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# L.A. residents giving significantly less to charity, study finds



A Los Angeles Fire Department paramedic speaks with a homeless man who was too weak to stand. (Mark Boster / Los Angeles Times)



By **Alice Walton** · Contact Reporter

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**C**haritable giving in Los Angeles County dropped off after the 2007 recession and still hasn't fully recovered, according to a new study from the California Community Foundation and the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

Angelenos donated \$6.03 billion to charities in 2013, down from \$7.16 billion in 2006. While household incomes in California have not returned to pre-recession levels, the study found Angelenos donated 2% of their adjusted gross income in 2013 compared to 2.4% in 2006.

Both individual donations and “mega-gifts” of \$1 million or more declined. Researchers based their findings on data from the Internal Revenue Service as well as a survey of donors.

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The survey confirms what many in the non-profit community already believed – it’s difficult to raise money in Los Angeles, said John Kobara, executive vice president and COO of the California Community Foundation.

Major international foundations are turned off by the region’s sprawl and complex system of local governments, he said.

“They just can’t figure out who runs it. What’s going on? How can I talk to somebody who has a real feel for the needs and issues,” Kobara said.

The same frustration extends to local donors who are often unaware of the needs in their own backyard. According to the survey, 43% of donors listed “ending homelessness” as one of their top three philanthropic goals. However, two-thirds of their donations went to organizations outside Los Angeles County.

“You don’t understand the diversity of L.A. and that the needs that you might be interested in in another continent are literally a mile from your house,” Kobara said. “They don’t understand what their neighbors are going through.”

Charities can educate donors through seminars but the best recruiters are often other donors, particularly those who give through estate planning, said Shawn Landres, a UCLA Luskin School Civil Society Fellow and co-author of the study.

The survey found 88% of donors who planned to make bequests to local organizations also gave annual contributions.

“Now you have a sense of community. Now you feel like you belong. Now you feel like you have a stake in Los Angeles,” Landres said.

Los Angeles County is home to more than 35,000 nonprofit organizations -- a 12% increase from 2006. The growth has created tremendous competition between medium-sized charities. The median annual revenue of local human services organizations declined from \$300,000 in 2000 to \$200,000 in 2013, according to the report.

“Local nonprofit organizations form a powerful network dedicated to serving the county’s most

vulnerable residents, but we know they are stretched for resources,” said Antonia Hernandez, president and chief executive of the California Community Foundation. “We as a collective region must tap into our talent and generosity of spirit to build stable organizations that can make a lasting difference in Los Angeles County.”

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The study’s authors recommended charitable organizations work together to “market” Los Angeles to donors. The California Community Foundation undertook a similar effort in 2013 that resulted in an additional \$200 million in state and federal funding for Los Angeles County, according to the group.

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Los Angeles County is home to more than 35,000 nonprofit organizations — a 12% increase from 2006. The California Community Foundation is creating a new Web portal to help donors filter through those charities.

“It is our hope that a better understanding of charitable giving in the region can benefit donors and nonprofits alike, as we work together to build better futures for all Angelenos,” Bill Parent, project director and a lecturer at the Luskin School, said in a statement.

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