

Results

Issue Areas

Dotmocracy

In order to understand which topics and issues are most relevant to Fort Bend County residents, individuals were asked to select **three of the nine** issue areas (*listed to the right*) that they are most knowledgeable about and/or interested in. From there they were given fifteen dots, which were **color coded** according to the list below:

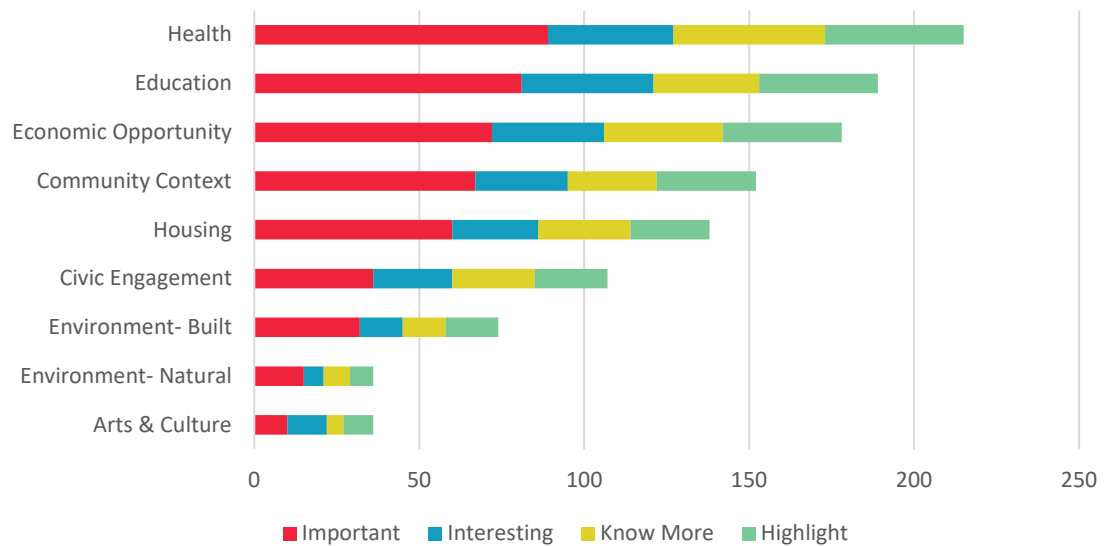
- Most Important (6 red dots)
- Most Interesting (3 blue dots)
- Most In Need of Knowing More About (3 yellow dots)
- Most Worthy of Highlighting for the Community (3 green dots)

With these fifteen dots, participants were asked to place **five** dots (2 red, 1 blue, 1 yellow, 1 green) on subtopics in each of their three issue areas using the color scheme noted above. Each of the nine issue areas has three to six subtopics within them, for a total of forty-six subtopics. For example, in the picture **to the right**, the main issue area is Health; the subtopics in this area are Access to Healthcare, Health Behaviors (Wellness), Mental Health, Aging, and so forth.



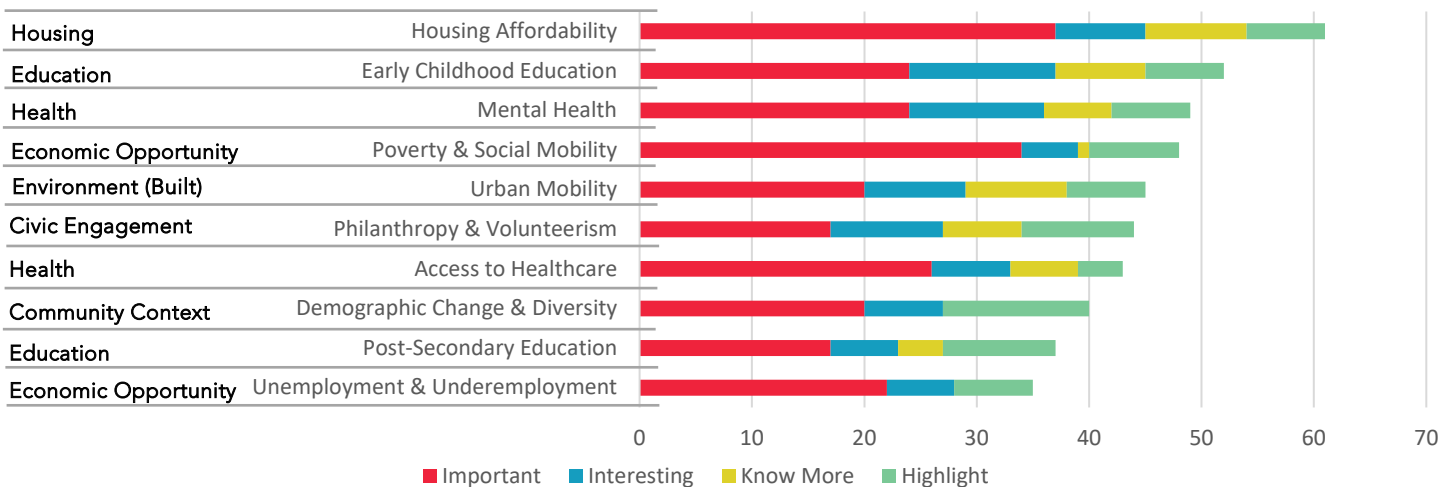
The data given in the bar graph **to the right** presents the nine issue areas by total number of dots as well as the color distribution for each issue area. The chart presented gives a broad sense of participants' engagement with issue areas, with **health, education, and economic opportunity** reflecting the greatest activity overall.

Voter Activity By Issue Area



Below are the top ten subtopics that received the most dots. **Attendees were clear that Housing Affordability was a topic of overall community importance.** Dotmocracy voters ranked **Poverty & Social Mobility** as highly important, **Early Childhood Education** and **Mental Health** as most interesting, and **Demographic Change & Diversity** as the issue most worthy of highlighting.

Top Ten Topics By Voter Activity



“If we don’t know the gaps, we can’t improve our work.”

- Fort Bend Focus Group

Subtopics of note that did not make the cut for the top ten most chosen subtopics were:

Industry Dynamics & Job Growth: In the top three subtopics categorized as *“most interesting to you.”*

Inequality: In the top three subtopics categorized as *“most should know more about.”*

Health Outcomes: In the top three subtopics categorized as *“most should know more about.”*

Access to Credit & Household Debt: In the top three subtopics categorized as *“most should know more about.”*

Fort Bend County Residents Have Spoken

The following subtopics are suggested topic additions written-in by participants during Dotmocracy

Criminal Justice - Veterans (Community Context)

Obesity (Health)

Vocational Training & Career Readiness (Education)

Disabled Veterans (Health)

Special Education (Education)

Intellectual or Developmental

Rural Mobility (Environment – Built)

Disabilities & Special Needs (Health)

Homelessness (Housing)

Focus Groups

Groups of roughly six individuals were led, by a facilitator, in a thought-provoking conversation about the Understanding Houston initiative. They were also invited to consider and discuss how the data driven platform could best be utilized by their organizations and which issues were most important to keep in mind when considering their community.



What do you think about the initiative?

Many individuals expressed a high level of interest in the project and excitement towards having data available about their community. One person remarked, **“Finally! Data is needed.** [It’s] hard to find quality data specific to Fort Bend.” Another stated, “It’s most needed, overdue, and I’m excited that we’re doing it. I’m surprised we haven’t already, especially with all of the needs.” Participants anticipate that Understanding Houston will be a “great opportunity to share what is happening in the community.”

Additionally, participants were **“very in support for one database”** that is not only accumulated into a single source, but also easy for every level of organization to understand. Currently, “community organizations have trouble finding and understanding data.” Understanding Houston will provide “reliable, consistent data” on a single platform that “will lead to better understanding” the information as a whole.

Furthermore, participants see Understanding Houston as a **networking opportunity that could catalyze collaboration** with other organizations and donors.

How will you use the data?

Participants shared that the data will provide a great “opportunity to increase awareness” regarding the needs and issues for community focus, making Understanding Houston **an awareness tool for the community.** “Accessible data will put us in a better position to decide which needs and gaps our organizations will work on.”

Participants also shared that the data can serve as **an educational tool.** For donors, the information can help them identify pressing issues they may not be familiar with. “As a funder, we want to ensure that funding goes to the most vulnerable populations.” Other organizations and civil leaders can also “learn from other counties who are doing well in a particular indicator area and see why it’s working well there.”

Other uses of the data include **grant writing, strategic planning, and effective programming.** The data will also aid donors, board members, government officials, and nonprofit leaders with **decision making** within their organizations.

“One of the things data will allow us to do is be proactive rather than reactive.”

- Fort Bend Focus Group

Who else could use the data and how?

“**Everyone.** That includes schools, libraries, civic organizations, community organizations, donors, nonprofits, policy makers, elected officials.” Other possible users include politicians, churches, religious leaders, social services, engineers, business leaders, and more.

“We all have different missions and goals but [will be] working with the same set of data.” “**We are all invested.**” Participants made it clear that the entire community could find a way to use this data, and furthermore, collaborate with it.



What do you see as the greatest opportunity related to the project?

Participants' answers included identifying needs and gaps in the community, opportunity for collaboration, and the availability of resources for donors, organizations, and leaders to make informed decisions.

One attendee commented that the project also provides “**great opportunity for reflection.** [The data] could allow

organizations to step back and more easily reflect on if what they are doing makes sense and serves the people.” Another commented, “You might be going in one direction and the data show you that you need to go in the other direction.”

Understanding Houston will also provide assistance with strategic planning, grant writing, program development, resource allocation, and effective management of time and efforts. This data will provide “**a forum to make collaboration easier.** Not just to talk about it, but approach the problems together.”

“Data helps to open the dialogue, address the unspoken barriers, and lead to focused planning and increased accountability.”

- Fort Bend Focus Group

What risks/concerns should be avoided?

Multiple tables discussed that “there is always concern about **making sure all voices are represented.**” Other concerns for Understanding Houston include inconsistent and inaccurate data, failure to capture all of the data needed, silo thinking, how user-friendly the site will be, ensuring the data is utilized to take action, and ensuring the data focus on the information itself and is not politicized.

Five years out, what kind of impact would you hope to see as a result of this work?

Many participants responded that they would like to see an advancement and improvement of programs within Fort Bend County as a result of the data, allowing these programs and services to serve people in more efficient and impactful ways.

“We’ll have a better idea of what programs are needed.”

“Services that would meet the people where they live.”

“Foster a more collaborative approach to meeting the needs of our community. Together we can make a greater impact.”

Indicator Surveys

Participants were given a list of over two hundred indicators that could be part of the Understanding Houston website. By marking the list, individuals were given the opportunity to communicate which indicators should be prioritized, add additional comments about each indicator, and add indicator suggestions.

Twenty-six individuals utilized this list to mark indicators they personally believed should be prioritized. The information they shared will be used to further inform the Understanding Houston initiative and personalize it to Fort Bend County. The indicators that received the most prioritization by participants were Access to Mental Health, Uninsured, Access to Healthcare, Population with High School Diploma, and Family Type. As we saw in Dotmocracy, eight subtopics were suggested within their respective issue areas. In addition, **twenty-nine indicator suggestions** were also made, with the highest amount (nine) allocated to Health, six of which pertaining to **mental health**. Multiple comments also emphasized the importance of **veterans** and **special needs** within the community.

Conclusion

“Collaboration without credit is a hallmark of Fort Bend County. We do what we do best and partner with the rest.” - *Fort Bend Focus Group*

Some big takeaways that the Understanding Houston team received from the convening were that Fort Bend County is a very diverse and fast growing county, and for that reason, it cannot be defined simply by looking at the overall region’s strengths and weaknesses. As vocalized during the focus group discussions and seen through the Dotmocracy activity, transportation is an issue that is in need of attention, as are housing affordability and vulnerabilities, and the overall disparities within the community.

We are excited to use the information we’ve gathered to help refine the indicator list and content for the Understanding Houston website, as well as have an ongoing conversation with the leaders and residents of Fort Bend County to help us all learn, engage, and act to make our region a more vibrant one.

Special thanks to Quynh-Anh McMahan, Senior Program Officer of The George Foundation, for her instrumental leadership and support of this important conversation and Understanding Houston.

Visit www.understandinghouston.org & follow us on social media!