



Public Policy Institute

Annual Report 2015-2016



Message from the Director

This year was an active and productive one for the Public Policy Institute. First, this year included the successful integration of the Local Government Training Program (LGTP) with the PPI and we welcomed its new director, Rebecca Scott. The merger of the PPI and LGTP will strengthen both institutions and allow us to more efficiently and effectively work with our regional partners in improving our community. In addition to participating in on-campus engagement activities, the PPI worked with many external partners. Our projects varied from surveying North Carolina local government and nonprofit leaders about their collaborations, to conducting a county-wide survey on land use planning, to facilitating a civic leadership workshop for students in the region. Student involvement was a crucial component in all of our projects. Our students served as the principal contributors from each project's initial planning to producing final reports. These projects not only delivered valuable services to the community, but also provided learning and networking opportunities for our students.

Below we provide a brief overview of who we are and summaries of the PPI projects and activities. Some include links to media coverage of the activities. However, the PPI could not have provided any of these benefits to the students or our community partners without the assistance of many other individuals and departments. This year the PPI received support from many on-campus groups, including the Office of the Chancellor, the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs, the Office of Communications and Public Relations, the Center for Service Learning, the Pre-Law Club, Creative Services, and the WCU Print Shop, among others.

The PPI also received assistance from off-campus organizations such as the North Carolina Center for Non-profits, the North Carolina City and County Management Association, North Carolina Campus Compact, and Haywood County. Thank you to all these groups, both internal and external partners, for your continued support.

The WCU Public Policy Institute aims to empower the Western North Carolina region to effectively manage real policy problems by mobilizing students, community leaders, faculty, and citizens to discuss and develop viable policy options to create more effective policies.

The Public Policy Institute: Who We Are

The Public Policy Institute (PPI) was founded in 1999 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent research and outreach organization. The mission of the PPI is to generate effective public policy responses and alternatives to important political, administrative and social problems that profoundly affect the quality of life in Western North Carolina. Faculty, staff, and students in the PPI use the tools of empirical social science to understand and address public policy problems. The PPI staff writes for multiple audiences, enabling research projects to reach as many constituencies as possible.

The PPI helps undergraduate and graduate students connect the classroom with real-world applications. Specific student contributions vary from project to project, but students frequently collect data, co-author reports and articles, and act as full partners in the research process. Students also interact with external constituents delivering policy recommendations and becoming part of the policy process.

As an explicitly collaborative organization, the PPI welcomes partnerships with local governments and non-profits as well as with faculty throughout the Western Carolina University campus.

Our goals include:

To help students to become active participants in their communities.

To improve public policy in the region by conducting rigorous research on major issues and making it available and understandable to a practitioner audience.

To exercise policy leadership in the region.

To obtain resources to carry out the mission of the institute, and to attract dedicated students, faculty, and staff to assist in carrying out that mission.

Public Policy Institute

2015-2016 Staff

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2015-2016 SUMMARY OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Jackson County/ Southwestern Commission Survey

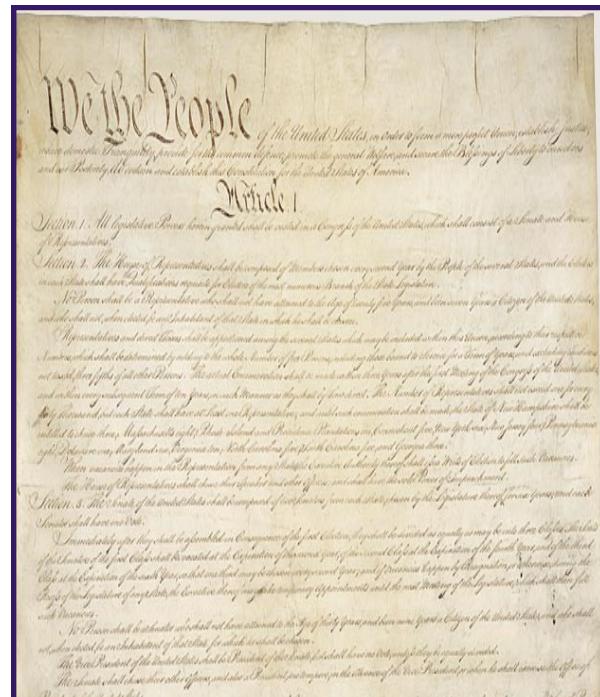


In September of 2015 the PPI worked with the Southwestern Commission to formulate a comprehensive community planning survey for Jackson County. The survey was made to study key issues over the next 20-30 years to serve the diverse interest of county citizens. The survey was available for all residents of Jackson County, with the plurality of respondents coming from Sylva, (49%) with the majority of respondents being white (94%) between the ages of 25-44. (21%) The on-line survey included a total of 2,165 responses. Some of the most pertinent responses were related to improving citizens quality of life, such as job opportunities, high-speed internet and phone service, and more shopping opportunities. Residents were also asked about government spending, with most

residents supporting spending for public schools, recreation opportunities, and expanding broadband access. Finally, transportation issues were a priority for Jackson County citizens, with the top three being construction of a new road from NC 107 to US 74, that would bypass congestion in Sylva, improving NC 107 from NC 281 South towards Cashiers, and improving NC 116 from NC 107 to US 23/441. The results of the survey will be used to determine the wants and needs of the citizens of Jackson County and one part of a comprehensive planning project for Jackson County.

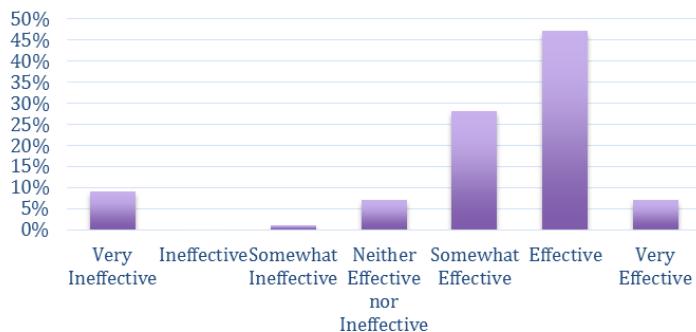
2015 Constitution Day

The PPI hosted a free public forum for Constitution Day entitled, "The Constitution in Everyday Life?" The event was centered around the topic of how the Constitution applies in normal everyday life. Dr. Todd Collins, Director of the Public Policy Institute stated that, " So often, we cover the big topics like Roe v. Wade, or abstract principles like free speech. My hope is that this panel will focus a bit more on more common, everyday activities where constitutional rights or issues may be involved in ways that we either don't recognize or take for granted – in common, everyday subjects, like education, housing, or other topics." The panelist for the forum were Bonnie Claxton, Legal Aid of NC, Paige Dowling, WCU MPA Alum and Town Manger of Sylva, Dr. Kim Elliot, Jackson County Schools Assistant Superintendent, and The Honorable Roy Wijewickrama a District Court Judge. After ten minutes for each speaker the floor was opened to attendees for questions. The Pre-Law Club also handed out pocket sized Constitutions for the event.



2015-2016 Local Government Survey

Figure 2: Overall, how effective is nonprofit collaboration in meeting its intended goals?



In the summer and fall of 2015, the PPI conducted a statewide survey of city and county government leaders as part of its annual Local Government Survey (*LoGoS*). This year's theme examined collaborations between nonprofit organizations and local government agencies. The survey was distributed to 634 local government entities and was comprised of 26 multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey highlighted some interesting opinions and trends for local government and nonprofit collaborations. For example, within the last three years a plurality of respondents (49%) stated that their nonprofit has frequently partnered with nonprofits in collaboration efforts. Nearly all of the local government respondents reported that they expect collaborations with nonprofits will increase or at least stay the same in the future.

Respondents said that collaborations included such things as sharing duties, services, or resources and that information exchanges were important between local governments and nonprofits. Overall, when asked how effective collaboration efforts between local governments and nonprofits, the majority of survey respondents (54%) stated that collaboration efforts has been effective or very effective.

Statewide Nonprofit Survey

Building on the *LoGoS* project for local governments, the PPI, in partnership with the N.C. Center for Nonprofits, conducted survey to gauge trends and opinions of nonprofit and local government collaborations. The survey was comprised of 22 questions; both multiple choice and open-ended questions were asked. The goal was to gauge how much nonprofit organizations collaborated with local governments, in what service areas, and the effectiveness of those collaborations. The survey was distributed to over 1,000 nonprofit organizations across the state. In examining the major trends from the survey results, we see that within the last three years a majority of survey respondents (57%) stated that their nonprofits have partnered with local governments at least frequently in collaboration efforts. Over the next three years most respondents (57%) stated that their expected interaction with local government will increase. Informational exchanges were cited as the most common duty, service area, or resource that are shared between organizations. A majority of respondents (63%) stated that they received some type of funding from local government agencies(either in grants, contracts, or some combination of the two). Overall, a majority of respondents (53%) stated that they believe that collaborating with local governments has been effective or very effective, with only 9% of respondents stating that collaborations have been ineffective. The overall trend that nonprofits had towards collaborating with local governments was a positive one, and Collaborations often have important secondary effects such as increasing trust and creating more favorable attitudes between local governments and nonprofit organizations.

North Carolina



Center for Nonprofits

Voter Education and Registration efforts

Staff from the PPI worked closely with the Center for Service Learning and the WCU's Andrew Goodman Scholars in efforts to educate and register students and community residents. Activities included several voter registration drives in the fall and spring leading up to the North Carolina primary, assisting with "Debate Watch" parties, and facilitating a "Intentional Conversations" panel discussion on March 3rd concerning presidential candidates' policy stances on important issues.



Photo Courtesy of the Western Carolina Journalist

Haywood County Land Use Planning Survey



MPA Student Lucie Willis presents to the Haywood County Commissioners

The PPI analyzed and conducted a presentation to the Haywood County Commissioners on citizen opinions on land use in Haywood County. PPI graduate students Lucie Willis and Heather Britt analyzed the survey data, wrote, and conducted a presentation on the survey findings in a public meeting of the Board of Commissioners on April 4th. Our results indicated overall support for land use planning, particularly in the areas of industrial and commercial development. Many respondents also stated that the largest problem facing the county was the lack of community standards in property development. Several commissioners noted that the results provided different information than they were hearing through more informal measures and will be very helpful as the county explores options concerning new regulations. A video of the presentations is available from the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akCn9Wn2KRE>

Local Government Training Program Activities

Overall, a total of 16 UNC School of Government training workshops were offered in Western North Carolina in partnership with the Local Government Training Program in FY 2015-2016. These workshops were targeted toward public officials and public employees, including (but not limited to) Mayors, Councilmembers, Board members, Town and County Managers, Finance Directors, HR Directors, Clerks, Planners, Economic Development Directors, and many more. Some examples of these workshops include:

Performance Measurement for Local Government
Grant Writing for Local Government and Non Profits
ments and Non Profits
Essentials of Municipal Government 1
Tax Collection Workshop
Evaluating Manager and Board Performance
Liability & Rules of Procedure

ABCs of Purchasing
Grants Management for Local Govern-
New Mayors Orientation
Essentials of Municipal Government 2
Public Employment Law Update
Governmental Accounting Update

In addition to School of Government workshops, the Local Government Training Program also assisted in the planning of 4 quarterly WNC Managers Association Meetings. Throughout the year, the LGTP also hosted several viewings of webinars offered by the School of Government at UNC Chapel Hill, including an FLSA webinar and an ACA reporting webinar.

NC Campus Compact Civic Engagement Institute

On April 16th, the PPI in coordination with North Carolina Campus Compact, hosted a collegiate political leadership training workshop at Biltmore Park. Students from several universities participated in this event with experts from the NC Institute of Political Leadership. Students participated in training sessions concerning ethics in politics, political beliefs, and developing a public service career plan. The event also featured a panel of government leaders with an open discussion about public service, including NC Representative Brian Turner, Moore County Commissioner David Lambert, and Brad Young (press secretary for the NC State Treasurer).



STUDENT EXPERIENCES



Working at the Public Policy Institute has been a tremendous opportunity this past year. Learning how to analyze surveys and turn data into useable information has been an invaluable experience that I know will help me in becoming a more effective public servant. The PPI not only allows students to get hands on experience with public engagement projects, but also getting to learn new skills that help prepare and train public servants. For example, being able properly analyze survey data and turn it into something that citizens and elected officials can use to better understand the needs of the people and work to move their towns and cities forward.

- Lance Riddle, MPA Graduate student

The Public Policy Institute has been a very valuable experience for me because it has allowed me to get hands on experience in local government across a diverse area of subjects. It gives me the hands on experience that a traditional academic classroom sometimes lacks. I was able to learn organization and leadership skills while coordinating campus events, professional skills in communication by being in direct contact with local government clients, and subject area knowledge in planning, policy, and public input and engagement. I am very grateful for my experience in the Public Policy Institute.

- Heather Britt, MPA Graduate student



Working at the Public Policy Institute this semester has been a valuable educational experience for me. This semester I helped with reports for the local government and non-profit surveys. The reports generated from these surveys will serve as an important feedback tool for local governments and nonprofits across the state. As an MPA major, I found that working on these survey reports gave me skills that I will be able to use in future classes and other projects outside of school.

- Faviola Olvera, MPA Graduate Student