NACo Classroom Guide

Overview

We've designed this guide to help you have a successful classroom visit experience. The hints and instructions you'll find here were developed by veteran teachers who have seen their share of classroom visitors. With this guide, you can prepare yourself to be calm, cool, and all about counties!

A Note on Naming: We use the term county as a default, but we've created our resources to embrace the use of parish and borough as appropriate. There are also opportunities to adapt and discuss instances where titles, departments, and government functions differ from one form of county government to the next.

Activity Options: Choose between playing the iCivics game *Counties Work* with the class (Option A) or using NACo's County Explorer tool and your local government website(s) to teach students about their own county (Option B). More on these later in the guide!

Time Suggested: Each option is designed to take one average class period, or about 45-50 minutes. (Don't worry about running out of time. In a classroom, it's always better to have too much planned than too little.)

Hints for Success:

- Get the teacher's input on which activity option would work best with his or her students.

- Share the materials with the teacher in advance. He or she may have great ideas that will help the effort with his/her particular group of students. Ask the teacher for specific suggestions to help the components of the activity go smoothly.

- Find out what the students will have already learned about counties before your visit.

- Make sure the teacher will handle logistics like setting up PowerPoint or getting kids on the internet.

- Don't skip the preparation!

NACo Resources: In addition to the iCivics materials listed in this Guide, here are two other sites you and the teacher may find useful.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES **NACo**

- **NACo's County Explorer** tool provides the latest available data for 3,069 counties that includes over 1,000 indicators as well as printable PDF versions of county or state profiles. (www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer)

- **NACo's Counties Matter** site is a visually engaging way to walk through the various aspects of county governments, with a listing of services as well as interesting facts and figures. It's great to project for classroom viewing. (www.NACo.org/counties-matter)

This Guide includes the following:

- Option A: *Counties Work* Game

- Option B: Learn About Your County!

- A Note on Logistics

- Bridging Classroom Visits & Community Engagement

- Appendix

    - *Counties Work* Game Guide

    - My County templates: Middle/High and Elementary School versions customized for county, parish, and borough use.

See Also: PowerPoint slide deck for use with both Option A and B. The customizable file can be found alongside this Guide.

Option A: The *Counties Work* Game

What You'll Do:
- Introduce students to the iCivics game *Counties Work*
- Observe and talk to students as they play the game
- Lead a post-game discussion

Grade Range: 5 – 12

What You'll Need:
- Student internet access
- Computers for access via iCivics.org or tablets with game loaded from app store
  - www.icivics.org/games/counties-work
- *Counties Work* Game Guide (See Appendix)
- Optional: Projector and PowerPoint with discussion questions

1. Prepare for Your Visit

- Print yourself a copy of the *Counties Work* game guide from the Appendix. You can also find the game guide on the iCivics website. Read the guide and preview the discussion questions on the last page.

- Play the game! It should take 20-25 minutes to make it to the end. It's always best to understand what you'll be asking the kids to do. You can play the game through the iCivics website, or download it to your iPad from the iTunes App Store or Google Play for Android tablets. (The game isn't designed for phones.)

- Preview the discussion questions in the game guide again. Feel free to make changes to fit your style, your expertise, or suggestions from the teacher.

- Optional: Have the names of the departments in your specific county at the ready to share with the kids for comparison to the game if you'd like.

2. Lead the Activity

- Start your visit by introducing yourself and asking the class what they know about counties and county government. Ask them to share any ideas they have, even if they're not sure. Keep this short, under 5 minutes.

  - Example questions: Which county are we in? What does a county do? Does anyone know someone who works for the county? What kind of services does our county provide residents? Where is the county government located? Etc.

- Tell the class they'll be playing a video game about how county governments work, where they are put in charge.

- Allow the teacher to get the students set up with the game and ready to play.

- Circulate the room while students play for approximately 25 minutes. Stop to talk to students and ask them questions about what's happening on their screen.

- Warn the students when they have five minutes of play time left, and stop them early enough to give you time to lead the discussion.

- Discuss the game with the class using the discussion questions in the game guide. Budget about 10-15 minutes, depending on how chatty the class is and how much you like to talk.

Leave Behind

- County Government Materials: bring enough brochures, etc. to leave for the teacher to share and discuss

- PDF county profiles on specific issues are available at www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer.

- Point teachers to the Capable County (grades 6-8) or County Government (grades 9-12) iCivics lesson plans or the My County template for students to complete at a later time.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES NACo

Option B: Learn About Your County!

What You'll Do:
- Introduce students to county governments
- Help the class complete the My County template
- Lead a post-research discussion on what students find

Grade Range: 5 – 12

What You'll Need:
- Classroom or student internet access
- Copies of My County template (See Appendix and select appropriate grade level version)
- Completed My County template with answers that are specific to your county government
- Optional: Projector and PowerPoint with discussion questions

---

1. Prepare for Your Visit

- Familiarize yourself with the My County template you plan on using, making a key with the correct answers for your county to use in the classroom as needed. (Also, note where the information is best found on the web.)

- Have the links ready for your local county government website(s) and for the NACo County Explorer tool. The more comfortable you are with these sites, the easier it will be to facilitate student navigation in class. (Always a good thing!)

- Check in with the teacher to make sure that you have the tech access you need. (One projected screen or multiple computers for student use.)

- Make copies of the My County template, or ensure that the teacher will have them ready for the class when you arrive. (It is best to bring your own!)

2. Lead the Activity

- Start your visit by introducing yourself and asking the class what they know about counties and county government. Ask them to share any ideas they have, even if they're not sure. Keep this short-- under 5 minutes.

    - Example questions: Which county are we in? What does a county do? Does anyone know someone who works for the county? What kind of services does our county provide residents? Where is the county government located? Etc.

- Distribute the My County template to each student, and explain that they will be learning details about their county government and noting them on this sheet.

- Ask students to offer up any information on the template that they already know.

- Work through the remaining areas of the template, having the best resource for the question identified in advance.

- Remember: You can have students do this activity individually, in pairs, or in small groups with you and the teacher circulating offering assistance. Or you can do this as a class with you running the research effort from the front of the room and the students noting the answers on their own sheets.

Leave Behinds
- County Government Materials: bring enough brochures, etc. to leave for the teacher to share and discuss
- PDF county profiles are available at www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer.

Extension Idea
- Once students have collected all the great data about their county, they could create brochures or posters to tell others about what they've learned. These could even be displayed at the county government offices for a neat experience!

A Note on Logistics

Finding a Class to Visit:

- Tap your personal network for local teachers, school administrators, and other school staff. Even if the individual isn't the right fit for a class visit, they are likely to know the perfect teacher for an introduction. Extend the search to the networks of people in your office too.

- Look for teachers with classes like: U.S. Government, Civics, U.S. History, State or Local History, general Social Studies, and even classes like Consumer Ed., Home Economics, and Computer Science.

- If you find that teachers shy away from the thought of bringing "politics" into their classroom, focus on the fact that you are there to talk about how the county government works/ interacts with the students' day-to-day life. (Not to promote a campaign, candidate, or issue.)

Coordinating with the Teacher:

- It's always good to give the teacher as much lead time as possible before your visit. Lessons are usually scheduled very tightly, so he or she will need to plan ahead to make the most of your visit.

- Share materials with the teacher in advance, and discuss anything that you'd like to see shared with the students before or after your visit.

- Try to have at least two conversations (phone, email, or in person) with the teacher before the visit to get a feel for the classroom environment, student behaviors, tech access, and anything else either of you want to share.

- It's best for the teacher to stay in the room with you. Make sure you are both on the same page, you are a visiting speaker not a substitute. Leave the classroom management tasks to the teacher.

Bridging Classroom Visits & Community Engagement

iCivics creates our materials with an eye toward making civics and government relevant to students, no matter their age. Our hope is that by showing students how and why the government works as it does, they will feel informed and compelled to act. To further support this goal, we've created two versions of our civic action plan unit, County Solutions. Take this opportunity tell your partnering teacher about the following resources.

- **County Solutions—Middle School:** Our original County Solutions unit is a nine-step process for creating an action plan to resolve a community issue. In this series of lessons, students learn about current events, the role of local government, and the variety of outreach methods available to average citizens working to influence public policy. The unit is designed for instruction around a single issue that the teacher and class choose together, and lesson activities are highly structured guides that walk students through the basic skills and knowledge involved in public policy advocacy. Students focus on the role of local and county government in resolving the issue the class has chosen.

> **ALSO!** Share upcoming county government events that are open to the public and invite the students to attend.

- **County Solutions—High School:** This new level of County Solutions introduces flexibility and autonomy for students who are ready for more independent work. Students choose their own issues (the unit can also be adapted for group/whole-class work) and are expected to spend some time outside of class working on the project. In this 10-step lesson series, students learn and practice research, analysis, and advocacy skills as they develop a plan to "move the needle" on their chosen issue. Lessons offer reinforcement activities and flexible templates for students to use for research and plan development. Students examine the broad context of their issues—including the role of county and other levels of government—and focus on effecting local change using strategies tailored to their individual issues.

iCivics

Counties Work—2017 Update!

In *Counties Work*, students learn about local government by becoming a county official responding to citizen requests. They explore questions like: Are citizens making sensible requests? Which county department would best tackle each citizen's request? Do taxes need to be raised or lowered to keep a balanced budget? How will citizens react—and what's the best action when crisis strikes? They must keep citizens happy and manage county resources responsibly. Challenges come from all directions in this fast-paced game!

Learning Objectives

- Simulate the role of county government, including its organization, responsibilities, and services
- Identify appropriate resources and departments of county government to solve problems
- Consider how a budget and major sources of local revenue affect both services and citizens

Prerequisites

Nothing! *Counties Work* is designed to teach students about county government as they play. The accompanying lesson plans, *The Capable County* and *County Government - HS*, are a great sources for deeper learning after the students have played the game. You can find these lessons and all of our great resources at www.iCivics.org/teachers.

HOW TO GET STARTED

1. Pick a difficulty level

Fist time in county government? Try normal mode. If you think you are an expert, give fast mode a try!

2. Customize your local government experience

- **Name your county**, parish, or borough yourself or randomly generate a civically-inspired name.
- **Select your character** to run the government by browsing faces and outfits.
- **Give yourself a title** that reflects your status as a county official. The options show the diversity of structures and titles found at the county level of government.
- **Select a special department** to add to the map. Not every county has the same departments and services, so pick one that works for you!

3. Hit the continue button when you are ready to play!

Counties Work takes about 20-25 minutes to play.

How to run your county

Working with local residents

The game begins on the landscape of your newly incorporated county. The main goal of *Counties Work* is to keep citizens happy by responding to their requests. Here is how to do just that!


Residents have many requests for the county and will need your help to carry them out! Above each resident's head is an indicator revealing the request's cost and potential impact if fulfilled. A timer also shows how much longer the resident is willing to wait. If you take too long to respond to a request, the resident will leave.

Click on a resident to hear the request.

After reading the request you can:

- Select **Hold That Thought!** if you want the resident to continue waiting while you think about the request.

- Select **No Thanks** if you want to turn down the request, either because you can't afford it, or because it's not in your county's best interest.

- Select **Let's Do It!** to accept the request. At this point, the resident will begin following you.
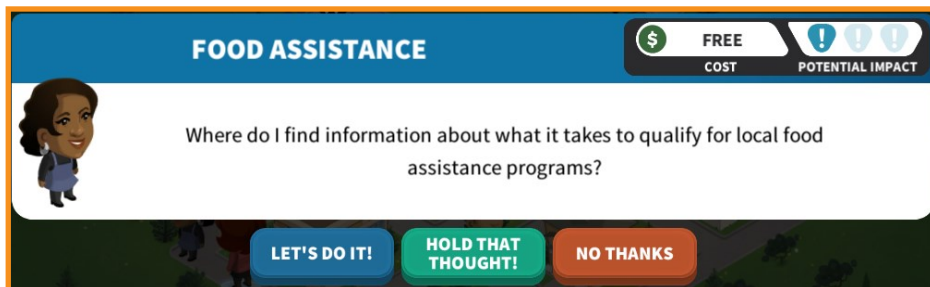

Once a resident is following you, you must bring the resident to the department on the map that can best fulfill their request.

Inside each department, you can find a description of the services that department provides. You can also browse the services of all the departments from the Departments tab in the Help Section.

Getting crowded? Develop areas!

Over time, you'll want to develop new areas of your community to attract more residents and grow the county's population. More population means more tax revenue!

Selecting a construction cone on the map reveals the cost to develop the new area. The cone will only appear in color if you can afford the cost. Developing areas also gives you space to construct new buildings.
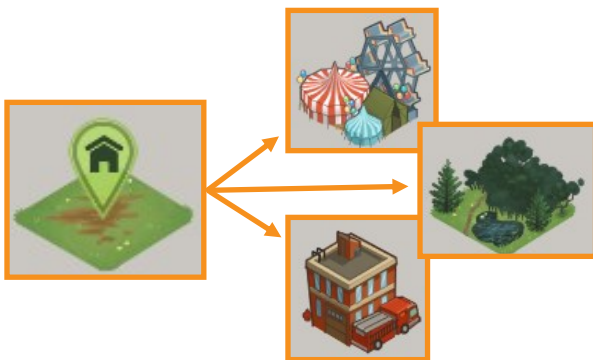
Each developed area includes one construction plot on which you can build a variety of county structures. Select a construction plot to see what buildings can be constructed in that space. Each building has a unique cost and would provide a unique perk for your county. A perk is an immediate or monthly bonus to your approval rating, the county's population, or its funds.

Tax time!

At the end of each year, you will have the opportunity to adjust sales and property taxes before moving on to the next year. Sales taxes can also be adjusted in the middle of the year by clicking the Sales Tax button on the home screen. In order to maintain your county and fulfill requests, you need funding from taxes. But bear in mind that high taxes will make residents unhappy. It's an important balancing act!

How do you respond to a crisis?

Any county can encounter an unexpected crisis. When a crisis occurs, go as quickly as you can to the department that you believe can best handle the crisis.

iCivics
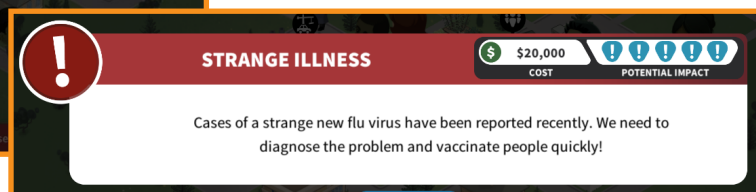
Everyone loves feedback!

As you play *Counties Work*, you will have lots of opportunities to get feedback on how you are doing in the game. Here are some things to keep an eye out for:

Your HUD (Head-up Display) helps you keep track of all kinds of important information. As you make your way through the game, you can watch how each action impacts the metrics in your HUD. Little pop-up messages showing the impact of your actions will appear below impacted metrics as you play.

YEAR 2 — MADISON COUNTY — 5% SALES TAX — +$288,750/mo
57,750 POPULATION — 73% RESIDENT APPROVAL — $161,250 FUNDS
+10K New Area Populated — -$1M New Area Purchased

THE MADISON — DECEMBER ISSUE
The Past Year In Review
A Look Back on Last Year:
What Residents are Saying:
county Resident Satisfaction Polls Show: **65% Approval**
Requests Fulfilled: **11 Requests**
I am saving so much money growing my own fruit and veggies at the community garden!
The addition of new snow plow drivers has really improved winter around here!
I voted for the first time thanks to the simpler system. Proud to be part of my community's political process!
What's Inside:
Mystery Goat
Who left an angry goat at the fire station? Not cool!
Page 2
Short Articles
Editor forces paper articles to 55 letters!! That's rea
Page 3
Our population grew this year! 10,000 to 36,000 residents
36K
10K
CONTINUE

The Year In Review pops up at the end of each year to show you resident feedback, approval ratings, requests addressed, and population growth.

News Flashes let you know how well you dealt with a crisis.

SPECIAL EDITION
MADISON NEWS
YEAR 2
MYSTERY VIRUS CURED!
Quick action by the County Chair has helped address the strange flu virus that started to spread through the community. The Health Department's diagnosis and vaccine efforts stopped the bug in its tracks. "The last thing we need is a population full of flu zombies!" said a relieved nurse, "This vaccine should work through next year too!"
Continued on Page 6...
DR. RINDO OF THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OVERSEES VACCINE DISTRIBUTION AT THE LOCAL CLINIC
CONTINUE

Game over!

The game ends after four years have passed. If citizen satisfaction is above 50%, you will be re-elected to a second term. After finishing, you can print a game certificate to provide additional information about your performance.

YEAR 4 — MADISON COUNTY — 7% SALES — +$1,807,750/mo
258,250 POPULATION — 100% RESIDENT APPROVAL — $33,529,150 FUNDS
FINAL SCORE
REQUEST BONUS — 640
POPULATION BONUS — 1,000
APPROVAL BONUS — 3,000
IMPACT POINTS — 4,640
YOU WON RE-ELECTION!
VIEW CERTIFI

COUNTIES WORK
Play Time: 27 Minutes — Impact Points: 4,640 — Date: 03/21/2017 03:19PM
DIFFICULTY: FAST
ELECTION RESULTS: RE-ELECTED
COUNTY NAME: MADISON COUNTY
UNIQUE DEPARTMENT: PARKS & RECREATION

COUNTY STATISTICS:		RESIDENT REQUESTS:	
Final Approval Rating:	100%	Popular Requests Matched:	48
Final Population:	258,250	Unpopular Requests Matched:	0
Total Funds Collected:	$72,359,150	Requests Mismatched:	1
County Expansions Unlocked:	6/6	Requests Ignored:	8
Construction Plots Filled:	6/6	Requests Rejected:	23

iCivics
www.icivics.org

iCivics

The Departments

	Public Works & Transportation keeps infrastructure in shape by building and maintaining the building blocks of the community. The department covers everything from filling pot holes to keeping the lights on.	Maintenance of Public Facilities, Gas & Electricity, Airports, Telecommunications, Roads & Bridges, Public Transportation
	The Finance Department coordinates the financial side of county business. Officials make sure that bills are paid, taxes are collected, and budgets stay balanced.	Tax Assessments & Collection, Government Budgeting & Audits, Human Resources for Government Staff
	The Records Department is responsible for keeping all county records safe and secure. The clerk and team work to ensure residents have access to documentation of life's big events, as well as oversee elections.	Property Records, Marriage Licenses & Wedding Ceremonies, Birth & Death Certificates, Elections
	Justice & Public Safety makes the safety of the community priority #1. From law enforcement to emergency services to courts and corrections, these folks work to protect and serve.	Sheriff & Police, Fire & Emergency Services, Courts, Jails & Corrections, Juvenile Justice, District Attorneys, Public Defenders, Coroner's Office
	Human Services provides services that improve the quality of life for residents of all ages. From children to the elderly or disabled, this department protects groups that need special care.	Adoptions & Foster Care, Food Assistance, Veterans Services, Employment Training & Assistance, Elderly & Disability Services, Low-Income Support
	Community Health provides services intended to create and maintain a healthy community, including health care, food safety, and everything in between.	Behavioral & Mental Health, Substance Abuse Help, Immunizations & Disease Prevention, Nursing Homes, Hospitals & Clinics, Health Code Inspections
	Parks & Recreation creates and maintains spaces and services that allow county residents to relax, exercise, and play. This department brings the community together.	Parks, Nature & Bike Trails, Community Classes & Events, Recreation Programs, Community Engagement
	Community & Economic Development creates and provides affordable housing to residents, and helps bring communities and companies together to bring new businesses and jobs to the county.	Housing Assistance, Partnerships with Businesses, Start Up Assistance, Job Creation
	The Department of Education does its homework to make sure that all students, young and old, have access to a high-quality public education.	Public & Charter Schools, Adult Education, Community Colleges, Special Education Services
	Environment & Land Management provides stewardship of natural resources, protects residents from environmental contaminants, and offers land and waste management services.	Air & Water Quality, Recycling, Solid Waste Disposal, Land Zoning, Land & Natural Resource Management

iCivics

CLASSROOM CONVERSATION STARTERS

Pre-Game Questions

You can use these questions before playing *Counties Work* in the classroom to activate knowledge.

- What is a county? Which county do you live in? (Substitute county with parish or borough as needed.)

- Do you know anyone that works in county government or for a county service?

- What services do counties provide?

  ◊ *Answers may vary, but services might include: maintaining property records, protecting citizens, providing parks and recreational activities, health and human services, etc.*

- How do counties get money to provide services?

  ◊ *A combination of taxes collected from people who live and work in the county and income from fees and fines.*

Post-Game Questions

Use these questions as a way to debrief the individual experiences of playing *Counties Work*.

- What was the easiest part of running a county? The hardest?

- How did you decide what projects to accept and reject?

  ◊ *Students might mention costs, impact rating, if it was a good idea or not, funding or population perks, etc.*

- What role did money play in your decisions about which projects to accept and reject?

- What is the county's role in people's day-to-day lives?

- Which county department are you most interested in learning more about?

Activity Ideas

- Find out more about your county/parish/borough and make a poster or brochure as a class. Each county government should have it's own website. The National Association of Counties also offers great information in their County Explorer tool. Check it out at http://explorer.naco.org/

  - Research the titles and names of the officials in your county's government. Remember, every county government is a little different.

- Create a Venn diagram that compares a county to a city, state or nation. You can pick the topic for comparison: structure, function, services, etc.

My County Government

Name:

Basic Information	
County Name	
County Seat	
Population (with date of census)	
Has population grown or declined since the previous census? By how much?	
Date Established	
Size of County (sq mi)	
Is the county more rural, suburban, urban?	
Identify major employers in your county: (Think: industry, agricultural exports, corporate headquarters, universities, tourist sites, etc.)	
What is the employment rate in your county? Has it grown or declined in the last 10 years?	
The Government	
What is the website address for your county government?	
What kind of structure does your county government have? What are county officials called?	
How many departments or agencies are in the county government? Name three.	
What was the most recent annual budget for the county?	Revenue: Spending:
In the News	
Provide the headline for one news story relating to your county government.	
Contact Information	
What is the general contact address for county services?	

My Parish Government

Name:

Basic Information	
Parish Name	
Parish Seat	
Population (with date of census)	
Has population grown or declined since the previous census? By how much?	
Date Established	
Size of parish (sq mi)	
Is the parish more rural, suburban, urban?	
Identify major employers in your parish: (Think: industry, agricultural exports, corporate headquarters, universities, tourist sites, etc.)	
What is the employment rate in your parish? Has it grown or declined in the last 10 years?	
The Government	
What is the website address for your parish government?	
What kind of structure does your parish government have? What are parish officials called?	
How many departments or agencies are in the parish government? Name three.	
What was the most recent annual budget for the parish?	Revenue: Spending:
In the News	
Provide the headline for one news story relating to your parish government.	
Contact Information	
What is the general contact address for parish services?	

My Borough Government

Use these resources to complete this fact sheet about your borough government:
-NACo County Explorer Tool: www.naco.org/countyexplorer
-The U.S. Census Bureau: www.factfinder.census.gov   -Your borough government website

Basic Information	
Borough Name	
Borough Seat	
Population (with date of census)	
Has population grown or declined since the previous census? By how much?	
Date Established	
Size of Borough (sq mi)	
Is the borough more rural, suburban, urban?	
Identify major employers in your borough: (Think: industry, agricultural exports, corporate headquarters, universities, tourist sites, etc.)	
What is the employment rate in your borough? Has it grown or declined in the last 10 years?	
The Government	
What is the website address for your borough government?	
What kind of structure does your borough government have? What are borough officials called?	
How many departments or agencies are in the borough government? Name three.	
What was the most recent annual budget for the borough?	Revenue: Spending:
In the News	
Provide the headline for one news story relating to your borough government.	
Contact Information	
What is the general contact address for borough services?	

My County

Use these resources to complete this fact sheet about your county government:
-NACo County Explorer Tool: www.naco.org/countyexplorer
-The U.S. Census Bureau: www.factfinder.census.gov   -Your county government website

Basic Information	
County Name	
County Seat	
How many people live in my county?	
When was my county established?	
What is the largest city or town in my county?	
How large is my county (in square miles)?	
Draw your state and put a star where your county is located, or draw it too!	Draw the seal for your county.

My county has...
      industry   agriculture   business
      major university   major tourist site
      other: _____
	My county is more...
	      rural or urban or mixed

The Government	
What kind of structure does your county government have? What are county officials called?	
What are county officials called?	
How many departments or agencies are in the county government?	
Pick three agencies or departments and briefly describe the kind of work they do.	

My Parish

Use these resources to complete this fact sheet about your parish government:
-NACo County Explorer Tool: www.naco.org/countyexplorer
-The U.S. Census Bureau: www.factfinder.census.gov   -Your parish government website

Basic Information	
Parish Name	
Parish Seat	
How many people live in my parish?	
When was my parish established?	
What is the largest city or town in my parish?	
How large is my parish (in square miles)?	
Draw your state and put a star where your parish is located, or draw it too!	Draw the seal for your parish.
My parish has... industry agriculture business major university major tourist site other: _____	My parish is mostly... rural or urban or mixed
The Government	
What kind of structure does your parish government have? What are parish officials called?	
What are parish officials called?	
How many departments or agencies are in the parish government?	
Pick three agencies or departments and briefly describe the kind of work they do.	

My Borough

Use these resources to complete this fact sheet about your borough government:
-NACo County Explorer Tool: www.naco.org/countyexplorer
-The U.S. Census Bureau: www.factfinder.census.gov   -Your borough government website

Basic Information	
Borough Name	
Borough Seat	
How many people live in my borough?	
When was my borough established?	
What is the largest city or town in my borough?	
How large is my borough (in square miles)?	
Draw your state and put a star where your borough is located, or draw it too!	Draw the seal for your borough.

My borough has...
     industry   agriculture   business
     major university   major tourist site
     other: _____
	My borough is mostly...
	     rural or urban or mixed

The Government	
What kind of structure does your borough government have? What are borough officials called?	
What are borough officials called?	
How many departments or agencies are in the borough government?	
Pick three agencies or departments and briefly describe the kind of work they do.	