

RACE & GENDER IN FUNDRAISING

EXPLORING POTENTIAL BIAS AMONG EVANGELICALS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1** In a fundraising context, evangelicals do not find pictures of children of their own race or ethnicity any more or less compelling than pictures of children from other racial or ethnic groups.
- 2** This is true whether we ask them how compelling an ad is overall or when we ask them to describe the ad they saw. The race/ethnicity pictured simply does not impact the results.
- 3** Black evangelicals tend to find *all* the ads substantially more compelling than other evangelicals, no matter whether the child pictured is Black, Asian, White, or Latino.
- 4** The picture of the Latino child shows several small but significant differences, making the image less compelling than the others. However, this is true among every racial/ethnic group of evangelical adults – including Latinos – suggesting something about the picture, other than the child’s ethnicity, subtly affects the results.
- 5** With gender, it is a different story. Men show slightly more positive results when shown a picture of a boy in a fundraising appeal than when they see a girl. Women show *substantially* more positive results when shown a boy.
- 6** Women are more likely to say the ads featuring a boy get their attention, are touching, are urgent, are the kind of person they want to help, and are compelling in encouraging them to click on the ad for more information.

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HOW BIASED ARE WE?

Choosing the correct video or photo for a fundraising appeal is often challenging. Everyone may have a different opinion of what will be most effective. In discussions about this decision, you are likely to hear the following:

- “People want to see kids who look like them in our ads.”
- “We have a heavily female audience, so we need lots of pictures of little girls.”
- “That person looks too happy – like he doesn’t need any help.”
- “Donors expect to see pictures of kids from poor parts of the world, like areas of Africa and Central America, so we shouldn’t show a bunch of White kids.”
- “Girls look more vulnerable, so we need to show more of them.”

Is a little girl in need more likely to tug at your heartstrings than a little boy?

Are you more likely to give to help a child of your own race or ethnicity?

These questions may seem difficult, maybe even offensive. A hurting person is a hurting person, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. **We are all equally valuable to God.**

But human nature often dictates that no matter how hard we may try, it is possible to be swayed by factors that should not make a difference. And this does not even take into consideration people with *willful* biases.

How does the race/ethnicity and gender of a child, portrayed in a ministry appeal, impact potential evangelical donors?

Join us as we explore this issue...

Monadic Testing Methodology

Monadic testing is a method to understand what people like and how they respond to a particular product, service, or experience.

Instead of providing multiple choices at once, researchers present individuals with one option out of the group and gather their feedback. By focusing on a single concept, researchers can gain insights into its stand-alone impact and assess its effectiveness or appeal without the influence of comparative images. Monadic testing allows for controlled comparisons and helps researchers understand how consumers perceive and react to individual elements.

In this study, we tested ad layouts showing children of different racial/ethnic backgrounds and both genders. A group of evangelicals was shown one ad out of each group of ads, and their results were compared with groups shown a different ad from that group (rather than asking people to compare ads directly).

If you directly ask people questions about whether they would prefer helping a child of a certain gender or ethnicity, most will deny having any bias. Therefore, we avoid asking them directly or having them compare pictures and tell us which person they would most want to support.

Our sample of 1,010 evangelical Protestant Americans was randomly divided into four equal groups. Each group was shown one image from our set regarding race/ethnicity, and asked a few questions about the image they saw. Elsewhere in the questionnaire, they were shown one of the four images in our set regarding gender.

Race/Ethnicity Images



Gender Images



As you can see, the images are formatted like banner ads – mostly a picture, without a lot of information. As much as possible, we tried to keep all four images very similar, with only one distinct difference among them. For the first group, it is the race/ethnicity of the child. For the second group, it is the gender of the child and the emotion they are displaying. (We will cover the emotion issue in a separate, upcoming report.)

Two Quick Notes...

1. We want to thank **Farmers & Hunters Feeding the Hungry** and **Faith Life Now** for allowing us to incorporate their logos into these tests.
2. Latino is an ethnicity, not a race. However, to avoid the constant repetition of “race/ethnicity” in this report, we will describe all four pictures as comparisons of race. Demographers, please forgive us.

Does Race Make a Difference?

It is common in advertising to believe people want to see others like themselves portrayed. And it very well may be true that older people want to see older people buying car insurance, or that Asian Americans want to see Asian Americans using dishwashing liquid.

But giving is very different from buying. Buying is generally to help *self*, so it can help to see *self* using the product or service in an advertisement.

Giving is to help others (not ignoring personal benefits to giving, such as knowing you are following God's will or feeling good about your actions). Would it still be more compelling to see someone who looks like you in a fundraising piece?

Quite bluntly, we hesitated in deciding whether to perform this test. Our concern was that evangelicals might show strong favoritism toward their own race or favor/reject one or more racial groups. Obviously, this would show evangelical Protestants in a very poor light.

Yet, in our research, we also stand on the premise that **truth is worth pursuing**, no matter what the findings may be. The only way to address issues is to be aware of them.

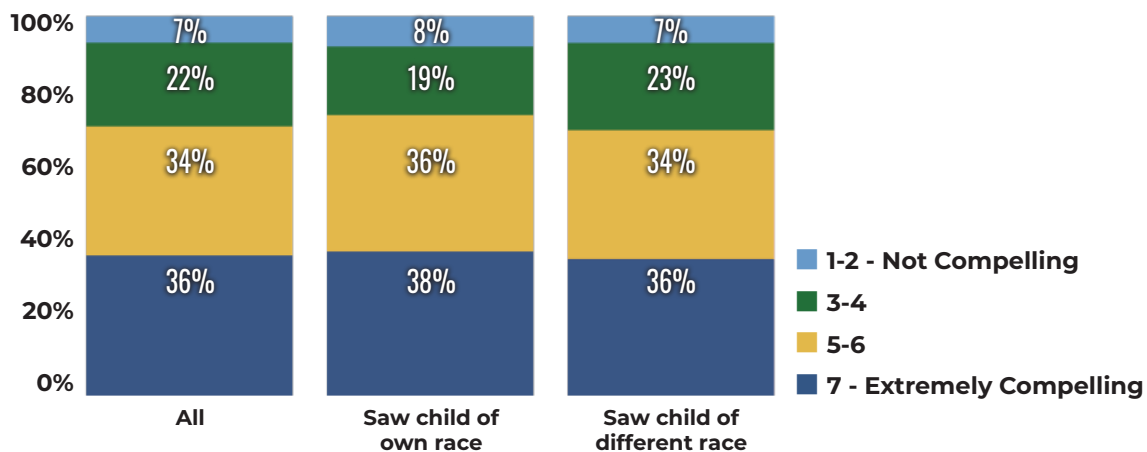
Regarding race, we found two “Big Things” in the data.

BIG THING #1

The first is that **evangelicals do not find pictures of children of their own race or ethnicity more compelling than pictures of other races**. Nor do they find pictures of their own race *less* compelling. Race simply does not make a difference.

We asked how compelling the ad they saw was in terms of encouraging them to click on it to find out more. (We *never* ask about the likelihood of giving, as people cannot make realistic decisions about that based on seeing a banner ad in a survey).

How Compelling Is Race in Each Ad?



Percentages may not add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

When evangelicals see a child of *their own* race portrayed in the ad, 38% find that ad extremely compelling. When evangelicals see a child of a *different* race from their own, 36% find that ad extremely compelling. The average ratings on the seven-point scale are 5.46 for a child of their own race and 5.38 for a child of a different race. **Neither of these differences is statistically significant or meaningful—they are well within the margin of error for the survey.**

We also provided 16 different descriptions and asked people which ones fit the ad they saw. Out of all these terms, **not one description shows any difference when people see a child of their own race or another race.**

16 DESCRIPTIONS

- Appealing
- Believable
- Discouraging
- Easy to ignore
- Engaging
- Gets my attention
- Hopeful
- Motivating
- Persuasive
- Realistic
- Relatable
- Relevant to me
- The kind of person I want to help
- Touching
- Typical/Seen it before
- Urgent

This is not just evangelicals telling us how they feel about race and ethnicity but demonstrating it when they have no idea that is what is being measured. It is much more than just lip service.

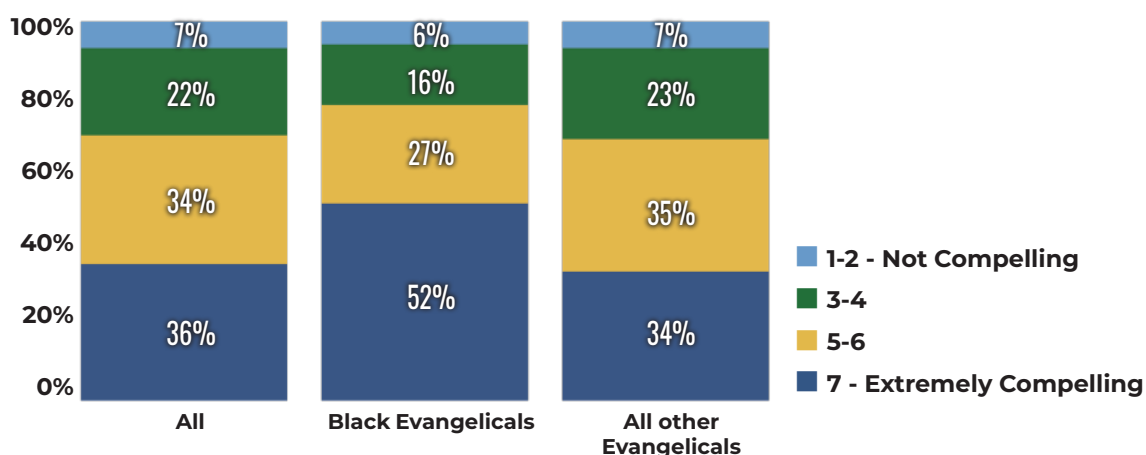
Note that the ads all specify “children in the US,” so this does not indicate whether Black Americans might prefer to help children in Africa rather than other parts of the world, or whether a Latino evangelical might feel more pulled to help in Nicaragua or Mexico than in Cambodia or Kazakhstan.

BIG THING #2

The second big thing we see in the data is that while the race of the *child* does not make a significant difference in how people react to these ads, the race **of the adult seeing the ads** affects the impact.

Black evangelicals find the ads substantially more compelling than others – no matter which child they see. Black evangelicals are less likely than others to call *all* the ads discouraging or easy to ignore, and more likely to find them hopeful, realistic, believable, and relatable.

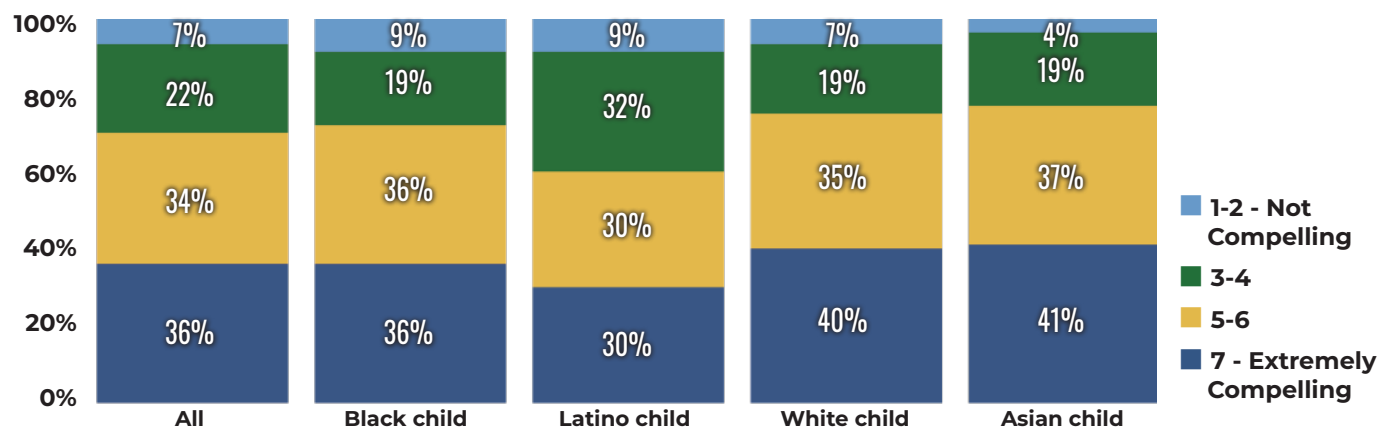
How Compelling Is Race in Each Ad to Black Evangelicals?



DOES APPEAL CHANGE BY RACE?

When evaluating the results for the individual ads, we find only one consistent difference among the four races portrayed in the ads: the Latino child scores somewhat lower than the other three.

Does Appeal Change by Race in the Ads?



On a seven-point scale, the average for all four ads is 5.4. Thirty-six percent call the ad they saw “extremely compelling” (a rating of 7), and a total of 71% give their ad a positive rating for being compelling (5 – 7 on the scale).

A total of 60% give the ad with the Latino child a positive rating – compared to 72% for the Black child, 75% for the White child, and 78% for the Asian child.

The averages show the same kinds of differences: an average of 5.02 for the Latino child, but 5.52 for the other three.

There are also differences in the terms evangelicals use to describe the ad they saw:

- Both the Latino and White child ads are more likely to be called “easy to ignore” than those with the Black or Asian child.
- The ad with the Latino child is less likely to be described as “gets my attention” than any of the other ads.
- The ad with the White child is slightly more likely to be called “relevant to me” than the others.
- The ad with the Latino child is slightly less likely to be described as “the kind of person I want to help” than the others.
- The ad with the Latino child is decidedly less likely to be seen as “touching” than the others.
- The ad with the White child is somewhat more likely to be called “urgent” than the ad with the Latino child.

These are relatively small differences, but they are statistically significant, and they are certainly enough to impact the success of a fundraising appeal.

So, does this prove some evangelicals carry anti-Latino bias? Not necessarily. First, the ad with the Latino child is somewhat less compelling no matter who sees it. Latinos themselves rate it less compelling than they do the other three ads, as do all other races. It would be extremely odd for all races to have a bias against one (and only one) specific group.

There appears to be something in the photo itself other than race that is causing the lower ratings, as these lower ratings are universal among evangelicals of all races. Possibly it is the child's expression, the lighting, or some other factor, even though every attempt was made to have similar photos other than the race.

It is impossible to take every possible factor into account – would the results be different if these were all girls, babies, or teenagers? If the White child were blonde or redhead, or the various children had lighter or darker skin? What if the ads were related to homelessness or education, or evangelism, rather than hunger?

We would need to repeat this test with many different photos to establish a consistent pattern and say definitively whether there is any sort of racial or ethnic bias among evangelicals.

When looking at the numbers overall, the results for the Latino child seem to be more related to the photo itself than to racial or ethnic factors.

Does Gender Make a Difference?

In a word: Yes.

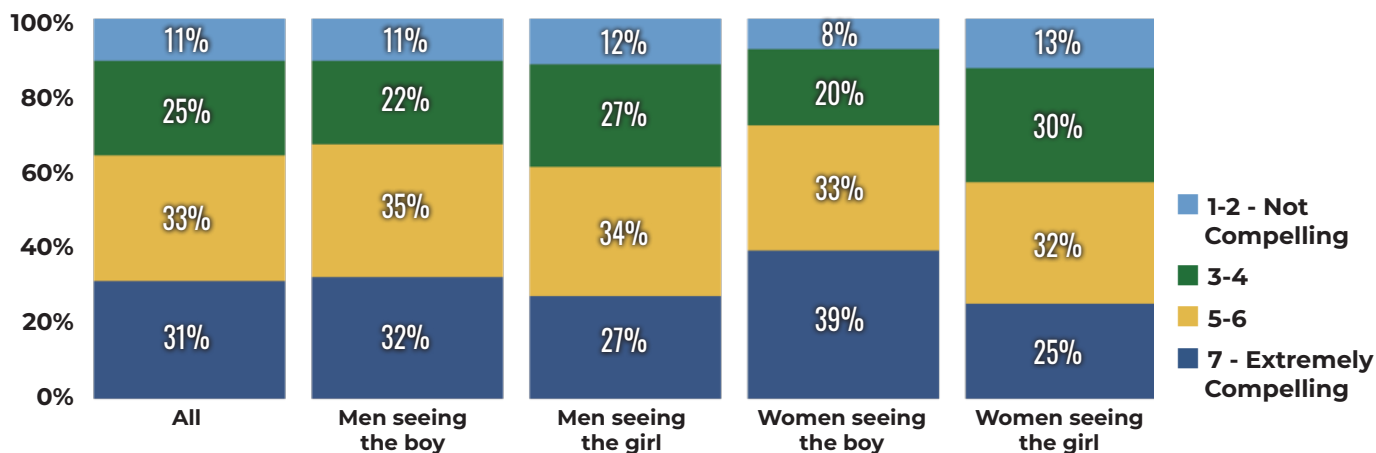
Men are slightly more likely to rate the ads with the boy as extremely compelling than they are to say this about the ads with the girl (32% to 27%). The same is true when we look at all positive ratings (5 – 7 on the scale) (67% to 61%). The average for men rating ads with the boy is 5.12, compared to 4.94 for men rating ads with the girl.

Is this just a case of men favoring their own gender? No – **women are even more likely than men to have rated the ads with the boy as compelling** (39% to 25% for ratings of 7; 72% to 58% for ratings of 5 to 7). The average for women is 5.39 for how compelling the ads with the boy are, compared to 4.77 for the ads with the girl.

These differences hold true no matter whether each child is pictured smiling or despondent.

Male evangelicals have a slight bias for the two ads with the boy, while female evangelicals have an even stronger bias for the ads with the boy.

Does Gender Make a Difference in the Ads?



When we ask evangelicals whether the 16 provided terms describe the ad they saw, men show only one difference between the ads with the boy and the girl: they are

more likely to call the ads with the boy “the kind of person I want to help” (41% versus 31% for the ads with the girl).

Again, the difference rests largely with females. Women are more likely to describe the ads with the boy over the ads with the girl with:

Description	Saw Boy	Saw Girl	Difference
Gets my attention	60%	48%	+12%
Urgent	35%	23%	+12%
Touching	52%	44%	+8%
The kind of person I want to help	43%	36%	+7%

Men rate the ads essentially the same between the boy and the girl on 15 of the 16 terms, and women on 12 of the 16 descriptions. However, with women finding the ads with the boy to be more urgent, more touching, and better at getting their attention, and both genders feeling the ads with the boy are more compelling and more the kind of person they want to help, **obviously these differences could have a significant impact on a fundraising campaign.**

What Does It All Mean?

So, of course, the findings mean fundraisers should avoid using images of girls or Latinos, right? Not at all.

In terms of race and ethnicity, what the findings really show is that fundraisers can feel free to use photos or videos that are appropriate to their work, without much worry about whether there are “enough” of any given racial background. Of course, an organization working primarily in Columbia or Cambodia is predominately going to have pictures of one racial or ethnic group. And certainly, our test showed evangelicals a single image in an advertisement, not a website full of images where lack of diversity could be an issue. It would be odd, for instance, for donors to visit a rescue mission’s website and see only pictures of one racial group being helped.

The big message here is **not to get caught up in stereotypes** such as the examples we gave earlier in the report (e.g., “People want to see kids who look like them in our ads”).

It appears what evangelical Protestants really want is to help people, not to help people of their own race or of any specific ethnic background.

So, what do we make of the fact that the ad with the Latino child was less compelling, and that there was consistent favoritism shown toward the male child when we tested gender?

As detailed in the report, it appears the ad with the Latino child was slightly less compelling due to something other than his ethnicity.

Grey Matter Research has done extensive research and testing of sensory perception – particularly visual perception – for clients ranging from automotive manufacturers to publishers to homebuilders to ministries. We can state with certainty that **people pick up a variety of subtle visual cues from images**: facial expressions, body language, lighting, angle, background, etc.

Years ago, Grey Matter tested a fundraising appeal for an international development organization. Potential donors saw a video of the head of the organization out in the

field, showing how they were helping in a famine-torn country. A number of donors raised concerns about the financial trustworthiness of the organization because the head of the organization was wearing a large wristwatch. They associated an oversized watch with an oversized price and wondered whether their donor dollars would go to enrich the head of the organization (ignoring the fact that while Patek Philippe and Rolex sell massive watches for hundreds of thousands of dollars, Casio and Timex do, too – for under \$100). **Never forget that details matter.**

On the subject of gender, it does appear **there is some bias toward helping boys over girls** – and interestingly, that bias is substantially stronger among female evangelicals.

We would need considerable further testing to know whether this bias would exist with images of different age groups, races, types of organizations, etc. But the bias is present in this test.

First, it is important not to paint all evangelicals with the same brush. There was a five-point difference among men and a fourteen-point difference among women, so **broad interpretations that “evangelicals are sexist” would be inaccurate and irresponsible.**

Second, **we need to think about why** some people feel more compelled to help boys than girls.

- Do they feel girls already receive more help than boys and want to equalize that?
- Do they believe the problems of boys are too often ignored or glossed over (the old “big boys don’t cry” trope)?
- Have some people been raised in a way that unfortunately encourages some subconscious level of sexism, for instance, feeling it is more important that males be leaders or achievers, or somehow they have greater intrinsic worth?

We do not have the answers to these questions, but certainly, they would make for fascinating discussion and further research.

At the moment, however, organizations should not consider **de-emphasizing images of females**, but putting forth images, stories, and information that make it clear their work is critical to males *and* females.

Bullying happens to both genders (in fact, several studies show girls are more likely than boys to be victims of social bullying and cyberbullying, while boys are more likely to be victims of physical bullying)¹. Poverty, violence, loneliness, disease, and hunger affect both. Both are worthy of evangelism, discipleship, wellness, education, safety, and love.

Knowing some gender bias apparently exists, **instead of playing to that bias, how can fundraisers, marketers, and communicators work to change it?**

¹ <https://youthtruthsurvey.org/bullying-2017/>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3881143/>

Methodology and Definitions

Researchers have defined “evangelical” in ways that have them representing 7%, 23%, and even 35% or more of American adults. For this study, we considered an evangelical to be someone who agrees strongly with all four of the following theological positions:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe
- It is important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation

This is the definition favored by the National Association of Evangelicals, which [Grey Matter Research](#) and Lifeway Research helped create.

Further, we limited this study to exclude those who identify with a non-Protestant group, such as Mormon, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox. This is a study of evangelical Protestants, a group representing 23% of American adults, or about 59 million people.

The study was conducted online, through a blend of research access panels. Stringent quality control was used to eliminate any responses from bots, click farms, and disengaged or fraudulent respondents. A demographically representative sample was screened for evangelical beliefs and lack of non-Protestant affiliation. Data was gathered in early 2023. A total of 1,010 evangelical Protestants participated in this study.

ADDITIONAL REPORTS

from Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter Research

If you found this report beneficial, Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts offer additional reports on evangelical Protestants:

FUNDRAISING INSIGHTS:

- [*The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving*](#)
- [*The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences*](#)
- [*The Favorite Charity: Evangelical Giving Priorities*](#)
- [*The Sustainers: Exploring Monthly Donor Partnerships*](#)

CHURCH INSIGHTS:

- [*The Ripple Effect: Congregations, COVID, and the Future of Church Life*](#)
- [*The Congregational Scorecard: What Evangelicals Want in a Church*](#)
- [*The Renewalists: Pentecostal and Charismatic Evangelicals*](#)

ISRAEL INSIGHTS:

- [*The Jewish Connection: Evangelicals and Israel*](#)
- [*The Holy Land Journey: Evangelicals and Israel Travel*](#)

MEDIA INSIGHTS:

- [*Media Matters: Evangelicals and the Media*](#)

WELLNESS INSIGHTS:

- [*Faith & Wellness: Evangelical Insights on Healing and Physicians*](#)

ABOUT GREY MATTER RESEARCH



What do you wish you knew about the people you are trying to reach: donors, potential donors, customers, or the general public? And what could you accomplish if you knew the answers to those questions? **That is where we help you make a difference.**

Grey Matter Research helps our clients make wiser decisions with **valuable, relevant consumer insights**. We specialize in serving **Christian organizations**, although we have partnered with many secular charities and for-profit companies, from professional sports teams to vehicle manufacturers to branding, marketing, and fundraising agencies.

Our motivation is to **partner with our clients**, which is why we have been working with some of the same organizations **for over two decades**. Whether we are helping a client discover how consumers perceive their brand, learn what the donor experience is like, develop new messaging, or any other topic, we have **A Passion for Research That Makes a Difference**.

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American Bible Society • National Christian Foundation • World Vision
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Our work has been **covered by the international media**, (MSNBC, *Christianity Today*, NPR, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Fast Company*, *Harvard Business Review*, *NonProfit Times*, many others), translated into multiple languages, used in US Senate panel hearings, and included as part of the curriculum at universities in the US and Italy.

You can learn more about how we help clients, as well as check out a variety of available research reports, on our website: www.greymatterresearch.com.

Company president Ron Sellers would be delighted to chat with you. Call him at **1-602-684-6294**, or meet him digitally at ron@greymatterresearch.com.

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Infinity Concepts is an integrated marketing-communications agency inspiring people of faith to action that specializes in the following:

- **Consulting:** We help you think more strategically and lead more effectively.
- **Branding:** We help you develop a strong and memorable brand.
- **Creative:** We provide effective and memorable creative including superior quality graphic design, copywriting, websites, direct mail, logos, and much more.
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- **Public Relations:** Through proven strategies, effective communication, and media relationships, we will put your organization on center stage.
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For over 20 years, Infinity Concepts has helped its clients *think more strategically, operate more efficiently, and communicate more effectively.*

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Holocaust Remembrance Association • International Christian Embassy Jerusalem
Israel Ministry of Tourism • The Jewish Agency for Israel • Marilyn Hickey Ministries
Metro World Child • Mission Eurasia • NRBTV • One Voice Ministries • Open Doors USA •
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You can learn more about Infinity Concepts and how our team of experts can help you make a bigger impact. If you are looking for an agency to be your thoughtful strategic partner and impassioned advocate, Infinity Concepts may be for you: www.infinityconcepts.com

Infinity Concepts President, Mark Dreistadt, and Chief Growth Officer, Darrell Law, can be reached at 724-733-1200 or by email at Mark@infinityconcepts.com and Darrell@infinityconcepts.com.

Additional FREE RESOURCES from Grey Matter Research

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A small selection is below; [click here](#) for information on all of them.

■ Uneven: Success, Stagnation, and Delusion in Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth and maturity among American evangelicals is a mixed bag. Some are highly engaged and growing, while others have almost completely checked out. [Click here](#).

■ What America's Favorite Charities Have in Common

Donors often claim they like to support small, local organizations. The reality is they generally favor massive global brands. And most people of faith do not favor supporting faith-based organizations. Learn what sets America's favorite charities apart in the minds of donors. [Click here](#).

■ Lost Opportunities: Faith, Giving, and Social Media

Learn how donors and people of faith use social media to interact with nonprofit organizations and congregations. [Click here](#).

■ Charitable Overhead Ratios and Donor Decisions

Donors often believe ministries and charities spend more on fundraising and administration than they should. Because of this, many organizations think donors will not support organizations with expense ratios exceeding a certain threshold. We find that is often not true—and in fact, donors frequently do not have a clue what their favorite organization's overhead ratio really is. [Click here](#).

■ Understanding Evangelical Mid-Level Donors

This small but critical group is not well understood because not much research has been done on them—we help put that right with this report. [Click here](#).

■ Six Ways Your Survey Research May Be Misleading You

The only thing worse than no research is bad research, and there are many ways you can unintentionally receive misleading data from your surveys—even when they are conducted by professionals. [Click here](#).

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■ Donor Trend Analysis

Every nonprofit should have a clear understanding of what is happening with its donors by measuring key performance metrics to monitor the health of its donor file. The **Donor Trend Analysis** gives insights into your donor retention rate, average lifetime donor value, donation frequency, number of multi-gift donors, average gift amount, new donor acquisition trends, lapsed donor trends, and much more.

This Donor Trend Analysis is valued at \$800. However, you may qualify to receive this valuable report for FREE! [Click here](#) to complete your application to see if you qualify for a FREE **Donor Trend Analysis** for your church, ministry, or nonprofit.

■ Digital Assessment

Your digital presence matters, now more than ever! What does a donor experience when they give to your organization online? Are you posting too little or too much on social media? Does your website effectively communicate your story and impact? How well do you engage with your followers through social media?

Infinity Concepts provides a FREE **Digital Assessment** to qualified churches, ministries, and nonprofits. This analysis will help you improve the way you communicate and engage with people and donors online. [Reach out](#) to see if your organization qualifies for a FREE **Digital Assessment** by the experts at Infinity Concepts.

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