

# Agency Image & Awareness Study

---

**GMI original research  
Executive Summary**

Report originally issued February 2010. Updated for 2013.



A research report by  
GMI  
PO Box 63719  
Colorado Springs, CO 80962 USA  
719-531-3599

**gmi.org**

## Study Purpose

You can't send them if they don't know about you. So...

- How many future long-term cross-cultural workers know about your agency?
- And among those that do: What is their opinion of your agency?

To find out, we surveyed more than 900 prospective cross-cultural workers, asking them which agencies they knew about (aided and unaided awareness). Then we asked them to characterize and express their favorability toward one of the agencies they knew about.

The results showed us quite a bit – both about agencies and about prospective long-term missionaries. For agencies at Recalibrate 2012, GMI is glad to provide baseline awareness results from this 2010 survey on a complimentary basis – email your request from an approved agency email address to [jim@gmi.org](mailto:jim@gmi.org).

Agency-specific results for favorability – including open-ended comments – are available for a report-generation fee to agencies that received feedback from at least 20 respondents. All agency-specific results are held in confidence and will not be published or released by GMI except to leaders of that agency. Code names are used for individual agencies in this report.

Our hope is that this information will enable sending agencies to better understand and more productively dialogue with the emerging generation of cross-cultural workers, while relying on the leading of the Spirit in all things.

## Whom We Interviewed

Global Mapping International maintains a panel of approximately 4,000 future missionaries – largely young adults under age 25 – who have:

- attended at least one student mission conference in recent years and
- indicated moderate-to-high intent to pursue long-term cross-cultural service.

Each panelist is re-qualified each time he or she is interviewed; panelists that no longer considering long-term service or who have joined or are active candidates with a sending agency are disqualified from responding.

A total of 938 prospective missionaries responded to the Awareness section of the survey. Of those, 893 provided their impressions of one of 54 sending agencies. The survey's margin of error is +/- 3.2% at 95-percent confidence.

# Awareness

The “typical” (median) respondent named two agencies on an unaided basis, then selected seven more agencies from the aided list, for a total of nine. This pattern held true for both men and women.

The best-known agency was recognized by 84 percent of respondents, while the least known was recognized by only two percent – even after prompting.

The “typical” (median) agency generated unaided awareness of 1.5 percent and total awareness of 12.0 percent.

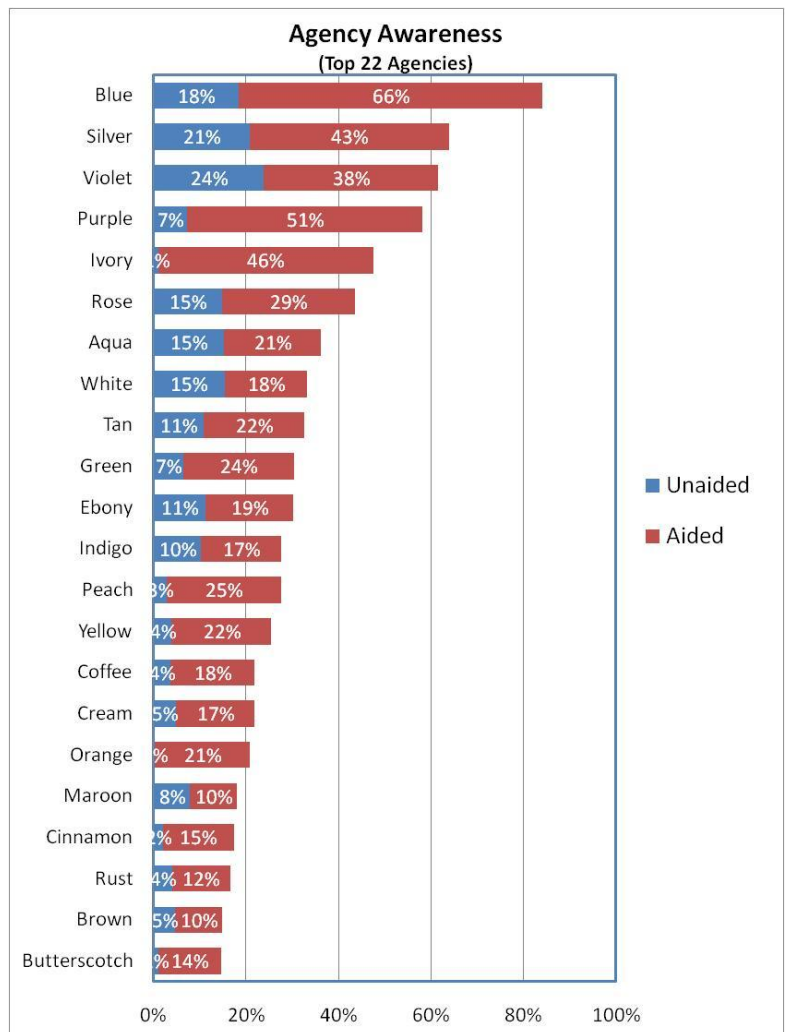
Several of the most-recognized agencies have a traditional youth focus; these are doubtless known by many college students and recent graduates through their ministry experience in college or high school.

Overall, higher relative levels of awareness were noted among older respondents, White/Caucasian respondents and respondents who are most likely to go.

Two “red herring” organizations included in the aided list were each selected by fewer than one percent of respondents, suggesting little evidence of “false positive” responses.

## What it means

Almost every non-youth-oriented agency has plenty of room for improvement in awareness among prospects for long-term service.



# Overall Image of Sending Agencies

Agencies tend to be most strongly associated with the following image elements, each selected by about a quarter of respondents:

- **Long-term commitments**
- **Team oriented**
- **Short-term Opportunities**
- **Education/Training**
- **Culturally aware/relevant**

These could be considered characteristics typical of the overall sending-agency sector.

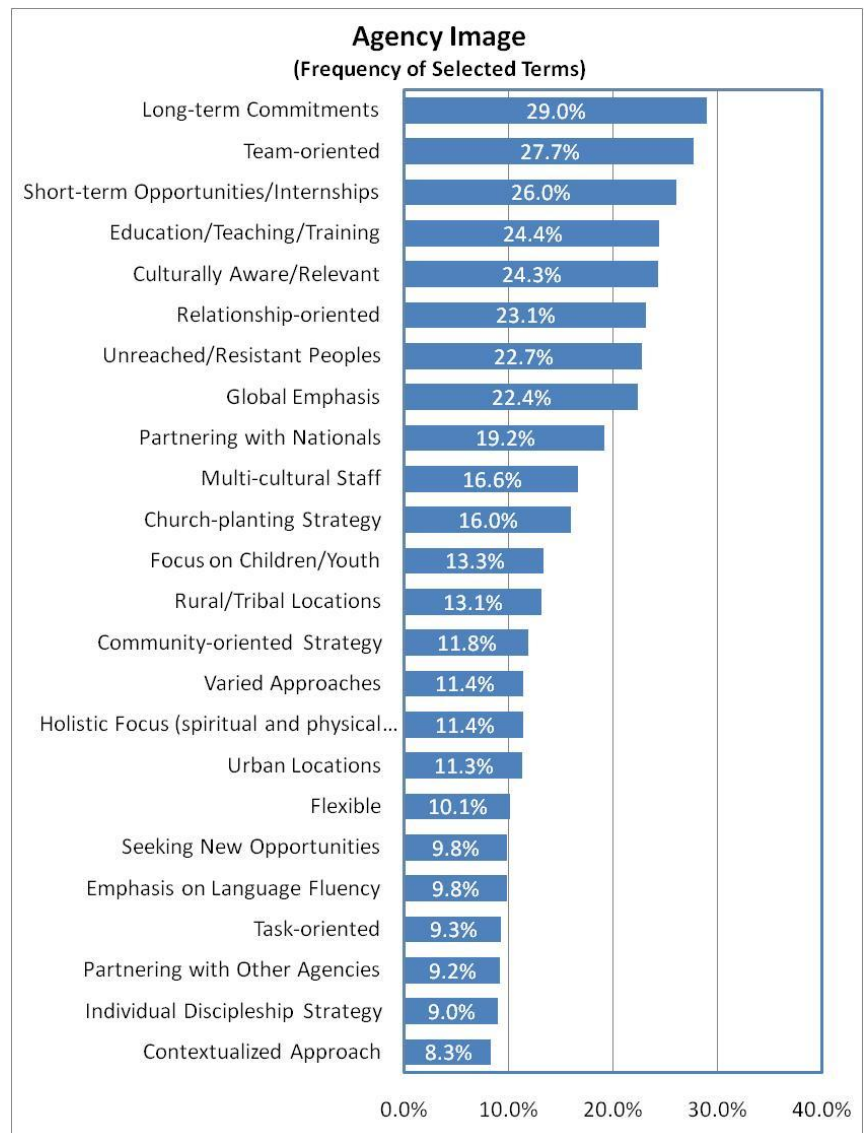
Frequently-selected terms often have favorable associations, so agencies may be tempted to emphasize them. However, such terms don't help to distinguish an agency from other agencies.

Other terms may represent “less-claimed space” in prospects’ minds. Some of the following may offer agencies an opportunity to position themselves as distinctive:

- High-Risk Settings
- Exploring New Ideas
- Regional Emphasis
- Relief/Development
- Literacy/Translation
- Sowing Broadly
- Specialized Focus
- Mobile/Agile
- Proclamation
- Tentmaking/Business as Mission

- Decentralized (Field-Driven)
- Focus on a Specific Faith/Worldview
- Orality/Storytelling
- Justice Issues
- Politically Unstable Settings
- Simple/Low-tech
- Publishing

- Sowing Deeply
- Replicating Successful Approaches
- High-tech
- Focus on Women
- Focus on Men
- Electronic Media/Broadcasting
- Politically Stable Settings
- Virtual/Online Settings



# Image Factors Linked to Favorability

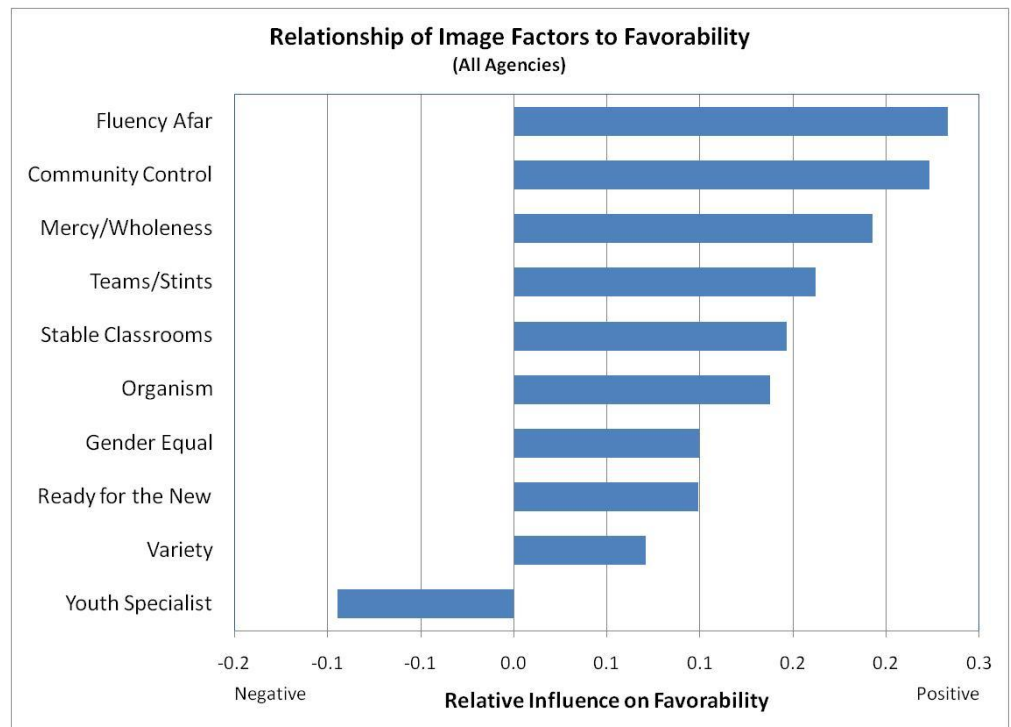
Just because an image characteristic is frequently selected does not mean that it is attractive or influential for prospects.

Key image “factors” (weighted combinations of similar image elements) were identified and then compared with favorability ratings to determine which image elements may have positive influence with prospective workers. Ten themes stood out; in descending order of influence:

- Fluency Afar:** Communicating relevantly while crossing cultural barriers in hard places.
- Community Control:** Looking and acting multi-cultural, contextual, interdependent, cooperative.
- Mercy/Wholeness:** Helping real people and communities with real needs.
- Teams/Stints:** Going together.
- Stable Classrooms:** Equipping the next generation of servants.
- Organism:** Living, growing and bearing fruit in the Spirit.
- Gender Equal:** Ensuring meaningful roles and responsibilities for all.
- Ready for the New:** Reflecting God’s image by creating and discovering new opportunities.
- Variety:** Doing well by being involved in many things.
- Not Youth Specialist:** Reaching out to many people in many ways.

## What it means

Incorporating these elements – those that truly reflect agency values – into verbal and visual communication is likely to resonate with the next generation of missionaries. Consider using some of these as criteria to evaluate messaging. Consider leadership team discussions about elements of alignment or dissonance.



# Image-based Segments

Image factors can also be used to create a map of the “image landscape” of agencies. The labels around the outside of the map represent image factors. The label size shows how well each factor distinguishes among agencies.

Each marker on the map represents an agency. Markers close to the map border are more strongly associated with nearby image factors. Markers closer to the middle of the map are perceived as more balanced...or indistinct.

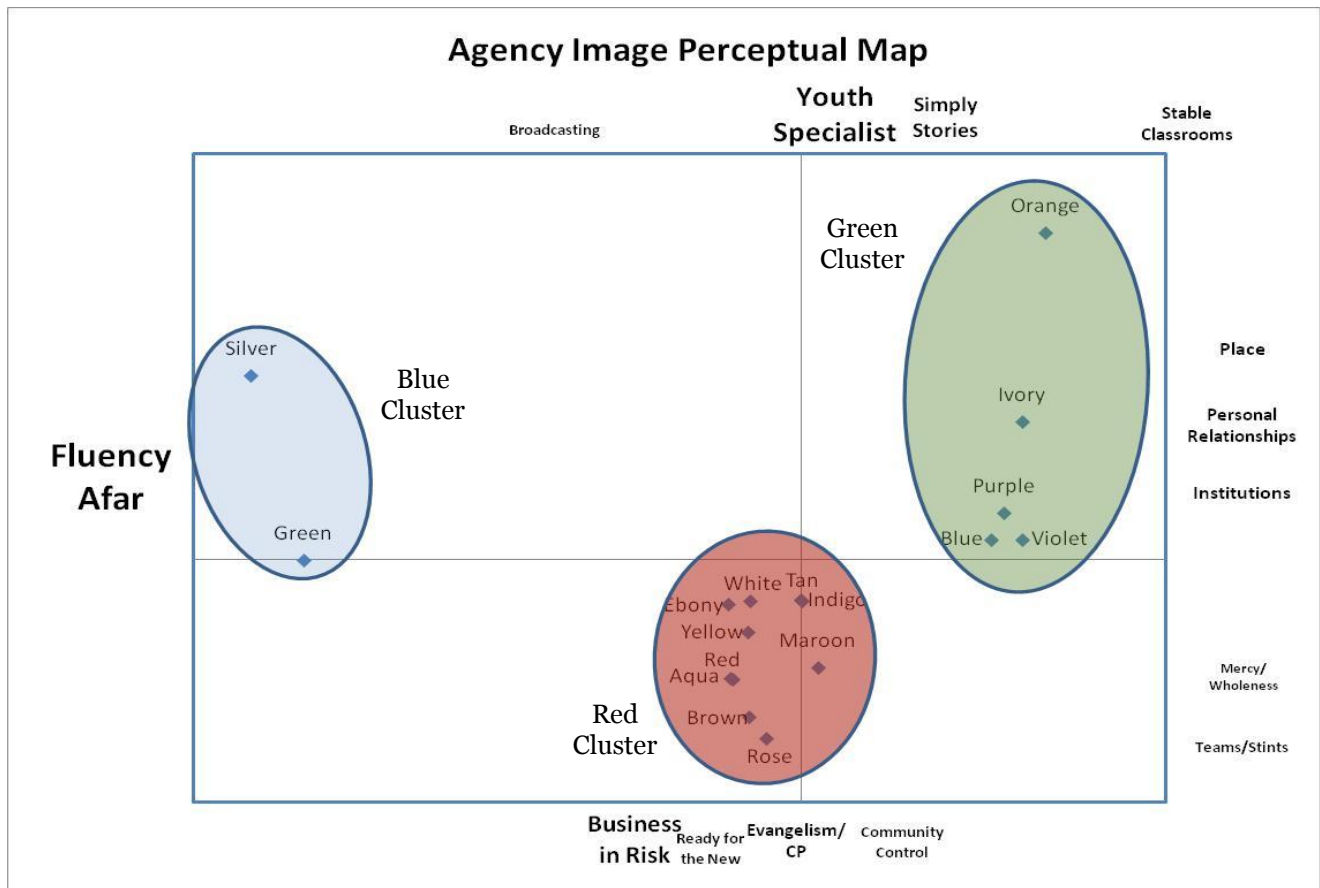
The map reveals three basic sending agency segments:

**Blue Cluster** agencies are strongly linked to Fluency Afar – these emphasize literacy and translation work with tribal peoples.

## Red Cluster

agencies are linked to Business in Risk – these often use commercial ventures to engage people in less-open areas for witness and church-planting. Innovation and decentralized control are typical.

**Green Cluster** agencies have a traditional youth orientation and are often associated with places and institutions, personal evangelism and training/equipping.



## **What it Means**

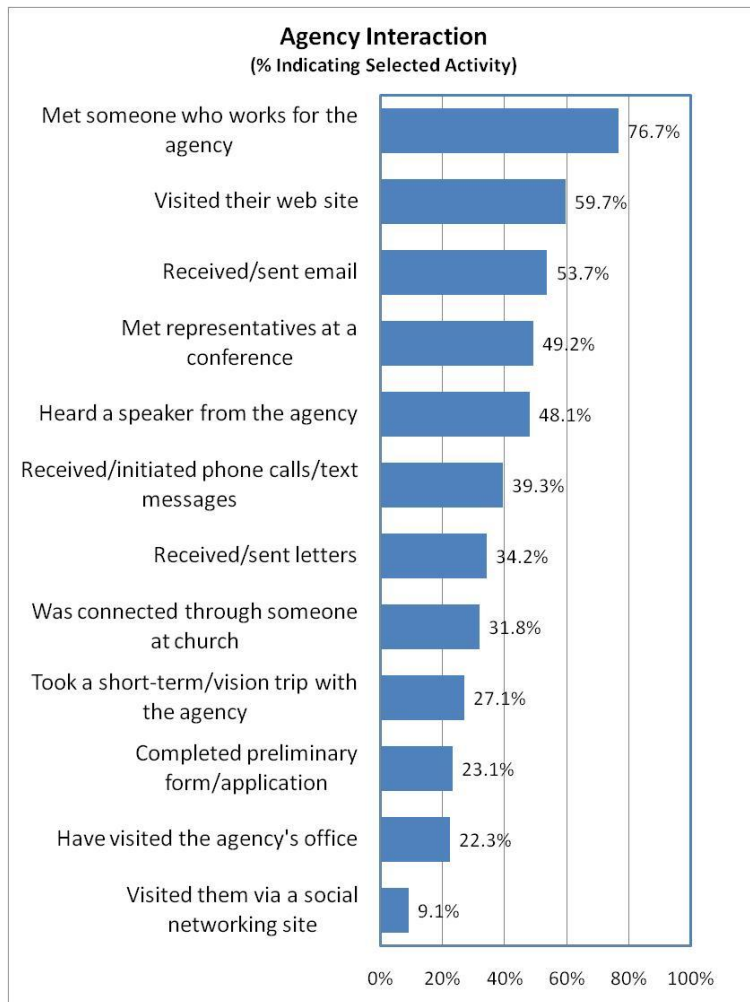
Blue Cluster agencies are not only distinctive from other agencies, but because Fluency Afar is a key driver of favorable impressions, so agencies in this cluster tend to have strong brands.

In the Red Cluster, two distinctive factors (Business in Risk, Evangelism/CP) are not linked strongly to favorability, but some of the secondary factors are: Community Control (field-driven, multi-ethnic teams that are culturally aware and context appropriate) and Ready for the New, reflecting innovation and adaptability. Agencies like these are encouraged to wrap these themes into messaging, even if imbedded in or as subtext to other themes.

Some Red Cluster agencies could consider repositioning themselves toward “blue ocean” spaces in the map not strongly occupied by other sending agencies. A focus on Mercy/Wholeness (which is often linked to relief/development groups rather than sending agencies) and Organism (less Western, less task oriented and less focused on replicating successful approaches).

The Green Cluster association with youth (whether by name or tradition) is a double-edged sword, allowing better access to prospective career workers but also associated with image factors that are not linked to favorability. A potential strategy for these agencies is diversification that acknowledges youth-related ties while showing that the agency does much more. Another is drawing on related image elements that are linked to favorability, including teamwork, training the next generation of servants, and extending mercy.

# How Prospects Interact with Agencies



Respondents' most common interaction is meeting someone who works for an agency. Other personal, face-to-face points of context were also frequently cited: meeting representatives at a conference and hearing speakers.

Web and email communication is also prominent, but as of 2009/2010, use of social networking sites for engaging with agencies was still modest (9%).

A third of respondents had interacted with their selected agency within the past month, while a fifth had not done so at all within the past two years.

Prospects beyond college age and those of non-White ethnicity were much more likely to not have been contacted within the past two years.

## What it means

Agencies appear to group prospects into two categories: "hot" and "cold," with

hot prospects being contacted frequently and cold prospects contacted rarely if at all, reflecting likely use of contact-management systems that reduces contact frequency when it seems that the prospect and agency are not a good match. Agencies may consider sending an occasional communiqué to "cold" prospects to see if their circumstances may have changed and their interest rekindled.



# Frequency and Favorability in Agency Interaction

Respondents most frequently selected the following terms to describe their interactions with agencies as:

- **Professional**
- **Informative**
- **Provides a Structured Path to Join**
- **Makes Face-to-Face Contact**
- **Makes Email Contact**

As with image factors, frequent does not always mean favorable. The accompanying chart shows five factors (out of 14) that are most strongly linked to favorable impressions.

## What It Means

For communication with prospects, we find that:

- **How** (style of communication) is very important. Prospects want agency reps to listen and provide input based on prospects' needs. They want to be reminded that God is listening...and speaking. Being perceived as cool, funny, and relevant is not important. Prospects want an agency they can aspire to be like – not the other way around.
- **Who** (the messenger) is somewhat important. Connections via field staff and local church contacts are positive links. **Who** (agency personality) is also somewhat important. Incarnation, Kingdom, Community and Compassion are all winsome elements.
- **What** (agency structure, task assignment) is usually not important unless the content is immediately timely for the prospect. Communication about candidate screening and pre-field training is helpful and relevant; info about potential field assignments is less so.
- **Where** (channels of communication) was not yet important (as of 2009-2010), although there are indications that understanding and engaging in new media are appreciated.

