

Bay State Banner Project Proposal

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Background

The Bay State Banner is an African American owned news weekly that reports on the political, economic, social and cultural issues that are of interest to African American and English-speaking Latinos in Boston. Our client Yawu Miller, a senior editor at the Bay State banner would like to examine the lobbying power of the real estate industry in Massachusetts. We know that the real estate industry is the largest donor to Massachusetts politicians, which include developers, contractors, architects, lawyers serving this industry, building trade, realtors, etc. For clarification, the source of donors should cover brokers, developers, architects, and anyone with a vested investment in building. We will be combining data from the campaign finance scorecards for city councilors and state representatives along with business registration documents.

Goals

Our goal for this project is to check whether there is a connection between the project approval rate in the real estate industry and its donation activities. We will collect data through the provided API and Database. The short term goal is to create a dataset that includes influential companies and individuals in the real estate industry. The mid-term goal for our group is to find out the donation activities of these people. Our ultimate goal is to create a comprehensive dataset so that we can explore the connection between politicians and the real estate industry and show the pattern between an entity's project approval rates and its donation activities. If possible, we will develop a database so that people can view the relational map directly. By the end of this semester, we will have the ability to show who are the most influential real estate industry professionals in Boston.

Non-goals

There are many other out-of-scope topics related to our project. For example, the data we collected can also reveal which city councilors receive the most donations from the real estate industry, which company or individual are most active in those donation activities and which law-firms played the key roles during these processes. Did politicians approve a project of a certain company because it is the best one among all the competitors, or simply because they have a better relationship with this company? Our data will be very useful for those researchers

who want to take a deeper look into the connection between the real estate industry and politicians in Boston and may help to improve social justice.

Result

A comprehensive database contains real estate individuals and businesses with donations to the city or state corresponding to their approved projects (collected from ZBA data and BPDA data). Visualize the data showing the pattern between politics and real estate through analyzing this database.

Uncertainties

There could be some uncertain elements that may influence the project progress and the final results.

First, the data source: according to our first meeting with BU Spark and our client, we have decided several datasets that are good to use, but there are still some proposed datasets we found are not very proper to use now such as BLDUP organizations list, BPDA building data, and City of Boston building projects. This may cause a series of efficiency and precision problems for this project.

Second, cooperation with another team: since there are two teams on this Bay State Banner project, and each of us is focusing on different data but the same target, after the initial data cleaning procedure, there may exist data-overlapping, data-missing and data-format-incompatible problems which may cause problems when doing merging and matching tasks.

Third, technical problems: since most of our data are downloaded as PDF format file, and useful information are distributed in the whole file, this may increase the difficulties of being efficient and precise.