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# Boston Foundation Study Says Living Costs Shape Local Giving

 June 12, 2007 — High-income Massachusetts residents give more than twice the average given by comparable households nationwide, but middle and lower income residents here, burdened by the high cost of living in the state, give less than their peers elsewhere in the country, according to a new study of charitable giving released today by the Boston Foundation.

When Massachusetts residents give, they give far more to secular causes than to religious institutions, the study found.

The report was researched and written by Paul G. Schervish and John J. Havens, respectively director and senior associate director of the [Center on Wealth and Philanthropy](#) at Boston College, a national leader in the study of spirituality, wealth, philanthropy and the culture of affluence.

“Philanthropy is especially important in Massachusetts because of the scale and significance of our nonprofit sector,” said Paul S. Grogan, president and CEO of the [Boston Foundation](#). “For years we have operated on hunch and anecdotal evidence, but this report for the first time puts the subject on a credible, factual basis.”

The report contains extensive data about Greater Boston and Massachusetts with regard to wealth and giving, and includes comparative information from other states and urban areas. The result, according to the Boston Foundation, is a first-ever truly national context for charitable giving as well as a foundation for other areas that choose to explore local levels of giving.

Among the findings of the research:

- At the national level, giving is evenly split between religious and secular giving, but New England is one of the few places in the country where that is not the case and giving favors secular causes.
- Wealthy householders in Massachusetts donate more to charity than their counterparts—except in New Jersey, Connecticut, and New York.
- In Boston and Massachusetts, households headed by African Americans give the largest percentage of their incomes to charity, compared to other races. This community also stands apart because members are more likely to make their contributions to religion.

“This story is both simple and complex,” said Schervish. “Most giving is made by those with the most to give. On the other hand, the research makes it clear that the idea of summing up entire states with a charitable

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giving identity runs counter to reality. States are hugely complex entities, with different economic climates and different ethnic characters in different places. There are interesting and useful things to be said about the pattern of giving in Massachusetts, and this report was designed to encourage other parts of the country to follow up with further close readings in their neighborhoods.”

The report was released at an *Understanding Boston Forum* held at the Boston Foundation. *Understanding Boston* is a series of forums, educational events and research sponsored by the Boston Foundation to provide information and insight into issues affecting Boston, its neighborhoods and the region.

The Boston Foundation, Greater Boston’s community foundation, is one of the oldest and largest community foundations in the nation, with assets of over \$830 million. In 2006, the Foundation and its donors made more than \$70 million in grants to nonprofit organizations and received gifts of \$71 million.

The Boston College Center on Wealth and Philanthropy is a multidisciplinary research center specializing in the study of spirituality, wealth, philanthropy and other aspects of cultural life in an age of affluence.