get to know people in their communities in order to increase understanding and decrease the tensions that can lead to threats against religious liberty.

The alliance was invited by the Obama administration to provide insights and guidance in developing new policies aimed at protecting religious freedoms for all Americans.

### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- From March to June 2016, the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, in partnership with U.S. Attorneys and other federal agencies, hosted community roundtables across the country that focused on issues elevated by the KnowYour Neighbor alliance.
- The Justice Department released a 2016 report titled *Combating Religious Discrimination Today* and announced new steps to combat religious discrimination. These include the Department of Education issuing a revised online complaint form to better serve individuals who believe they have experienced racial, ethnic, or national origin discrimination involving their religion, and the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA updating their websites to highlight trainings and guidance for communities on how to protect their houses of worship.

**“Community leaders of various faiths have joined together to launch an innovative public awareness campaign called *Know Your Neighbor*. I want to applaud the spirit of mutual respect and collaboration that they bring to this vital work of community engagement.”**

– Vanita Gupta, Head of the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice during the Obama administration



- We launched #ChangeTheStory for people to share positive stories of interfaith encounters and relationships in order to counter negative media messages about religion as a divisive force.
- Today, the alliance has grown into a collaborative effort of nearly 100 national and regional organizations and groups with diverse missions and objectives, working together on campaigns that push back against bigotry and discrimination while promoting civil dialogue across differences.
- In January 2017, the US Army announced a permanent exemption from its uniform policy for unshorn beards and turbans—led by members of the *Know Your Neighbor* coalition.

**Learn more:** [knowyourneighbor.us](http://knowyourneighbor.us)

## HOW WE DID IT

After launching our groundbreaking messaging report, *Sikhism in the United States*, produced through the study led by Hart Research Associates, we secured a meeting with the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice. We advocated for the Obama administration to take the lead on fostering dialogue around the nation’s growing religious diversity and the challenges and opportunities that come with it.

The Civil Rights Division leadership believed this task was so important that they elevated it to the Obama White House, paving the way for us to work directly with President Obama’s team to start these conversations and change national policies through initiatives such as the *Know Your Neighbor* alliance.

### Know Your Neighbor Founding Members:

