

*Benefits and Limitations of...*  
**ALTERNATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS**  
**AS SCIENTIFIC TOOLS FOR POLICY DECISION-MAKING**

**I. PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The present discussion is intended to:

- ❑ Identify specific scientifically sound RESEARCH DESIGNS for gathering “intelligence” from target populations for purposes of policy-level decision-making.
- ❑ Discuss both the STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS of each of the research designs identified in order to determine which approach is the “best fit” for addressing a given need for strategic planning purposes.

When properly employed, each of the research designs identified and discussed below are extremely powerful and useful tools for gathering accurate and objective intelligence for purposes of strategic planning. On the other hand, decisions based upon data generated through research efforts that employ these very same research designs in an inappropriate fashion are, in fact, unsound.

For example, many public agencies employ **public hearings**, **Town Hall meetings**, and/or **focus groups** for gathering intelligence/information from the community-at-large, assuming the collective opinions and attitudes secured through these events mirror those of the community-at-large; in other words, is “generalizable” from the participants of the respective event(s) to the overall population being studied. While often being the “politically correct” research design, this is virtually never the appropriate methodology from a scientific perspective. In short, it is highly likely that policy decisions based upon this form of “intelligence” will be flawed. Thus, the intended outcome of the strategic plan will not be realized.

The missing ingredient in the above noted research designs is “representation”; in other words, in order for a “finding” to be generalizable from a sample to a target population, you must draw a RANDOM SAMPLE (every person in the population having an equal likelihood/probability of being selected for being interviewed). Those participating in public hearings, Town Hall meetings, and even focus groups are (for the most part) “self-selected.” By definition, there is nothing “random” about this collection of individuals.

True and accurate “representation” can be accomplished only by drawing a viable random sample of a sufficient number of people (subjects) and then interviewing them using a carefully designed research instrument (questionnaire). Of course, such surveys can be administered via telephone or in person; here again, both approaches have their inherent advantages and limitations.

Perhaps the above research designs can be best thought of in the following terms:

On the one hand, scientifically conducted *surveys* have the advantage of being “representative” of a given population, but the limitation of not being able to penetrate a given topic to a major degree (thus, having breadth vs. depth);

On the other hand, scientifically conducted *focus groups*, and other research designs that involve too few participants who are (for the most part) self-selected, have the advantage of providing “depth” (vs. breadth), but the limitation of not being representative of the population of interest. This limitation also applies to such methodologies as public hearings and Town Hall meetings.

Thus, it is imperative that those who commission research have an awareness of, and an appreciation for, the various scientific tools that are available to them. Equally important is having an understanding and appreciation for the advantages and limitations that each research design brings to the proverbial table.

Toward this, end we will discuss, first, the following two categories of research: Primary Research vs. Secondary Research. We will then discuss the following three primary research designs:

- *Traditional and non-traditional Focus Group Research* including Public Hearings and Town Hall meetings, concept testing, conducting quasi-experiments, new product development, litigation research including jury selection and conducting mock trials, and more.
- **Survey Research** including public opinion surveys (i.e., polling for politics, feasibility studies for tax initiatives, community image surveys), land use studies, bench marking, needs analysis, forecasting, satisfaction and loyalty research, trend analysis, causal modeling, profiling, positioning studies, modeling for Economic Development (building partnerships between the public and private sectors), tracking/monitoring, litigation research, and-the-like.
- **Field studies** involving *special interest groups* such as community and/or civic groups and organizations, the business community, and others (Opinion Leadership/Consensus Building studies, Management Audits, generating Competitive Intelligence).

While the above research designs are not exhaustive, they are the most common methodologies employed in both the public and private sectors for purposes of strategic planning and policy decision-making.

We will conclude our discussion with an introduction to our research Institute, entitled: *Why Retain the Services of SRI?*



## II. Primary vs. Secondary Research

There are two fundamental categories of research; they are: “primary research” and “secondary research.” Properly conducted, both employ scientific principles and methodologies. The former simply means that the data are gathered first hand (thus, primary data); the second, involves gathering and organizing data that already exists (thus, secondary data).

Of course, both forms of research yield instructive and useful “intelligence” for purposes of strategic planning. Both are used to secure “exploratory” and/or “confirmatory” *intelligence*.

More often than not, secondary research is conducted internally and involves tapping into existing databases. Some are “proprietary” and many are “public” (e.g., libraries, the Library of Congress, U.S. Census data, what-have-you). The “findings” are most often expressed in “frequencies” (raw numbers) and/or “percentages”; thus, it involves very little statistical analysis.

Primary research, on the other hand, most often involves outsourcing to a responsible vendor, such as Strategy Research Institute (SRI). In our case, every project is headed by one or more of SRI’s five seasoned behavioral scientists; four are *quantitative* researchers and one a *qualitative* researcher; all holding

*doctorates* in their respective disciplines from premier academic institutions.

Primary research routinely involves both “descriptive” data analyses (i.e., frequencies, percentages, and cross-classifications/cross-tabs) and *inferential* or “advanced” statistical analysis (correlation analysis, regression analysis, discriminant analysis, factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and/or other tests deemed appropriate for the situation at hand). In the behavioral sciences, such advanced statistical analysis normally involves using a computer program designed specifically for such purposes, such as SPSS or SAS.

Of course, primary research can involve any of a number of research designs and methodologies. The more common ones will be discussed below.

First, however, we should make note of two very common forms of *information gathering* that, while being “politically correct” are (more times than not) simply misused. Nonetheless, both forms of information gathering are, when properly employed, extremely instructive as well as being politically correct. We’re referring to *public hearings* and *Town Hall meetings*.

This brief discussion will be followed by another discussion regarding one of the most appropriate and cost-effective research designs available in both the public and private sectors

for securing highly accurate “intelligence” from a given population of interest to decision-makers...the *telephone survey*.

*The traditional role of...*  
**‘Public Hearings’ &  
 ‘Town Hall’ Meetings**

A common (but erroneous) notion held by many, if not most, public agencies is that the FIRST STEP for securing accurate and “generalizable” information from constituents (e.g., the community-at-large or members of the local electorate) regarding issues of concern to public officials is to reach out to the community through a series of **Public Hearings** and/or **Town Hall meetings**. More times than not, this approach turns out to be problematic. Why?

Because, the “intelligence” gathered through public hearings and/or Town Hall meetings DOES NOT represent the constituency-at-large. More often than not, this input turns out to be more representative of the individual speaker(s), and the special interest groups and organizations they represent, than it does of the public agency’s constituents.

And the potential problems do NOT stop there. By definition, public hearings and “Town Hall” meetings **attract local media**. The media feed on controversy. Because special interest groups seldom come to such meetings to *compliment* government officials, more often than not, speakers stand before the local press and express disappointment in the public officials and/or attempt to advance their respective organization’s agenda. That’s their job! Furthermore, they do so with passion.

As a result, what begins as a sincere attempt on the part of public officials to *reach*

*out* to the community can easily turn into a platform for criticism, at a minimum; thus, a forum that public officials, and their respective agency, on the “defense”...or worse.

This is NOT TO SAY that public hearings and Town Hall meetings are a bad idea; indeed, **properly timed and orchestrated**, these mechanisms provide an excellent forum for securing meaningful input from otherwise hard-to-reach *opinion leaders* and from *community* and *civic groups* and other organizations that have a “stake” in local and/or regional government. As such, both public hearings and town hall meetings should indeed be included as a **central part** of any comprehensive effort to reach out to the community-at-large in order to secure objective and instructive input. However, the issue is one of “ordering.”

In other words, something else should be done BEFORE reaching out to the community through public hearings and/or Town Hall meetings. What should be done? *Such public forums should be preceded by a scientifically designed and administered community-wide telephone survey.*

*The role of...*  
**Telephone Surveys**

Clearly, the *most appropriate* and *cost-effective* mechanism for securing objective and accurate “intelligence” (information) from a public agency’s constituency-at-large is a TELEPHONE SURVEY.

Properly designed and executed, telephone surveys yield intelligence that is REPRESENTATIVE of the population being studied.

By comparison, **mail surveys** are (more often than not) systemically biased to the negative, since only those on the “extremes” normally complete and return the written questionnaire. In other words, those who are most likely to respond to a City or County sponsored mail survey are residents who are either extremely happy or extremely unhappy; unfortunately, there’s a tendency for those who are unhappy to be far more inclined to respond. And, by definition, the “average resident” seldom takes time out of their daily routine to respond to mail surveys.

With respect to securing input from the community-at-large, **focus group research** is fundamentally flawed due mostly to the fact that the sample size is too small to allow the findings from such research to be “generalized” from the subjects (participants) to the community-at-large.

Therefore, when addressing issues of concern to public officials, more times than not, the FIRST and MOST APPROPRIATE step, clearly, is to commission a carefully designed and administered scientific, community-wide telephone survey.

In order to be assured of securing both reliable (accurate) and valid (truthful) findings from such a study, the following steps must be taken”:

- ❑ **The sample must be randomly drawn (a stratified random sample is perfectly acceptable, of course).**
- ❑ **The sample size must be sufficiently large to minimize “sampling error” (no more than  $\pm 3$  to 5 percent), with a confidence level of 95%.**
- ❑ **The data must be analyzed using the appropriate statistical tools and**

**methodologies (both *descriptive* and *advanced/inferential* statistical analyses is, by far, more desirable than limiting data analyses to descriptive analytical procedures).**

After a scientifically-conducted telephone survey has been properly administered, public officials are then positioned to utilize such forums as public hearings and/or “Town Hall meetings” to their best (and most appropriate) advantage. Why?.

1. A telephone survey will yield objective and accurate information regarding the **collective attitudes** and **opinions** of the constituency-at-large.

This information can then be segmented (categorized) based upon **demographics** (e.g., age, income, education, gender, and-the-like), **geographics** (observed differences based on where residents reside within the public agency’s jurisdiction), and **psychographics** (attitudes and opinions). Findings can also be analyzed according to such criteria as: *voters* compared to *non-voters* and differences based upon *ideology*.

Once the wishes, desires, attitudes, and opinions of the members of the community-at-large (and subsets within the community) are clearly understood and documented through the telephone survey, **public hearings** and **Town Hall meetings** can be used to:

- (a) ***disseminate information*** to the special interest groups, opinion leaders who attend them, and (through local media) the general public.
- (b) ***gather information*** from these same community and civic groups and opinion leaders in response to the collective

attitudes and desires of the community-at-large.

2. The **local media** will, of course, find this approach both “interesting” and “newsworthy.” Rather than focusing solely upon the criticism of public officials by spokespeople representing the various special interest groups and organizations, the focus will be on:

- (a) What *issues are of major concern* to the community-at-large, and...
- (b) How these *special interests respond* to the overall wishes and concerns of the community-at-large.

Because the information being disseminated to the community by the public agency is based upon “science” and presented by highly credentialed behavioral scientists, it will be accepted as being both accurate and objective (which it is!). As a result, the ultimate outcome (effects) will be far more constructive and useful from the perspective of every stakeholder (especially from the perspective of the respective public officials).

This approach allows public officials to demonstrate to both the community-at-large and the various special interest groups and organizations within its jurisdiction that the public agency is, indeed, being **truly customer-oriented**.

In fact, this approach allows public officials to remain responsive to the *perceived needs* of all stakeholders within its jurisdiction. For example, it will position you to look after both the *well-being* and *quality of life* of all those who depend, in no small way, upon services and programs provided by and through local government.

Indeed, this is an extremely healthy trend that is gaining acceptance throughout the public sector; few, if any, movements in public policy have held, or will ever hold, greater promise.

### III. **Traditional and Non-traditional Focus Group Research**

Based upon the above discussion, the advantages and disadvantages of traditional focus group research should be somewhat clear. Nonetheless, the research design merits more attention. Clearly, the three greatest advantages of focus group research is:

- The Client can “see” with his/her own eyes what is taking place** (through one-way mirrors). Most Clients truly enjoy being able to participate in this fashion in the “process.”
- The Client can “penetrate” any given topic by sending questions in to the facilitator (moderator) should something be said during the focus group exercise that creates concern, curiosity, or surprise.**
- Focus group research is relatively inexpensive.**

Most people have a great deal of confidence in their own judgments; for example, they believe they have a pretty good understanding of what they see with their own eyes. This makes focus group research extremely desirable, of course.

On the other hand, focus group research has inherent and systemic limitations. The most important one is the fact that:

- One cannot “generalize” the findings from focus group research from the sample (participants) to the target population.**

Nonetheless, many Clients assume focus group research is “generalizable,” which results in many, many failures in terms of achieving their goals and objectives. This is a reality that will probably never change.

SRI has developed a non-traditional approach (methodology) to conducting focus group research wherein the “findings” from focus group exercises can, to a limited degree, be *generalized* to target populations. If the focus group research is PRECEDED by survey research, then we can build two specific elements into the design of the focus group exercise.

First, respondents to the scientifically conducted survey can be categorized according to *demographic*, *geographic*, and/or *psychographic profiles*. Then, participants in subsequent focus group exercises can be recruited based upon these profiles.

Second, the participants of the focus group exercises are asked to complete the same questionnaire that was used in the survey BEFORE beginning the focus group exercise. Their responses can then be compared with those from the prior survey. If similar trends and patterns show through (and they usually do), it is reasonably safe to conclude that the “findings” from the focus group research do, indeed, represent the respective target population(s).

Furthermore, the “findings” from the survey can be used in developing the questioning procedure used in the subsequent focus group activities. This truly takes advantage of the reality that “surveys” are an accurate representation of *breadth*; while focus groups can be used to penetrate a given topic and deliver *depth*.

Of course, focus group research is particularly appropriate in the development of a research instrument (questionnaire) for use in a subsequent survey involving a particularly complex topic. For example, when there is ambiguity connected to **defining important terms** and/or **concepts** that are key to a given research effort, these ambiguities can be clarified through focus group research.

Focus group research is also appropriate for “testing” advertisements and other informational/promotional literature, for new product development, for conducting “quasi-experiments,” and in litigation research (e.g., jury selection and conducting mock trials).

#### IV. Survey Research

Once again, the benefits and limitations of survey research were made somewhat clear in the above discussion. The major advantage to survey research, of course, is that the “findings” can be generalized from the sample tested to the respective population from which the random sample was drawn.

Important factors include:

- **Sampling procedures** (e.g., drawing a random vs. stratified random sample) and **sample size** (generally, more is better).
- **Instrument design** (wording of questions, ordering of questions, et al.).
- **Measurement scales** (e.g., when to use a five-point scale and when to use a seven or ten-point scale?)

Surveys can be conducted using different formats. For example, there are telephone surveys, mail surveys, and in-person field surveys<sup>1</sup>. Each has its own advantages and limitations. The telephone survey was discussed in sufficient detail earlier; thus, we will provide a brief discussion of the other two methodologies below.

First, however, it should be noted here that SRI employs survey research for conducting the following types of studies: benchmarking, needs analysis, economic development in the public sector (building public/private partnerships), feasibility studies involving tax initiatives and other forms of political polling, forecasting, concept testing, new product development, trend analysis, profiling, causal modeling, positioning studies, tracking/monitoring, and more.

## Mail Surveys

Perhaps the most misunderstood and misused research design is that of mail surveys. Many people believe these are relatively inexpensive and highly accurate; quite the opposite is true.

To fully appreciate this fact, all one has to do is ask: ***How likely is it that I will fill out and return a questionnaire that I receive in the mail?*** For most people, the answer is seldom to never; even when there is an incentive to do so!

Nonetheless, one major advantage to a mail survey is that you can “penetrate” a given topic to whatever depth deemed necessary and/or desirable.

<sup>1</sup> In-person surveys will be discussed in the next section entitled: **Field Surveys**.

Unfortunately, people who complete mail surveys normally do so because they are ***passionate*** and/or ***highly involved*** in the topic being tested. As a result, the “findings” from mail surveys (much like public hearings and Town Hall meetings) are mostly representative of those on the extreme ends of a continuum. In other words, those who feel strongly about the topic at hand. Mail surveys seldom, if ever, represent the masses; which is to say, ***the “average” person in any given population is seldom represented*** in a mail survey.

Furthermore, mail surveys are relatively expensive. Not only do you have to pay for all of the standard elements of primary research (i.e., creating the questionnaire and subsequent data set, data analysis, report writing, what-have-you), but you must pay for the mailing itself, at least two follow-up efforts either via mail or phone, and provide incentives to encourage prospective respondents to participate. Furthermore, it takes far longer to complete a viable mail survey compared to many other research designs.

In sum, seldom do the advantages of a mail survey outweigh the limitations, especially when compared to telephone surveys. And if penetration is of major concern, it’s probably better use of money to conduct a telephone survey, followed by focus group research.

## Field Surveys (In-person interviews)

Clearly, this is one of the most accurate and desirable research designs available. In has the inherent benefit of being able to “penetrate” a given topic. It allows the trained interviewer to observe both verbal and non-verbal cues.

However, one-on-one, in-person surveys used sparingly for several reasons:

- ✓ they are **expensive** to conduct.
- ✓ they take **much longer** to administer.
- ✓ **quality control** can be problematic because noise (systemic bias) can enter the process through the interviewing process itself.

Nonetheless, given sufficient time and budget parameters, in-person surveys normally yield highly accurate and instructive findings.

Over the years, SRI has found field research to be extremely appropriate and effective for **opinion leadership studies**, **management audits**, and studies involving **HR** (e.g., employee surveys).

#### IV. Process & Deliverables

While the *deliverables* provided by and/or through SRI are tailored to the specific needs of each Client, there are various elements that are pretty much standard. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following.

##### Partnering with the Client

Our first goal is to develop a “partnering” relationship with the Client.

Toward this end, we meet personally with whomever the Client deems useful and appropriate in order to determine how best to approach the project at hand. This may include elected officials, professional staff, consultants, and anyone else the Client deems appropriate.

It is essential that we have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Client’s goals and expectations, budget parameters, time constraints, anticipated deliverables, and-the-like.

##### Research Design

Based upon the above discussion, it should now be clear how important it is to settle on the most appropriate research design given the task at hand. Toward this end, SRI behavioral scientists and strategic planners discuss with the Client each of the alternative research designs, making salient both the advantages and limitations of each one. Ultimately, the Client selects the research design and methodology that best meets its needs and budget parameters.

##### Instrument (questionnaire) Design

As a routine, SRI researchers work with the Client to develop the appropriate instrument (questionnaire) for gathering the desired information (data). We employ the appropriate *question formats* and *response scales* (from both the scientific and applied perspectives) that are needed in order to address the research question(s) in the study at hand.

Given a “team” approach (between SRI researchers and Client representatives and personnel), the research design ultimately chosen by the Client will hold special promise for the respective agency in terms of achieving the precise goals and expectations that underlie the research effort at hand.

##### Data Collection

When conducting telephone surveys, we normally recommend gathering data using a technology called CATI (*Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing*). CATI can be

programmed to randomly select respondents from any data base deemed appropriate; for example, from the community-at-large (employing random digit dialing) or the local electorate (i.e., high and moderate propensity voters). Thus, the “findings” from the respective research effort will be truly **representative** of the population being studied.

**Trained callers** will conduct telephone interviews until the agreed upon number of respondents have completed the entire survey.

When necessary, the “instrument” (questionnaire) will be **printed in both English and Spanish** (or virtually any other language); and the interviews will be conducted in whichever language the participant is most comfortable with.

### **Pre-testing**

The approved instrument will be pre-tested on twenty respondents. Any and all necessary adjustments will be made, then the entire survey will be completed.

### **Form and format of final report**

The findings from the data analysis phase will be carefully reviewed by SRI researchers and strategic planners and a comprehensive **final report** will then be prepared for presentation to the Client. The final report will consist of a narrative and graphic interpretation of the findings. This report will include the following:

- *key findings*
- *SRI’s interpretations*
- *SRI’s conclusions*

- *SRI’s recommendations.*

Of course, the report will include a graphic depiction of the findings in the form of charts, graphs, tables and figures.

Before a final report is prepared, however, SRI researchers and strategic planners will **debrief** the Client in person (using charts, graphs and other figures that show the findings). This process provides decision-makers with an opportunity to assess the “findings” for themselves at the earliest possible moment. Further, it creates an opportunity for researchers to “revisit” the data should public officials still have questions they wish addressed in the final report that SRI researchers and strategic planners did not address in the initial pass of the data set.

Finally, SRI normally provides the Client with *four bound copies* (plus *one unbound copy* for purposes of duplication) of the final report. Further, the findings will be presented, if so desired, in the form of an oral report before public officials, at a public meeting, and/or before Department heads.

### **Time Table**

The final report is normally delivered to the Client within four to six weeks of the final version of the instrument (questionnaire) being approved by the Client. Therefore, public officials will have access to the findings from the telephone survey in an extremely timely fashion.

### **Fees for services rendered**

Obviously, fees for services are predicated upon the parameters of the research effort at hand. However, it is important to stress here that SRI’s fees for services rendered are extremely competitive. Furthermore, and equally important, SRI will work with the Client to deliver the most appropriate research design

within the Client's budget parameters and expectations.

Toward this end, we almost always provide the Client with several approaches that can be tailored to their needs and perceptions. We have found through the years that the least confusing way to discuss the "cost" of conducting research is to show the cost in the context with other parameters of the respective survey; which is to say, compare each alternative approach based upon the key dimensions of the research design. Thus, for the sake of clarity and ease, the alternative approaches will always be presented below in **matrix format**.

### Payment Terms

It is SRI policy to be paid one-half of the total fee upon the signing of the contract by both parties. We are paid one-fourth when the data are gathered and the final one-fourth upon delivery of the final report to the Client.

SRI has the ability to electronically send invoices to its Clients and can receive payments deposited directly into its bank account electronically. Of course, we also correspond via e-mail, modem, FAX, and traditional mail.

## VI. Why Select SRI?

*Over a decade of experience  
involving Parks & Recreation*

Perhaps most important to a prospective Client is the fact that SRI has over a decade of experience in designing and administering public opinion research.

Our Client list includes, for example, the following:

- East Bay Regional Parks District** (the largest regional park district in the U.S.); have represented the EBRPD for over a decade (since 1988).
- Department of Parks and Recreation, **State of California** (funded by Save the Redwoods League).
- Sonoma County** Regional Parks; strategic planning purposes.
- City of Santa Rosa**; Public Usage, Attitudes and Priorities for Parks & Recreation Facilities and Programs.
- Department of Parks and Recreation, **City of Union City**; Parks and Recreation "Five-year Master Plan
- City of Brentwood**; Public Opinion, Attitudes and Priorities for Park and Recreation Facilities.
- City of Lafayette**; Survey to determine park and recreation desires and voter willingness to support tax for such projects.
- City of Davis**; Public Opinion, Attitudes and Spending Priorities regarding Issues of Open Space, Natural Areas, and Recreation Trails.
- It's Time for a Park Committee**; Marin County with the Towns of Fairfax and San Anselmo.
- City of Moreno Valley**; threshold of Willingness-to-Pay for Parklands and Recreation Facilities Made Available from the Closure of the March Air Force Base.
- Delta Environment Science Center**; market survey.
- Desert Botanical Garden**, Phoenix, Az.; marketing research to promote usage.

We are proud of the fact that we have been working with the largest regional park district in the United States, the **East Bay Regional Park District**, since 1988. In fact, the principal of SRI, Dr. G. Gary Manross, currently maintains an office at EBRPD headquarters in Oakland.

SRI is responsible for the passage of a **\$225 million bond initiative** for the regional park district. Furthermore, the Measures KK and LL (also sponsored by the Park District) received 79.8% and 69.1% of the vote respectively when they appeared simultaneously on the Nov. '96 ballot. Although Measure W failed to receive the necessary 2/3 voter support in the Nov. '98 elections, it garnered 65.4 percent support in the face of extreme and unexpected controversy.

Indeed, after more than a decade since first working with the Park District, it continues today to utilize SRI for the majority (if not all) of its public policy research, as well as for consulting for purposes of strategic planning.

Only recently, SRI helped the City of Union City develop its "Five Year Plan" for Parks and Recreation.<sup>2</sup>

SRI has been in business for nearly two decades. During this time, we have worked closely with municipalities, and other local and regional government and quasi-government agencies, with respect to public policy. Indeed, we specialize in such areas as strategic planning for:

<sup>2</sup> Please feel free to contact Ms. Valerie Crawford, Director of Parks and Recreation, Union City, (510) 471-3232 Ext. 312.

### Public Opinion/Consensus Building

SRI designs and implements research efforts intended for consensus building among *stakeholders* within communities who often have varied (and even conflicting) agendas.

SRI's behavioral scientists and strategic planners work with public officials to identify and rank-order the **collective opinions** and **desires** of the agency's constituencies, for example. These efforts involve *voters and non-voters* alike; as well as *special interest groups* represented through community and civic groups, chambers of commerce, trade and/or professional associations, et al.

Typical issues being addressed through these consensus-building efforts pertain to such things as the *delivery of public services, as well as willingness to pay* for these services through various tax initiatives and/or fees for services rendered.

### 'Economic Development' within the Public/Private Sectors

SRI designs and administers policy research for purposes of economic development. The primary goal here is to help government agencies and stakeholders in private enterprise sustain or regain fiscal solvency.

For example, SRI is currently working with the **City of Sunnyvale** and the **Oakland CEO Council** (comprised of the largest 15 corporations with headquarters in Oakland) on projects having to do with regional economic development.

We also work with consortiums that involve both the public and private sectors dedicated to economic development. One such Client, for example, is the Contra Costa Economic Partnership, headquartered in Concord, Ca.<sup>3</sup>

Toward this end, SRI helps Clients identify new sources of revenue generation. This may involve conducting **public opinion research** to “test” a tax-related measure (including *willingness to pay* and the electorate’s *tax threshold*); or it may involve conducting **marketing research** for purposes of attracting commercial enterprise (e.g., retail and/or light industry) into a given community; or, more importantly, keeping existing businesses from relocating out of the respective community.

## Land Use

SRI studies public opinion relating to land use, especially in cases where the available lands within the agency’s jurisdiction are limited and/or constricted in some form and government officials are faced with making hard choices.

We help public officials address such questions, for example, as:

Should the available lands within their jurisdiction be zoned:

- for *residential housing*; and, if so, what kind of housing should be approved?
- for *commercial* and/or *light industry* (and what kind)?
- or, perhaps dedicated to *permanent open space* for future generations to enjoy and for the *protection of wildlife*?

<sup>3</sup> Feel free to contact **Mr. Bud Lake**, former Executive Director of the **Contra Costa County Economic Partnership** as a reference for SRI: (925) 283-8455.

- or, should these lands be used for *parks and recreation*; and, if so, what kind?

We were responsible for the passage of a **\$48 million bond initiative** for the Alameda Unified School District and a **\$25 million bond initiative** that made possible the construction of a new high school in Martinez, California.

Through the years, we’ve repre-sented countless public school districts at both the elementary and secondary levels; public library districts/systems; community college districts; and other government and quasi-government agencies in pursuit of new (or renewed) funding alternatives.

With respect to municipal and county government, SRI’s client base includes (but is in no way limited to) the cities of Berkeley, Oakland, Hercules, Martinez, Lafayette, Pleasanton, Brentwood, Davis, Benecia, Gilroy, Los Altos, Pleasant Hill, Moreno Valley, and Santa Rosa; the Towns of Danville, Fairfax, Pacifica, Half Moon Bay, Fremont, and Windsor; the Counties of Contra Costa, Marin, Santa Clara, Sonoma, and Hollister/San Benito and others; and numerous other government agencies throughout California. For example, we represent the AC Transit District in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

At a state level, we’ve partnered with the Park and Recreation Department, State of California and the Department of Public Education, State of Arizona.

SRI is involved in the private sector, as well (both for-profit and non-profit). One market in which the problems being addressed closely resemble those in the public sector is “managed health care.” Our client base in this industry includes, but is not limited to, HealthNet, Inc., Humana, SCAN Health Plan, United Health Plan, Integroup Health Plan, Qual-Med, Inc., Eli Lilly Company, National

Medical Enterprises, Associated British Hospital Equipment Limited (headquartered in London, England), and others. Furthermore, we conduct both political/policy research and market research for **The Auto Club of Southern California** (AAA). And, we represent such non-profits as the Phoenix Art Museum, the Desert Botanical Garden, the Delta Environment Science Center, and United Way of Orange County.

The questions vary based upon the given circumstances at hand, of course.

Such decisions, by definition, require *highly accurate* and *objective* input from local constituents (especially registered voters).

It goes without saying, that in order to address the types of issues noted above, that we routinely conduct the following types of research:

- telephone and mail surveys** of local constituencies (including the general public and the local electorate),
- focus group research,**
- opinion leadership surveys,**
- management audits** (both internal and external),
- field studies** (involving special interest groups such as community and civic groups and organizations, the business community, and others).

We also consult with government agencies with respect to community outreach through “town hall” meetings, media planning, and-the-like.<sup>4</sup> Our involve-ment in public policy decision making has become ever more central

<sup>4</sup> One of SRI’s sister firms are often invited to help design and administer information campaigns for purposes of communicating effectively with the Client’s public(s) of concern. These firms include the **Political Action Institute** (PAI) and **Integrated Marketing Communications Corporation** (IMC Corp.).

to city officials in recent years due, in no small part, to today’s multi-cultural environments.

One area of special note in which SRI has played a central role in recent years is that of conducting “feasibility studies” for placing bond initiatives before local electorates (GO bonds, parcel tax initiatives, Mello-Roos, and-the-like). In a time when 2/3-voter support is required for the passage of most tax initiatives, there’s simply no room for error. Without wanting to appear immodest, the Institute’s Chairman, G. Gary Manross, Ph.D. is one of the leading authorities on this important topic. In fact, it’s been said that we’ve literally written the book. It’s entitled: *The Impact of Theory-Driven Public Opinion Research in Strategic Planning* (Manross, NY: Carlton Press, 1995).<sup>5</sup>

The accuracy of our research regarding such matters may best be illustrated in a statement from an official of the City of Berkeley:

**“You predicted that if we followed your recommendations (based upon a scientifically -conducted telephone survey) that the bond measure (tax initiative) would be approved by 79% of the voters. We followed your recommendations quite closely, and the measure was approved by 78.7% of the voters. Pretty impressive.”**

*Mr. Hal Cronkite  
Asst. City Manager  
City of Berkeley*

The Institute is comprised of highly credentialed behavioral scientists and strategic planners who have extensive experience in conducting the very form of policy and marketing research that is essential in today’s **multi-cultural** social and political

<sup>5</sup> This book is used for both graduate and undergraduate levels of higher education for courses in public policy, strategic planning, political communications, and-the-like.

environments. One such study involved a city in East Los Angeles that was concerned with **persuading Hispanic and Asian residents** who are victims of violent crime to begin reporting these to local authorities. SRI's Chairman, Dr. Manross, was also on the research team (through California State University, Fullerton) that addressed the issue of reducing the death toll among illegal aliens who were being accidentally killed while crossing freeways adjacent to the U.S./Mexican border. He was also very active in the "mentoring" program for Hispanics and African Americans during the seven years he was professor of communications and marketing at Cal-State University, Fullerton.

Perhaps SRI was best described in its response to a recent RFP from the Chairperson of the Marketing Research Committee, Senior Living Cluster of the (Arizona) Governor's Strategic Partnership for Economic Development. Mr. Denny Ryerson asked for a statement that explains what we believe sets SRI apart from other research organizations:

First, as its name implies, **Strategy Research Institute** is a supplier of "applied research" for strategic planning that is often used for the development of information and/or persuasive campaigns involving consumer and political behavior. The Institute is comprised of a team of seasoned *behavioral scientists* (both quantitative and qualitative researchers) and *strategic planners*. SRI's behavioral

scientists are proficient in the most up-to-date, scientific methodologies. As behavioral scientists, we are interested in understanding and predicting human behavior (i.e. consumer and political behavior); as strategic planners, we're interested in behavioral modification.

If asked to identify in a summary statement what sets SRI apart from other research organizations, we would undoubtedly cite four specific characteristics:

1. **SRI is expert in identifying "cause-effect" relationships, which is vital to any strategic planning process.**
2. **We model these findings (relationships) in a fashion that permits our Client to systematically impact human behavior in a fashion that manifests desired behavioral outcomes (e.g., vote YES on a tax initiative).**
3. **Due to an unusual mix of talent, competencies, expertise and practical experience among the members of our professional staff, we know how to interpret findings from our research (especially in terms of strategic planning) far beyond the ability of other research organizations.**
4. **Measures of accountability are built into our reports and recommendations by virtue of the fact that all of our work is based upon objective, scientifically driven information.**



Should you wish counsel from SRI regarding a project your Agency is currently dealing with, or contemplating at some future date, please feel free to contact us and open dialog; there is no cost or obligation to you or to your Agency for the initial consultation. Our contact information is listed below.

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*SRI is a member of a family of companies including:*

Political Action Institute, and...

Integrated Marketing Communications Corporation

