

## Case 87

### Pew Research Center for the People and the Press

*Pew Charitable Trusts, 1995*

Scott Kohler

*Background.* In 1995, the Times Mirror publishing company, concerned about its ability to turn a profit, was forced to consider shutting down its opinion research group, the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press. Run by Andrew Kohut, former president of the Gallup Organization, the Center was a source of high-quality, nonpartisan polling and research, yet the for-profit Times Mirror—constrained by its bottom line—was unable to justify its support on the grounds of serving the public interest. Yet serve the public interest the Center did, and still does thanks to the intervention of the Pew Charitable Trusts (PCT), which assumed sponsorship of the Center that same year. For Pew, a major philanthropy unburdened by the need to make a profit, the research and opinion polling conducted by Kohut and his associates, widely regarded to be among the most incisive and reliable available, was, in and of itself, valuable to the public interest.

*Strategy.* Since 1995, Pew has sponsored the Center, which became known as the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. According to Don Kimelman, director of Information Initiatives for PCT, “[t]he Trusts were very fortunate to have Andy [Kohut] bring his well-established polling operation into our orbit in 1995.”<sup>1246</sup> The Center conducts research in five primary areas:<sup>1247</sup>

- The People and the Press
- The People, the Press, and Politics
- The News Interest Index
- America’s Place in the World
- Media Use

This research is nonpartisan and relies primarily on hard data, rather than expert opinion.<sup>1248</sup> The Center’s polling and research are aimed primarily at policymakers and journalists, but they are available—free of charge—to the general public via the Center’s website. In addition, the Trusts in May 2001 launched a major new research effort: the Pew Global Attitudes Project. Run through the Center for the People and the Press, the Project is funded by Pew and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and is directed by Kohut and chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. It seeks to measure opinions around the world toward the rise of globalization. In the wake of 9/11, the Global Attitudes Project has also conducted research on people’s views of American hegemony, the spread of democracy, and tensions between Islam and the West. The Project began with a survey of 275 “opinion leaders (influential people in politics, media, business, culture, and government).”<sup>1249</sup>

*Outcomes.* The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press is one of the leading institutions of opinion research in the United States. Its polling is widely cited by major news outlets, such as the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*.<sup>1250</sup> Its polling continues to throw into deeper relief those issues which are important to the American people. In this way, the Center helps to frame public discussion, inform leaders and the people, and thereby promotes the public interest. The Global Attitudes Project has, to date, released two major reports. So far it has surveyed nearly

75,000 people in fifty populations (forty-nine countries, plus the Palestinian Authority). Already, it is the largest survey of its kind ever conducted. In April 2004, PCT announced that it would consolidate the Center for the People and the Press and the Global Attitudes Project, as well as five other Pew-sponsored research operations,<sup>1251</sup> under one roof: a new independent organization to be known as the Pew Research Center.<sup>1252</sup> Headed by Andrew Kohut, the Center has a \$15 million annual budget, and is able to provide a permanent home to a variety of polling and research activities until then funded on an ad hoc basis. It functions as both a resource for the news media, policymakers, and academics, but also as a “fact tank,” disseminating its findings “in an understandable and analytic way.”<sup>1253</sup>

*Impact.* Society has a clear interest in the gathering and dissemination of reliable opinion research, which can inform the work of the news media and government leaders. The Pew Charitable Trusts, a public charity not beholden to any political constituency or bottom line other than the public interest, are well-placed to support this sort of important work. In funding the far ranging research conducted within the Center, Pew keeps open a channel of nonpartisan information connecting public officials to the people they mean to serve. With the Center for People and the Press as its core, the new Pew Research Center is a guarantee that the high-quality, influential data collection the Trusts have supported since 1995 will not be threatened any time soon by an unsure balance sheet.

## Notes

1246. Pew Press Release, “Pew Charitable Trusts Establishes New Nonprofit Research Organization to Help Better Inform Public & Policymakers on Issues & Trends,” Available from <http://www.pewtrusts.com>.

1247. Available from <http://people-press.org>.

1248. Brian Faler, “Pew Trusts to Open Research Center in D.C.,” *Washington Post*, 4/27/2004.

1249. Available from <http://people-press.org>.

1250. A glance at the Center’s website, for example, shows that in the first six weeks of 2005, these three papers featured at least ten articles citing data gathered by the Pew Research Center. See <http://people-press.org>.

1251. The other five are the Project for Excellence in Journalism, Stateline.org, the Pew Internet & American Life Project, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and the Pew Hispanic Center.

1252. The creation of the Pew Research Center is the first major reorganization undertaken by the Trusts in the wake of its conversion in early 2004 from a private foundation to a public charity. In addition to institutionalizing support for the Center’s composite research operations, the move allows the Trusts to forego about \$1 million per year in administrative costs now that Pew need not pay outside nonprofits to administer its programs. Stephanie Strom, “New Pew Trusts Merging Works Into One Body,” *New York Times*, 4/27/2004.

1253. Faler, “Pew Trusts to Open Research Center in D.C.”