

Results

Issue Areas

Dotmocracy

In order to understand what topics and issues are most relevant to Montgomery 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 Highlight (3 green dots)

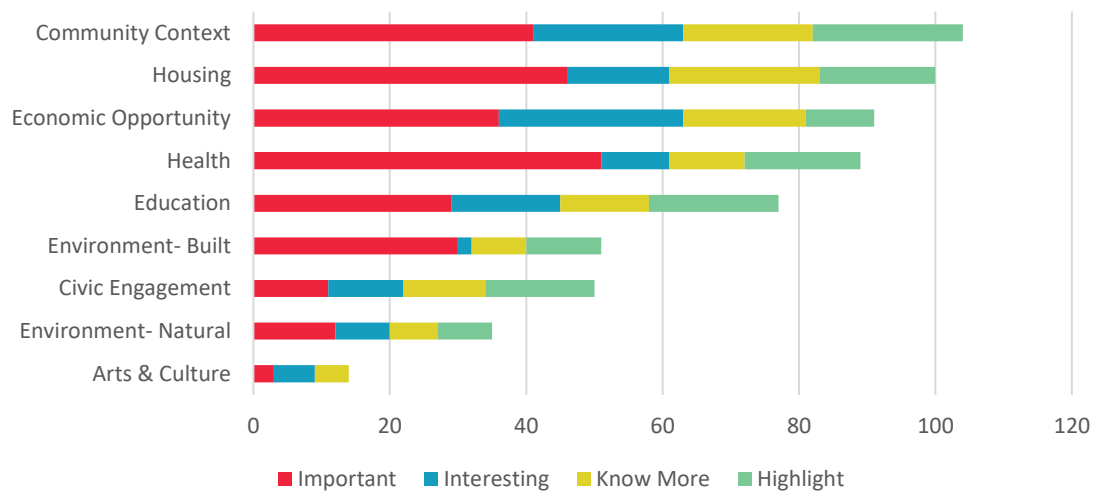
- Arts & Culture
- Civic Engagement
- Community Context
- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Environment – Built
- Environment – Natural
- Health
- Housing

With these fifteen dots, participants were asked to place **five** dots (2 red, 1 blue, 1 yellow, 1 green) on topics in each of their three issue areas using the color scheme above. Each of the nine issue areas has three to eight topics within them for a total of forty-six topics. For example, in the picture **to the right**, the main issue area is Economic Opportunity with the topics being Economic Activities & Jobs, Unemployment & Underemployment, Inequality, and so forth.



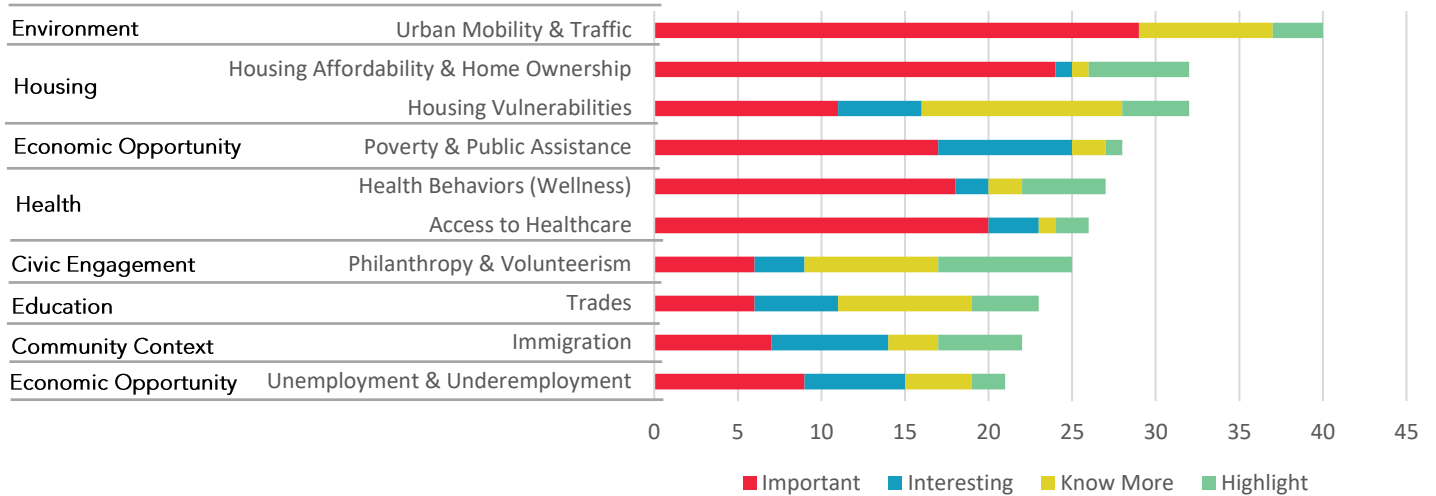
The data given in the bar graph **to the right** presents the nine issue areas by both total number of dots as well as the color distribution for each issue area. The chart presented gives a broad sense of participants' engagement with issues areas, with **community context, housing, and economic opportunity**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

Voter Activity By Issue Area



Below are the top ten topics that received the most dots overall. **Attendees were very clear that Urban Mobility & Traffic** was a topic of importance to the community, with transportation issues mentioned in focus groups as well. **Housing Affordability & Home Ownership** and **Housing Vulnerabilities** were also of key interest to the attendees, with housing affordability being an issue worth highlighting for the community and housing vulnerabilities being a particular knowledge gap.

Top Ten Topics By Voter Activity



“Important that the data addresses the county issues. Transportation! Transportation! Transportation!”

- Montgomery Focus Group

Topics that did not make the top 10, but ranked highly in other ways include:

Social Connectedness: In the top three of topics participants categorized as “most interesting to you.”

Demographic Change: In the top three of topics participants categorized as “most worthy of highlighting for the community” as well as “most should know more about.”

Commute Time & Mode: In the top three of topics participants categorized as “most worthy of highlighting for the community.”

Focus Groups

Nine groups of roughly six to seven 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 be best 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?

Multiple individuals expressed a high level of excitement and **were pleased to be included** in the process. One person remarked, “[It’s] very exciting, I think it’s much needed, and [I’m] really happy to hear that Montgomery County will be separate.” Another participant stated, “I’m glad Houston is asking us for what we see and know about data.”

Additionally, participants were glad that there would be **one “hub”** for data. Attendees described currently having to hunt down data, vocalizing that Understanding Houston will “help seasoned professionals and newcomers to understand the community” and that every level of organization can make sound decisions with this shared data.

Furthermore, participants see Understanding Houston as a source of education and awareness for the area—“a way to tell our story.”

“Having the content very specific to Montgomery County will be very good.”

- *Montgomery Focus Group*

How will you use the data?

Participants shared that individuals can learn from the data and take it back to other groups, making Understanding Houston an education tool. Understanding Houston is also seen as a “great way to identify service projects, see needs and trends, and create awareness” through communicating to audiences.

It was said that Understanding Houston is also a **great tool for grant writing and strategic planning**, with one attendee noting that “[networking will] help us link together stronger and strong data helps communicate to the donor,” and another commenting “...we will utilize data regularly to determine if needed to phase out or add [programs].”

Participants noted that the tool will also be “great for **advocacy**; we have to be able to paint a pretty accurate picture...” Montgomery County users of Understanding Houston will use the data for homelessness, mental health care, immigration, statistics of population, and infrastructure.

Knowing the source and reliability of the data in Understanding Houston, Montgomery County nonprofit stakeholders could see correlations, discern conflicting data, and possibly find duplication in services. This could help ensure “we are producing unique work.”

Who else could use the data and how?

“If it’s what I’m envisioning, **everyone**. It’s beneficial for school districts, nonprofits, schools looking at growth, and local government. Things we all need to be aware of, more people wanting to make a difference... We are all wanting to make a difference, and we feel like it’s a drop in the bucket. It will be nice to see if we’re more than a drop in the bucket.” Other possible users include politicians, government entities, private companies, donors, and business leaders.



participants noted the vast differences in socioeconomic status and that while there is a lot of diversity in Montgomery County it is also very conservative.

Homelessness is a real issue in Montgomery County. "There are whole groups of forgotten, lost people. There is a group of homeless veterans, about one thousand, living in The Woodlands, but don't want to be located. The problem is that the school district and organizations operate under different accounting of what constitutes homelessness. It depends on what you look at." One group also mentioned that individuals experiencing homelessness often come to Montgomery County from Harris County.

Indicator Surveys

Participants were given a list of over two hundred indicators that could be a part of the Understanding Houston website. Through marking on the list, individuals were given the opportunity to vocalize which indicators should be prioritized, add any additional comments about each indicator, and suggest adding indicators.

Five 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 the Montgomery County area. Things of note from the indicator surveys were suggested indicator write-ins; a **mental health topic** as well as a measurement of the number of students with learning disabilities being served. The indicators that received the most prioritization by the participants were civic and social organization, volunteerism, and underemployment.

Conclusion

"We are all trying to leave the community better than we found it." - Montgomery Focus Group

Some big takeaways that the Understanding Houston team received from the convening are that Montgomery County is a very diverse and fast growing county that is different from the counties around it and cannot be simply defined by looking at just one of the towns within that county. As was vocalized during the focus groups discussions and can be seen through the dotmocracy activity, transportation is an issue that is in need of attention and being addressed, as is housing affordability and vulnerabilities.

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 Montgomery County to help us all learn, engage, and act to make our region a more vibrant one.

Special thanks to Julie Martineau, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Community Foundation and her Board for their support of this important beginning conversation and Understanding Houston.

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Focus Group Response

What issues do you think are important to shed a light on for your community?