

**Requesting Public Documents as a Test of
Open Government:
Measuring Responses from 100 North
Carolina Counties**

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Project's Background

- Goal: Use secondary state government data to test the responsiveness of county officials.
- Technique: Test of the common citizen
- Oversight: Professional and academic

Secondary Sources

- ***Directory of State and County Officials of North Carolina***
[by NC Secretary of State: Google the title or
<http://www.secretary.state.nc.us/pubsweb/direct.aspx>]
- ***Public School Building Capital Fund – Monthly Projects Report*** [by School Planning, Division of School Support, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI): Google title or
http://www.schoolclearinghouse.org/otherinf/ADMFund/Monthly_Projects_Report.pdf or from menu at
<http://www.schoolclearinghouse.org/otherinf/ADMFund/ADMfund.htm>]
- ***Procedures Manual Public School Building Capital Fund*** [by NC Department of public Instruction]
[http://www.schoolclearinghouse.org/otherinf/ADMFund/ProceduresManual-PublicSchool_2003 .pdf](http://www.schoolclearinghouse.org/otherinf/ADMFund/ProceduresManual-PublicSchool_2003.pdf)
- **State & County QuickFacts** (US Census, North Carolina demographics by county) <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html>

Why select the *Public School Building Capital Fund* for a Research Methods class project?

- **State-wide Program / current interest**
- **Disclosure**
 - Procedures Manual (DPI)
 - Monthly Projects Report (DPI)
- **Verifiable / 3rd party reporting structure / 3rd party oversight**

Research Questions

- RQ1: Of four public documents requested from county officials, what percentage of them will be sent in response to a common citizen's request?
- RQ2: Do county officials in different roles respond to such requests at different rates?
- RQ3: Are there relationships between county response rates and those counties' different demographics?

Independent Variable One—the roles of county officials

- The four categories of subjects were
 - 1) the chair of the county commissioners
 - 2) the county manager
 - 3) the chair of the school board
 - 4) the superintendent of schools

Independent Variable Two—County demographic information

- Ten factors from the U.S. census data were used for each county

Dependent variable—response rates to requests for public information

- Each county official received a written request for the following:
 - 1) the application to the state for funds;
 - 2) the state board's certification of review;
 - 3) a listing of the checks written against the disbursement account for this project... and
 - 4) the final report of the project.

Method

- County officials were found
- School building projects were found
- Requests sent to county officials

Anecdotes

- Creepy stories
- Unusual stories

Results: RQ1a

26 counties responded by sending all items that were requested

41 responded by sending some, but not all, of the items requested

25 responded, but sent none of the items that were requested

7 counties failed to send any response at all

(One county was asked for an erroneous school project, and so the total here is only 99)

Results: RQ1b

Of the four public documents that were requested...

- 65 applications were received,
- 45 check registers were received,
- 29 final reports* were received, and
- 19 certificates of review were received.

Results: RQ2

- Replies were received from people with 56 different titles.

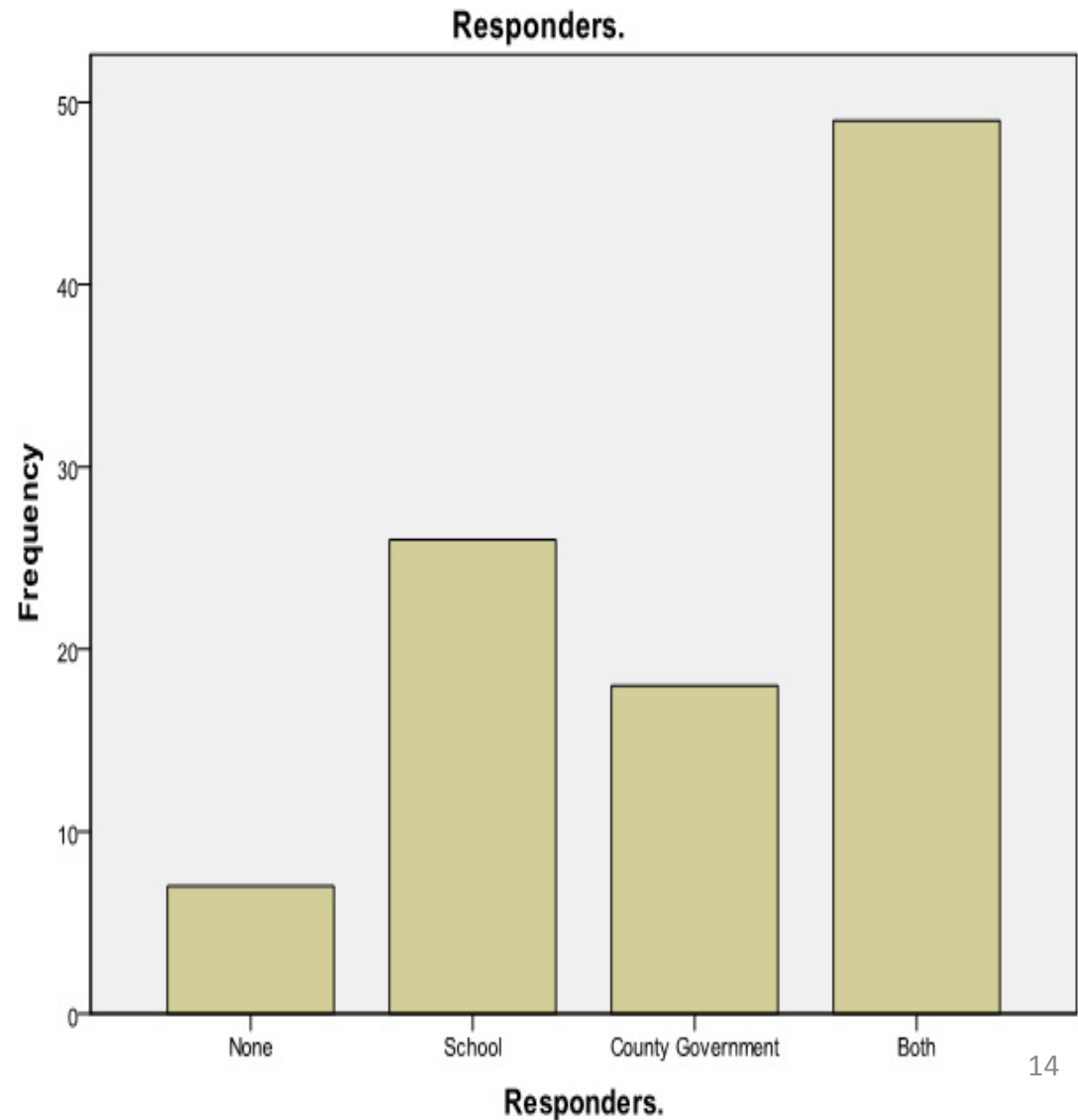
Results: RQ2

49 counties sent responses from both the local school and the county government.

26 sent responses from just the local school.

18 sent responses from just the county government.

7 sent none at all.



Results: RQ3

- The more white residents in a county, the higher the responsiveness of its officials.
- No other significant correlation was found.

Discussion

The Important results of this research:

- 1) No significant relationship between county size and response rates
- 2) Poor response rates suggest counties should consider posting public documents on the internet or using county libraries as repositories

Further Research

- Why are some county officials more responsive than others?