

# **Knowledge about Local Governance in Kenton County, Kentucky**

## **Introduction**

The Applied Environmental Anthropology Research Group (AEARG) at Northern Kentucky University (NKU), in collaboration with the Kenton County Governance Study, completed a preliminary investigation into the cultural models of local governance in response to the Northern Kentucky Forum that took place April 24, 2010. The purpose of this service-learning research project was to document how residents of Kenton County, Kentucky, understand the cooperation between local and county governments. In particular, Kenton County residents' knowledge of the parts of local governance and the relationship of these parts to each other was collected. During this research (spring 2011), 11 students in the Anthropology 100H, Honors Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, conducted ethnographic interviews with 98 Kenton County residents at Northern Kentucky University and public libraries in Kenton County. During interviews, participants were asked to describe the parts of local government and the relationship between these parts. We found that residents of Kenton County have only limited knowledge about their local government.

## **Methods**

In preparation for this research project, 11 students in the spring 2011 Honors Cultural Anthropology course were trained in ethnographic interview methods<sup>1</sup> and logistical planning for the project was completed. In addition to ethnographic methods, the students were trained in research ethics involving human subjects in accord with the Institutional Review Board requirements at NKU to ensure that the individuals with whom they spoke were protected from any ramifications of their participation in this research.

In January 2011 AEARG Director Douglas Hume sent letters to public libraries, grocery stores, and shopping malls in Kenton County requesting permission to interview on their premises. Only Independence and Erlanger branches of the Kenton County Library gave permission and fit the scheduling needs of the students.

The student researchers interviewed 32 students, faculty, and staff who were Kenton

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<sup>1</sup> McCurdy, David W., James P. Spradley, and Dianna J. Shandy. 2004. *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*, Second Edition. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press.

County residents during the first week of March 2011 at the Student Union at Northern Kentucky University. During this time, 11 student researchers developed interview skills in a student friendly environment and began collecting data on local governance knowledge. The student researchers interviewed 24 Kenton County residents at the Independence Branch Library during the third week of March 2011 and during the second week of April 2011, 42 Kenton County residents were interviewed.

After noting the approximate age and sex of the informant, interviews consisted of asking the following demographic questions:

1. In which county do you live?
2. How long have you been a resident of \_\_\_\_\_ County?
3. What is it that you do?
4. Have you or any of your immediate kin/family been employed by any local, state, or federal government office (e.g., libraries, courts, schools...)?
5. Do you pay attention to the news and if so which news and how often?
6. Do you care about politics?
7. Does the government affect you on a daily basis?
8. What political party do you identify with?
9. Do you vote?

After the demographic questions, informants were asked to list the parts of his/her city and county governments. For each part of government elicited, informants were asked if there were any suborganizations or whether the part of local government could be included within a larger entity. Finally, informants were asked about the relationships between the parts of government that they knew.

The student researchers completed a preliminary analysis of their data (field notes and digital audio recordings) outlining models of knowledge that they found during their interviews. Douglas Hume then consolidated these results during the following fall in preparation for this report.

## **Findings**

We found that only a few informants could name more than five parts of local governance. The majority of informants could only list a few local services (e.g., post office,

police, fire, and garbage collection). Many conflated state or national government with local government. The informants that had more knowledge of local government had either previous experience working in local government or had a close family member employed in local government. These patterns of knowledge indicate the presence of three models of knowledge about local government among Kenton County residents.

#### Limited Knowledge Model

The largest proportion of informants, approximately 60%, has limited, knowing three to five parts of local government, knowledge of the parts of local government. Informants with this model include all ages and both sexes. None of the demographic variables collected indicate a pattern relevant to this group. Informants with this model are able to name up to five parts of local government. Examples of parts of government listed by this group include the following:

1. female approximately 20 years old listed district judge, mayor, and mini congress;
2. male approximately 50 years old – listed police, fire department, public services, paramedics;
3. female approximately 25 years old listed library, city council, and mayor;
4. female approximately 75 years old listed police, court, and city council;
5. female approximately 45 years old listed fire, police, schools, and city council; and
6. male approximately 20 years old listed fire department, police department, and city council.

#### Federal and State Government Model

Many informants, approximately 20%, conflate local government with the federal or state government. These informants tended to be younger and did not have anyone within their family working for or in local government. There were no other patterns among the demographic answers in this group. Examples of parts of government elicited for the federal and state government model include the following:

1. female approximately 20 years old listed mail delivery, Internal Revenue Service, postal office workers, repossession, and Department of Motor Vehicles;
2. female approximately 38 years old listed city council, mayors, senators, and congressmen;

3. male approximately 18 years old listed legislative and judicial.

#### Moderate Knowledge Model

The smallest proportion of informants, approximately 10%, has a moderate amount of knowledge about the parts of local government. These informants tend to be older and have worked with or have a family member who has worked with local government. Informants with this model could list on average ten parts of local government, for example:

1. male approximately 25 years old listed judge executive, city attorney, court house, police department, fire department, code enforcement, water district, and county solicitor;
2. female approximately 45 years old listed judge, county clerk, fire stations, fire chief, firefighters, police, police chief, county sheriff, school systems, school superintendent, board of education, principals, teachers, planning commission, library, county water, city water, sewage, motor commissions;
3. male approximately 65 years old listed city major, city council, city attorney, county commissioner, judge executive, judges, county sheriff;
4. male approximately 55 years old listed judge executor, police, fire, mayor, fire chief, dog catcher, police chief, dog catcher, years old listed county pound, city pound, zoning board/housing, parking, utilities, sheriff, district representatives, judges, prosecutors;

#### **Conclusion**

Due to the limited number of informants interviewed, to learn the extent of knowledge about local governance in Kenton County, a questionnaire should be developed and administered. To continue this research on local governance, we propose to administer the attached questionnaire, which should be mailed to approximately 5,000 randomly selected Kenton County residents. In the questionnaires, participants will be asked to agree or disagree with propositional statements of the relationships between the parts of local government that were collected during the interviews. The final phase of this research, would involve Douglas Hume and his students analyzing the questionnaire data.

Douglas W. Hume, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Anthropology  
Applied Environmental Anthropology Research Group (AEARG), Director

Students of ANT 100H Honors Cultural Anthropology, Spring 2011: Amber Childers, Jordan Cresswell, Erik Dearduff, Stephanie Hayes, Katelyn Kappes, Tyler Kiefer, Lane Kolkmeyer, Iliyana Krivcheva, Kelly McDonald, Taylor Parr, and Robert Small

Northern Kentucky University  
Department of Sociology/Anthropology/Philosophy  
228 Landrum Academic Center, Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 41099  
[p] 859.572.5702 [f] 859.572.6086  
[w] <http://aearg.nku.edu/> [e] [humed1@nku.edu](mailto:humed1@nku.edu)

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- 1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years old
2. Are you Female or Male?
Married with children?
3. Which one of the following best describes your ethnicity?
African-American Asian-American European-American Hispanic-American Indian-American
Latin-American Middle Eastern-American Native-American Pacific Island-American
5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
Grade School High School Some Junior/Community College
Some Trade School Some Vocational School Junior/Community College (A.A.)
Completed Trade School Completed Vocational School Some College (four year)
College (e.g., B.A/B.S) Some Graduate/Medical/Law School/
Graduate School (e.g., M.A./M.S) Graduate/Medical School (e.g., Ph.D./M.D./J.D.)
6. What is your total (combined) household income per year?
\$0 - \$10,000 \$10,001 - \$20,000 \$20,001 - \$30,000 \$30,001 - \$40,000 \$40,001 - \$50,000
\$50,001 - \$60,000 \$60,001 - \$70,000 \$70,001 - \$80,000 \$80,001 - \$90,000 \$90,001 - \$100,000
\$100,001 - \$110,000 \$110,001 - \$120,000 \$120,001 - \$130,000 \$130,001 - \$140,000 \$140,001 - \$150,000
\$150,001 - \$160,000 \$160,001 - \$170,000 \$170,001 - \$180,000 \$180,001 - \$190,000 \$190,001 - \$200,000
\$200,001 - \$250,000 \$250,001 - \$300,000 \$300,001 or more
7. Have you worked for the government? Yes No
8. Have any of your close family or friends' work for the government? Yes No
9. How long have you lived in Kenton County? \_\_\_\_\_ years
10. How often do you watch/read the news? Every day, several times a week, once a week, etc...
11. Where do you get the news (e.g., television, internet, radio, newspaper, wom)? \_\_\_\_\_

GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION

Which of the following have you heard about? If so, do you know what they do?

Kenton County Government

- County Officials
 Fiscal Court – County Commission (Judge Executive\*, three  Commissioners and  Deputy Judge-Executive)
 County Attorney
 County Clerk
 County Jailer
 Property Valuation Administrator
 County Sheriff
County Departments
 Animal Shelter
 County Finance ( Treasurer,  Occupational License, and  Procurement Departments)
 Information Technology
 Parks & Recreation
 Personnel
 Public Safety ( Fire Association,  Homeland Security & Emergency Management,  Kenton County Dispatch,  Kenton County Police [ Chief of Police,  Bureau of Administration,  Patrol Bureau,  Community Services,  Animal Control])
 Public Works ( Fleet Maintenance,  Road Department,  Solid Waste Management)

City Government (Titles of officials/departments differ from city to city and some cities may not have each of the officials/departments listed below)

- Administration
 Mayor
 City Council/ Commissioners
 City Manager/Administrative Officer
 City Clerk
Departments
 Police Department
 Fire Department
 Emergency Medical Services Department
 Urban Planning/Code Enforcement/Engineering/Building/Zoning Department
 Solid Waste/Recycling Department
 Community Relations/Neighborhood Services/Economic/Tourism Development Department
 Public Services/Works/Maintenance
 Accounting/Finance Department
 Emergency Management
 Community Housing Resource Group/Housing Authority
 City Attorney Legal Department
 Municipal Court/Ombudsman
 Personnel/Human Resources
 Parks & Recreation/Recreation Department
 Information Technology Department

**City Government Officials and Departments**

	City Clerk	Fire Department	Police Department	Emergency Management	Municipal Court/Ombudsman	Personnel/Human Resources	City Council/Commissioners	Accounting/Finance Department	City Attorney Legal Department	Solid Waste/Recycling Department	Public Services/Works/Maintenance	Information Technology Department	City Manager/Administrative Officer	Emergency Medical Services Department	Parks & Recreation/Recreation Department	Community Housing Resource Group/Housing Authority	Urban Planning/Code Enforcement/Engineering/Building/Zoning Department	Community Relations/Neighborhood Services/Economic/Tourism Development Department
Fiscal Court, Judge Executive	-																	
Fiscal Court, Commissioners																		
Fiscal Court, Deputy Judge-Executive	X																	
County Attorney																		
County Clerk																		
County Jailer																		
Property Valuation Administration																		
County Sheriff																		
Animal Shelter																		
Finance, Treasurer																		
Finance, Occupational License																		
Finance, Procurement Departments																		
Information Technology																		
Parks & Recreation																		
Personnel																		
Public Safety, Fire Association																		
Public Safety, Homeland Security & Emergency Management																		
Public Safety, Kenton County Dispatch																		
Public Safety, Kenton County Police - Chief of Police																		
Public Safety, Kenton County Police - Bureau of Administration																		
Public Safety, Kenton County Police - Patrol Bureau																		
Public Safety, Kenton County Police - Community Services																		
Public Safety, Kenton County Police - Animal Control																		
Public Works, Fleet Maintenance																		
Public Works, Road Department																		
Public Works, Solid Waste Management																		

Blank = do not cooperate  
 X = cooperate (egalitarian)  
 arrow up or vertical line = city tells them what to do  
 arrow left or horizontal line = county tells them what to do  
 \* = I do not know