



# **The George Foundation** 2024 Community Needs Assessment

**Summary Report**



RICE UNIVERSITY

Kinder Institute for Urban Research



# Introduction

**E**stablished in 1945, The George Foundation was founded to give back to the Fort Bend County community. Since then, the foundation has awarded more than \$270 million in grants to nonprofit organizations and scholarship recipients, bringing to life the vision for the foundation set forward by its founders. Its grantmaking over the last 5 years has focused on key issues around education, health, human needs, and community enhancements.

## Purpose and Process

In the summer of 2024, The George Foundation sought feedback on the most pressing needs and existing assets in Fort Bend County to inform the foundation's five-year strategic planning process. Leaders of locally serving nonprofits were asked to complete a survey, participate in focus groups, and engage in one-on-one interviews.

## Key Takeaways

- Nonprofit leaders saw Fort Bend County as having many assets, including its people, its leaders, and its institutions.
- Fifteen community needs were identified by more than half of nonprofit leaders as major problems affecting the Fort Bend County community, spread across the areas of basic needs, healthcare, youth services, education and training.
- Mental and behavioral healthcare services was the most commonly identified need by nonprofit leaders for the county—98% said it was either a major or moderate need.

- Meeting the needs of special populations in the county (e.g., youth aging out of foster care, individuals with disabilities, unhoused individuals) was of particular concern to many nonprofit leaders.
- Nonprofits are engaged in many partnerships and collaborations, but they still see a significant need for more formalized networking and integration of the work organizations are doing in Fort Bend County.

Surveys were administered to 147 nonprofit leaders, with 97 (66%) providing at least partial responses and 85 (58%) completing the survey. Survey responses from those providing at least partially completed responses are included in the analysis. The survey covered three general topics: community assets, community needs, and nonprofit organization capacities (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1** General topics covered by survey

Community assets	Community needs	Nonprofit organization capacities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Civic leadership</li> <li>■ Culture and recreation</li> <li>■ Parks and greenspace</li> <li>■ Housing</li> <li>■ Neighbors</li> <li>■ Neighborhoods</li> <li>■ Public institutions</li> <li>■ Transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Basic needs</li> <li>■ Community enhancements</li> <li>■ Education and training</li> <li>■ Family services</li> <li>■ Youth services</li> <li>■ Legal services</li> <li>■ Health and mental health services</li> <li>■ Public safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Leadership</li> <li>■ Management</li> <li>■ Adaptive</li> <li>■ Operational</li> </ul>

Responses to the survey are summarized to provide an overview of the needs nonprofit leaders see as the biggest and most pressing for the Fort Bend County community.

In addition to surveys, three (3) focus groups were conducted. A total of 10 people participated in the focus groups. Each focus group was organized around a different topic:

- Focus Group 1: Mental and Behavioral Health Needs in Fort Bend County;
- Focus Group 2: Cost of Living Challenges in Fort Bend County;
- Focus Group 3: Nonprofit Landscape in Fort Bend County.

Finally, nearly 30 one-on-one interviews were conducted with nonprofit leaders as well as other key stakeholders in Fort Bend County to gain further detailed insights into the themes highlighted by the survey and focus groups.

This report provides a summary of the findings from the community needs assessment to help inform The George Foundation in its consideration of Fort Bend County's needs and its funding strategies. A full write-up of the study findings is available in Appendix A, and a synopsis of the grantmaking protocols of The George Foundation is available in Appendix B.

### Community Assets

Meeting the needs of a community starts by understanding its assets, and nonprofit leaders saw many different types of assets in the Fort Bend County community. In particular, nonprofit leaders consistently viewed the county's residents as an asset. More than 90% of nonprofit leaders agreed (i.e., slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed) that neighbors in Fort Bend County get along with each other and that residents know what it means to be a "good neighbor." Additionally, community leaders are viewed as an asset to the county. More than 80% of nonprofit leaders said that community

**TABLE 1** Percentage of nonprofit leaders who slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree that each of the following is a community asset in Fort Bend County

Community asset	Percent agree
Supportive religious institutions	99%
A landscape that is clean and devoid of litter	87%
Access to public libraries	85%
High-quality, public K-12 schools	84%
An active arts community	83%
Network of strong social service agencies for families	80%
Cultural institutions on history/tradition all residents	78%
Most have access to primary healthcare similar to others	74%
Public parks or greenspace within a 5- to 10-minute walk	72%

leaders genuinely want to be able to meet the needs of all community residents.

Nonprofit leaders also felt the county's institutions and built environment are assets. Almost every single nonprofit leader agreed the county had supportive religious institutions, and more than 80% felt that most neighborhoods had access to public libraries (85%), high-quality public schools (84%), a clean and litter-free landscape (87%), an active arts community (83%), and a network of strong social service agencies serving households and families (80%).

## Community Needs

Nonprofit leaders were asked to reflect on Fort Bend's level of need in the areas of: Basic Needs, Health and Behavioral Health, Youth Services, Family Services, Legal Services, Education and Training, Public Safety, Community Enhancements, and Services for Unique Populations. For each area, nonprofit leaders were asked to reflect on the severity of the need that exists, how much of the need is currently being met, and if current conditions remain, whether they see the problem as getting better, worse, or staying about the same in the next 10 years. Community needs identified as major for

Fort Bend County by more than 50% of respondents are included in Table 2.

In interviews and focus groups, nonprofit leaders highlighted the way many of these issues were co-occurring and intersecting, and that rising costs of living paired with population growth placed additional strains on service providers. An additional challenge faced by nonprofits was the "invisibility" of these needs to many residents in the broader Fort Bend community. High levels of affluence coupled with a lack of recognition among the general population generates additional obstacles for nonprofits trying to meet the needs of the county.

## Basic Needs

More than two-thirds of nonprofit leaders identified affordable housing as a major need in the county—the most commonly identified basic need in Fort Bend County. Approximately 80% of nonprofit leaders felt the need was either about half met or less than half met, and if current conditions continue, more than half see it as a need that is going to increase "a lot" in the next 10 years.

Nonprofit leaders attributed the increasing housing affordability needs to the rapid growth in the county and rising housing costs for both renters and homebuyers. These leaders felt like increasing costs were par-

TABLE 2 Community Needs Identified as Major by over 50% of Respondents

Community Need	% major need	% moderate or major need
Mental & behavioral health services	69%	98%
Child care services	65%	94%
Affordable housing	63%	95%
Services to youth aging out of foster care	62%	89%
Public transportation	57%	91%
Healthcare services to the uninsured	55%	93%
Services for unhoused individuals	55%	87%
Services to people with disabilities or special needs	55%	91%
Healthcare services to special populations	52%	90%
Reliable transportation	52%	90%
Prescription drug assistance	51%	90%
Rental assistance	51%	90%
Services to support immigrant residents	51%	77%
Housing issues (Legal Assistance)	51%	93%
Dental care	51%	89%





ticularly impacting low- and middle-income residents. This situation has also created significant challenges in providing shelter for the unhoused and for special populations, such as those facing domestic violence or mental health struggles.

Access to reliable transportation was highlighted by 90% of nonprofit leaders as a major or moderate need. Nonprofit leaders saw the current on-call public transit system as limited in scope and unreliable, preventing people from reaching housing, basic services, and employment. Other options, such as private vehicles and ridesharing platforms, were mentioned by nonprofit leaders but were viewed as prohibitively expensive and requiring significant investment of resources to be functional. Transportation issues were seen as most impactful for rural community residents, since public transit and rideshare options often do not reach into those communities.

### Health and Behavioral Health

Mental and behavioral healthcare services was identified by 98% of nonprofit leaders as a major or moderate need in Fort Bend County. About 90% said that less than half or about half of the mental and behavioral health service need was being met in the county. Across

the interviews and focus groups, it was clear that there is both a growing awareness about and prevalence of mental health issues in the county. Mental health issues were also frequently cited as both exacerbating and being exacerbated by the co-occurrence of other needs for residents in the area.

Access to healthcare for the uninsured was cited as a major problem by over half of respondents, with another 4 in 10 saying it was a moderate need. Over half of nonprofit leaders also highlighted dental care and prescription drug assistance as a major need. Fort Bend County nonprofit leaders did not think these needs were being met and expected them to increase in the future.

In-depth discussions with nonprofit leaders highlighted that health insurance was a significant contributing factor to challenges with healthcare access. Nonprofit leaders also saw some of their clients experiencing healthcare access challenges because of language barriers and finding providers sensitive to their needs.

### Legal Services

Various legal services were identified as a need in Fort Bend County; however, only legal services for housing issues were identified by a majority of nonprofit leaders

as a major need (51%), with a combined 93% calling it out as either a major or moderate need. The second most commonly identified legal service need in the county was around immigration matters. More than 4 in 10 nonprofit leaders identified it as a major need (42%), and a combined 85% said it was either a major or moderate need.

Nonprofit leaders reported that many of the legal service needs of the community were currently going unmet. Around 6 in 10 nonprofit leaders said less than half of the legal services needed for immigrant matters were currently being met, and a similar number said less than half of the current legal service need for housing issues was being met.

### **Service for Unique Populations**

Nonprofit leaders lifted forward several special populations as groups of people with major needs in Fort Bend County. For example, more than half of nonprofit leaders indicated there was a major need in the county for providing services to youth aging out of the foster care system (62%), people with disabilities or special needs (55%), and unhoused individuals (55%).

In addition to seeing high levels of need for special populations, nonprofit leaders also felt that much of the need was not currently being met. Around 9 in 10 nonprofit leaders said the current need was about half met or less than half met for youth aging out of the foster care system (92%), unhoused individuals (88%), formerly incarcerated individuals (89%), and survivors of interpersonal violence (89%). In general, nonprofit leaders saw a lot of the needs for special populations going unmet and increasing in the future.

### **Family Services**

Nearly two-thirds of nonprofit leaders identified child care services as a major need facing the area, and a total of 94% said it was either a major or moderate need. While no other family service was identified by more than 50% of nonprofit leaders as a major need, a combined 92% indicated that financial literacy and older adults and senior services were either a moderate or major need.

A large share of nonprofit leaders also reported that many of the family service needs were going unmet. For example, with the exception of older adult and senior services, each of the other family services asked about had over 80% of nonprofit leaders say that either about half or less than half of the need was currently being met. For example, 88% indicated that either about half

or less than half of child care services were being met, while 85% said the same for classes on parenting and 84% said the same for domestic violence prevention, interpersonal violence prevention, and financial literacy.

### **Youth Services**

No Youth Services need was identified by more than half of nonprofit leaders as major, with youth mentoring programs (48%) and summer out-of-school times (45%) being the most commonly identified major needs.

### **Education and Training**

Similar to youth services, no education and training need was identified by more than half of nonprofit leaders as major. However, the two areas of education and training where more than 80% of nonprofit leaders identified moderate or major needs in Fort Bend County were around higher education and workforce development. Higher education needs that more than 8 in 10 nonprofit leaders said were moderate or major included college access programs for first-generation students (86%), college access programs for economically disadvantaged students (89%), transition-to-college programs (83%), college-student counseling programs (82%), and scholarships for higher education (83%). Workforce development needs that more than 8 in 10 nonprofit leaders said were moderate or major included workforce development programs (84%), technical education programs (86%), and scholarships for career advancement (83%).

### **Barriers to Services**

Several barriers to receiving services were perceived as being major by nonprofit leaders: lack of access to affordable child care (61%), lack of knowledge/information about available services (59%), and lack of access to reliable transportation (54%). These results re-emphasize the ongoing needs around child care and transportation in the county.

### **Partnership and Collaborations of Nonprofits in Fort Bend County**

In addition to asking nonprofit leaders to reflect on the current needs they saw in Fort Bend County, they were also asked to reflect on the partnering and collaborating they did with other organizations in service to the needs of Fort Bend County residents. In general, nonprofit leaders felt they were either moderately familiar (36%) or very familiar (42%) with the other organizations working to meet the needs of Fort Bend County residents. Regardless of their level of familiarity with other organizations working in Fort Bend County,

the vast majority (91%) reported being involved in some sort of formal partnership in the past year, and even more reported being involved in some type of informal partnership or collaboration (95%). The most common type of organization that nonprofit leaders reported working with was other nonprofits, followed by government agencies and educational institutions. Across the board, nonprofit leaders indicated that these collaborations were beneficial to their organizations and their missions and goals.

While nonprofit leaders looked positively on their partnerships, they also felt like there were some challenges that hindered partnerships and reduced their effectiveness. Specifically, nonprofit leaders were asked to name the most common barriers they faced in partnering, with the top three being funding (28%), staff/leader/volunteer limitations (28%), and time limitations (19%).

Despite the regular partnerships that have been taking place, nonprofit leaders repeatedly called for greater collaboration. Many leaders felt the current state of collaboration had produced too much redundancy in resources and services. Nonprofit leaders pointed to the absence of a formalized network linking nonprofits in Fort Bend County, particularly those serving similar populations and providing similar services, as a contributing factor to the redundancy. In the absence of a formalized network, nonprofits were reliant on personal and historical connections to know what services were being provided around the county. The reliance on informal networks limited the flow of information and often resulted in nonprofit leaders not knowing about the work that others were doing, as well as being surprised that their own work was not widely known by their fellow leaders. Nonprofit leaders said that a more formalized network, whose structure was sustained beyond personal or historical relationships, was necessary to facilitate information sharing among organizations, reduce redundancy in services, and ensure nonprofits work together even when personnel changes.

In addition to wanting a more formalized network of nonprofits in Fort Bend, nonprofit leaders also reiterated other constraints on partnering between organizations, including the limited resources and time available. Nonprofit leaders noted that while organizations generally “get along,” an underlying sense of competition for funding and community recognition remains.

One solution proposed by a few nonprofit leaders to help facilitate formalized networking was establishing a data-sharing system across nonprofits in Fort Bend County. As an example, nonprofit leaders described a dashboard for client tracking, where information about clients and client needs are uploaded by one organization and accessible by many others. This would help to know who is servicing the individuals as well as reduce the onboarding costs of nonprofit organizations. Another suggestion was the establishment of a centralized community center that would provide information on the many service providers and their services to Fort Bend County residents. This center would help to refer residents to the appropriate nonprofit that can meet their needs. Both the dashboard for client tracking and the centralized community center were seen by nonprofit leaders as viable options to help monitor and limit service duplication, as well as identify need areas that require more focus.

### Views and Feedback on The George Foundation

Overall, nonprofit leaders were very positive and appreciative of The George Foundation.

Building on the positive existing relationships between nonprofits and The George Foundation, nonprofits identified some areas where they would be interested in receiving additional support. In particular, there were two efforts for which more than half of nonprofits wanted more support: fundraising (60%) and collaborations (53%).

In focus groups and interviews, when asked about the role The George Foundation could play beyond funding and addressing community needs, nonprofit leaders generally indicated that the foundation should focus on helping organizations build sustained relationships. This includes wanting to see The George Foundation take a more proactive approach in incentivizing and facilitating collaboration. In particular, nonprofit leaders wanted to see more funding dedicated specifically to partnering, so that collaboration was paid for and did not feel like an unfunded mandate. Nonprofit leaders felt that providing funding for participation in a structured network, managed by external entities such as The George Foundation or United Way of Greater Houston, would be critical for ensuring ongoing connections between organizations.



# Conclusions

**N**onprofit leaders highlighted the many assets available in Fort Bend County and elevated the work of the nonprofit organizations in the area. At the same time, Fort Bend County faces a number of challenges to meet the needs of the community. Similar to the 2019 community needs assessment, mental and behavioral health was identified as a key need for the community. Nonprofit leaders also identified cost-of-living challenges, largely revolving around housing affordability, as a major need facing the community.

Nonprofit leaders also reflected on the future challenges facing the Fort Bend County community. Given current policies and programs, many nonprofit leaders envision the challenges of today growing and increasing in the next 10 years. For some challenges, such as affordable housing and mental and behavioral health-care service needs, more than half of nonprofit leaders said they expected the current problem to increase significantly in the next 10 years. Curbing these needs will thus require new approaches, including new programs, policies, and practices.

While collaboration between nonprofit organizations in Fort Bend County is widely understood as important and beneficial, many nonprofit leaders emphasized the need for a centralized network that strengthens and sustains communications between organizations active in the area. Today, the nonprofit landscape in Fort Bend County is typified by small, informal and often short-lived collaborations that are defined by personal relationships. While these connections help small segments of nonprofits, leaders highlighted the need for a broader network sustained by a third party to make collaborations as effective as possible.

For future community needs assessments, The George Foundation may want to explore the potential of collecting data directly from community residents. Only 40% of nonprofit leaders said it was an organizational strength of theirs to monitor and assess community needs, less than half said it was a strength of their organization to use data to support program planning, and only about one-third felt the community's support of their organization was one of its strengths. In addition to these survey responses, insights from the focus groups and one-on-one interviews highlighted that nonprofit leaders did not feel well-suited to comment on the overall needs of residents in Fort Bend County beyond their organization's area of focus. Future community needs assessments could begin with a representative sampling of Fort Bend County residents that would enable population-level estimates of the needs that exist, and with that information, nonprofit leaders could be fully engaged to assess how those needs are being met. Subsequent population surveys would also provide The George Foundation with a way to measure the impact that their funding and their grantees are having in addressing the needs of the community.

Nonprofit leaders in Fort Bend County see continuing needs from the past, as well as emerging needs in the present. Many of the needs of today are expected to get worse without new policies and programs. The information in this report can help identify opportunities to meet those needs and align future grantmaking and programs to better serve Fort Bend County residents and nonprofits.

## Mission

The Kinder Institute for Urban Research builds better cities and improves lives through data, research, engagement and action.



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