

Urban Libraries Council: Fort Bend County Libraries and Local News Initiative Pilot Grant Application

Deadline: Friday, May 1, 2026

Question: Please share an example of a local issue that people argue about in your community but rarely fully understand and provide any detail about where a lack of access to or engagement with reliable information may play into that issue.

Fort Bend County Libraries serves the residents of Fort Bend County (TX), one of the fastest growing and most diverse counties in the country. With a population of approximately 822,779 (2020 Census), it is estimated that approximately 43% of the residents speak a language other than English at home. Since most of the area media is primarily written in English, a significant portion of Fort Bend residents are unaware of pertinent local information that directly impacts their lives and are at a loss of how to access it in their primary language. Media sources are not typically available in multi-lingual formats or in languages other than English, leaving a sizable segment of the county dangerously uninformed and with limited access to current news.

Question: Please describe a recent partnership you have facilitated on behalf of the library. How did the partnership come about, what did it entail, and how did you manage the ongoing relationship?

The George Foundation is a philanthropic organization that provides grants to local nonprofits and scholarship opportunities to local students. A longtime supporter of Fort Bend County Libraries (FBCL), The George Foundation was instrumental in helping fund the building of three libraries in the system, thus increasing FBCL's reach throughout the county and enabling more underserved communities to have access to free library resources and cultural events. Fort Bend County is on track to hit one million residents by 2030, and in anticipation of the continued influx, FBCL continues to develop relationships with philanthropic organizations, such as The George Foundation, to create free cultural events, workforce-development programs, and literary programs that benefit local communities.

Question: What is your library's current relationship, if any, with local news (reporters, public radio, journalism schools, independent journalists, civic nonprofits, etc.?)

FBCL's Marketing and Communications Office has a longtime, established history with local media, including newspapers, community newsletters, online publications, and Houston-area television. A new department – Outreach, Partnerships, and Programming – has been implemented to further explore outreach opportunities and strengthen relationships with civic nonprofit organizations. After the recent retirement of the system's Media Specialist, the system was fortunate to recruit the Managing Editor of the local news outlet to fill the position and build upon the media relationships that have been established over the decades.

Question: If your library already has an idea about the type of project you would like to do, a partner you'd like to engage, and/or a challenge you'd like to address, please share it here.

FBCL's biggest challenge in meeting the needs of the incredibly diverse populations of Fort Bend County is a language barrier. We would like to collaborate with local media to formulate a way of addressing this need, ensuring that all people of the county – regardless of their primary language – have access to current news and library resources.

Chosen libraries will receive

- \$7,500-\$10,000 of project support funds
- Skill-building for staff focused on topics including partnership development, community asset mapping, understanding current trends and opportunities in journalism, program or service design, facilitation, and evaluation.
- Access to a national network of libraries implementing innovative projects related to local news
- Access to expert ULC guidance and support
- No matching fund required.