

# Johnston

FIRST TWO VISITS:

OCT. 17

DEC. 3

“ On the first visit, the Town Clerk was a little apprehensive about giving me copies of the minutes and agendas. The clerk asked two different supervisors before granting the request and was frustrated with having to make copies. I was asked to wait about an hour for the copies. While visiting the Tax Assessor’s office, I found the clerk to be terse, defensive and inquisitorial. I was told that the information on delinquent tax payments was ‘too private - people might be having a hard time and shouldn’t have their names known.’ When asked if I could have a list with just lots and addresses, I was refused. The clerk seemed to be changing back and forth several times between there being no such list and me not being able to see it. The clerk told me that something similar to my request was published in the city paper around tax time. After initially denying the request, the officer suggested a written request could be submitted, but it was nearly certain to be denied. ”

### School Committee Minutes:

- Readability: Good
- Thoroughness: Good
- Layout: Poor
- Legal Compliance: Full

### City/Town Council Minutes:

- Readability: Average
- Thoroughness: Good
- Layout: Poor
- Legal Compliance: Full

## Documents Not Received

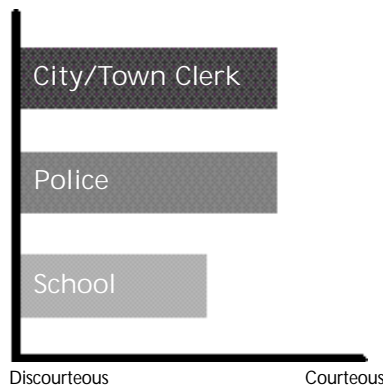


**T**hirty percent of the requests for public documents were denied in Johnston. As in many towns, the police account for much of the problem. Not only did they deny both requests for items clearly covered by the Open Records Law, but two visits were necessary before being denied each item. The School Department fared better in terms of overall compliance, but they were not in full compliance. Moreover, the clerks in the School Department received one of the lowest ratings of any school department for their demeanor. In fact, with respect to demeanor, the School Department received a lower rating than the police. The Town Clerks were the most helpful, uniformly complying with the Open Records Law.

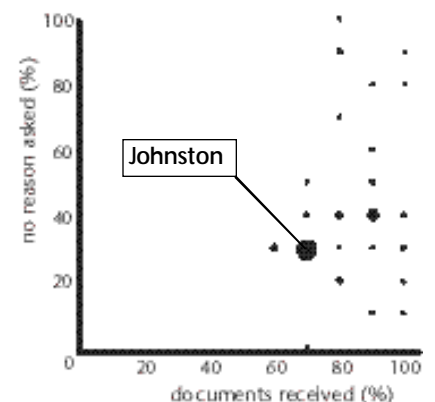
The employees encountered across Johnston were quite inquisitive, asking for identification 60 percent of the time and asking a reason for the request 70 percent of the time.

There is significant room for improvement in Johnston.  
(Footnote on p. 70.)

## How We Were Treated



## Comparison: Cities/Towns



## \* Footnotes for Cities and Towns

**Central Falls:** The researchers received arrest reports from the Central Falls Police Department, but all of the personal information was redacted and therefore did not comply with the Open Records Law.

**Coventry:** The officer in charge insisted upon seeing a piece of identification from the researcher before any arrest records would be shown. As the researcher refused to present verification of her identity, the arrest reports were not obtained.

**East Providence:** The charge was not actually levied, but was clearly marked on a sign outside of the front window.

**Johnston:** The school department clerk said that a printed copy of the school contract was not available and even if it were, she would not provide copy because it would be too difficult to understand.

**Providence:** After being denied on four separate visits, arrest reports were ultimately granted to the researcher on the fifth visit. However, it is appropriate to deem this a refusal, especially in light of the considerable runaround, since the general protocol of the study dictated that three separate unsuccessful attempts should indicate a denial.

**South Kingstown:** The arrest reports were received by mail after the narrative was written.

**Warwick:** The officer on duty explained that arrest reports were not filed chronologically, so it would be difficult to retrieve the three most recent arrest reports. The officer did suggest that he would be willing to look up arrest reports if the researcher gave specific names.