

# 2020–21

## UNC School of Government ncIMPACT Initiative

Dedicated to Improving the Lives of North Carolinians

### The ncIMPACT Team

**Anita R. Brown-Graham**  
*Professor and Director*

**Emily Williamson Gangi**  
*Policy Engagement Director*

**Barbara Steele**  
*Program Support Associate*

**Molly Gaskin**  
*Research Assistant*

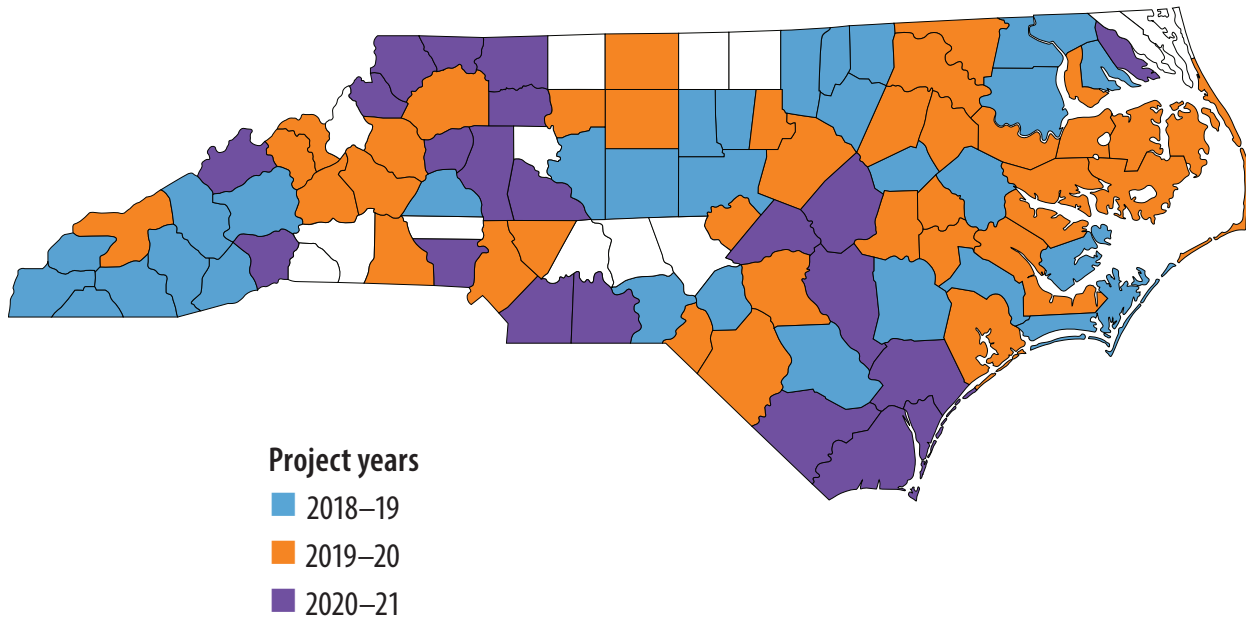
**Jason Jones**  
*Research Associate*

**Caitlin Lancaster**  
*Communications Assistant*

### Vision

Be the go-to place in North Carolina for trusted tools that bridge policy and practice in response to complex challenges

### Communities with active projects (2018–21)



## Strategies

1. We engage in deep experiments on pressing community challenges using sound data, high quality research, and rigorous analysis.

### EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

#### ► **Keys to Economic Recovery from COVID-19**

**Challenge:** The global COVID-19 pandemic caused an economic recession in 2020 that impacted local governments and their communities drastically, including unemployment, business closures, public health emergencies, and a shift to remote learning for education.

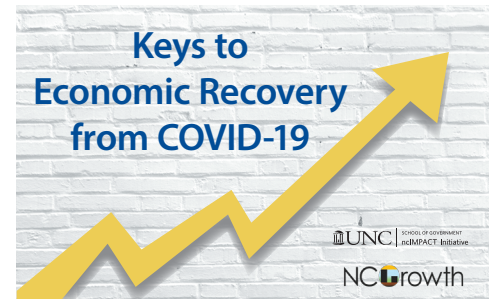
**Response:** The ncIMPACT Initiative at the UNC School of Government and NCGrowth at the Kenan Institute for Private Enterprise collaborated on a project to identify strategies that will help local economies recover more quickly from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Process:** In spring and fall 2020, the ncIMPACT Initiative sent a nonrepresentative sample survey to local government officials in North Carolina in an effort to assess how they viewed their early COVID-19 world—and the actions they were taking to respond. The team published analysis of these survey data in two reports. The project team also convened four webinars that attracted 250 participants to learn from community experiences, share findings of their research and various resources, and facilitate peer learning between communities. The team conducted research into eight case study communities that feature a diversity of strategies and geographies, with a focus on replicable, community-level interventions. Finally, the team produced a COVID Composite Tool with metrics, data, visualizations, and documentation to assist local governments.

**Impact:** Through robust data analysis, case studies, webinars, and peer learning sessions, NC local governments have access to some of the best economic recovery resources in the nation.

**Project Leads:** Anita Brown-Graham, Mark Little, Emily Gangi and Carolyn Fryberger

**Funder:** This project was supported by the [North Carolina Policy Collaboratory](#) at UNC-Chapel Hill, with funding from the North Carolina Coronavirus Relief Fund established and appropriated by the North Carolina General Assembly.



#### ► **myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives**

**Challenge:** Each community's talent development potential remains key to its economic competitiveness or disadvantage in today's economy, whether high-tech or service industries dominate their region. Prior to the pandemic, 58% of jobs in North Carolina required some form of postsecondary attainment. The pandemic accelerated this trend, while decelerating attainment.



**Response:** The ncIMPACT Initiative, in partnership with myFutureNC, launched a two-year pilot program that supports 15 local educational attainment collaboratives across the state that seek to significantly increase the number of students successfully completing post-secondary credentials of value in the workforce: a degree, credential, or certification.

**Process:** Selected collaboratives will serve as leaders in implementing positive strategies for post-secondary educational attainment in their communities and will pilot practices that benefit communities across the state. They receive these benefits by participating in the project:

- Valuable resources that respond to immediate concerns about learning loss during the pandemic and help prepare for longer-term planning
- Deep expert and peer support during five forums at which teams will develop goals, make plans for implementation, and collaborate across sectors
- Robust technical assistance throughout the process
- Critical financial support in the form of \$15,000 to compensate a community project manager and \$10,000 of implementation funding for their action plan
- Local Attainment Collaborative Toolkit to implement and sustain demand-informed local collaboration with regional employers

**Impact:** These collaboratives offer an organized way to respond to community challenges that no single institution or even an entire sector can effectively tackle. This effort will help achieve the state's legislative goal of *two million individuals* between the ages of 25 and 44 who possess a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree by 2030.

**Project Leads:** Anita Brown-Graham and Emily Gangi

**Funders:** John M. Belk Endowment, Dogwood Health Trust, and UNC Rural

#### ► NC Strategic Economic Development Plan

**Challenge:** To develop the state's comprehensive strategic economic development plan, the NC Department of Commerce contracted with a team of faculty and staff at UNC-Chapel Hill to provide a data-driven strategic plan and solid recommendations.

**Response:** ncIMPACT Initiative conducted a series of regional stakeholder engagement sessions and interviews with representatives from economic development, workforce development, local government, relevant state government agencies, business, and education (all levels) to ensure broad input informed the plan. The team conducted regional sessions in each of the eight prosperity zones, in which more than 250 people participated.

**Process:** The team administered a post-session survey for each region regarding priorities identified in the session to participants and other leaders in the region for input. The team received more than 280 responses to these post-session surveys and the resulting analysis enabled the research team to refine its findings for each regional session. To generate interest in these regional sessions, the team offered an online video with an overview of statewide data, the planning process, and what participants could expect from the regional sessions. The team also conducted three to five interviews with key economic and workforce development leaders in each region to tailor the session to regional opportunities, challenges, and concerns. The ncIMPACT Initiative analyzed the results of the interviews and regional sessions and developed key findings.



**Impact:** The ncIMPACT Initiative collaborated with the UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies to develop strategic recommendations utilizing the results of research and analysis, key findings of regional sessions and interviews, and discussions with the NC Department of Commerce staff and working group advising the Secretary of Commerce. The NC Department of Commerce released the plan in July 2021.

**Lead Faculty:** Jonathan Morgan, UNC School of Government professor, and Emily Gangi

**Funder:** NC Department of Commerce

### ► Opioid Response Project

**Challenge:** When this project began, four North Carolina metro areas ranked in the top 20 nationally for opioid misuse rates and three residents died each day from overdoses on average. This crisis creates enormous local burdens for foster care and social services agencies, law enforcement and emergency management, public health departments, and many other local leaders.

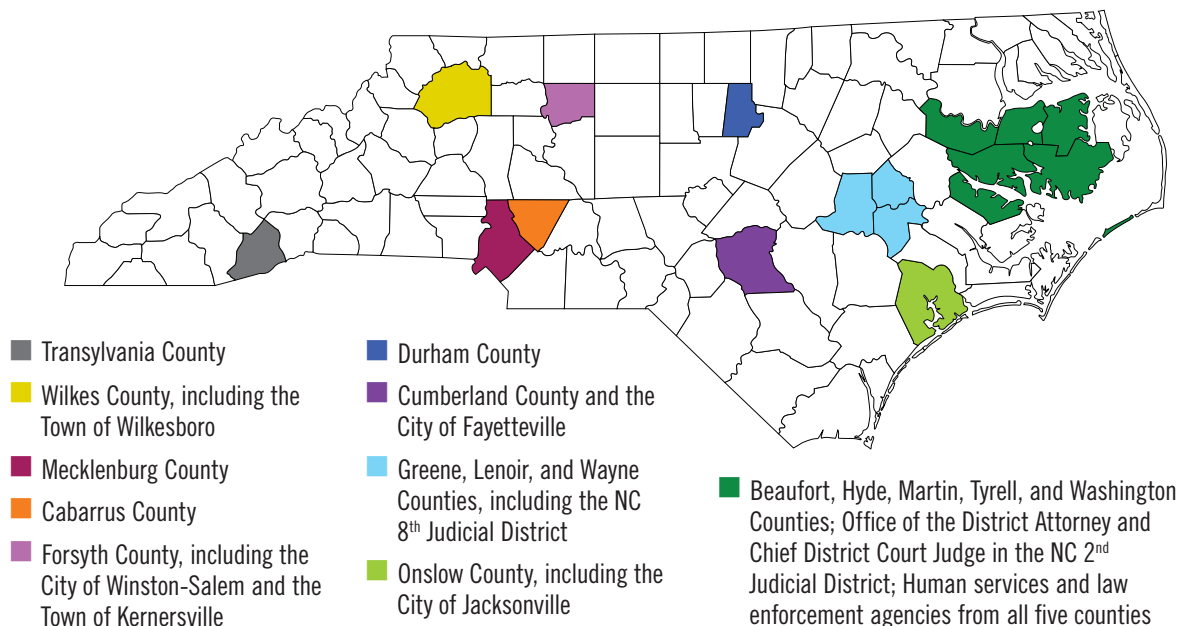
**Response:** Developed an intensive two-year collaborative learning program that provided direct support to 10 North Carolina communities enacting an integrated and innovative policy and practice response to their local opioid crises.

**Process:** Forums, technical assistance, funds for community project managers, and online resources

**Impact:** Helped 10 community teams devise effective strategies for combating the opioid crisis and develop capacity for implementing them. Shared resources and learnings with more than 1,000 stakeholders across the state in a monthly newsletter and webinars. Developed an online resource library available to the public and completed an evaluation of the project to inform future efforts. Teams leveraged their action plans to receive grant funding to support their work, totaling more than \$4 million.

**Lead Faculty:** Kim Nelson and Adam Lovelady, UNC School of Government

**Funder:** Blue Cross NC



## ► Social Capital

**Challenge:** When human service agencies fail to consider the importance of social capital in programs, they may limit the likelihood of increasing employment, reducing poverty, and improving child and family wellbeing.

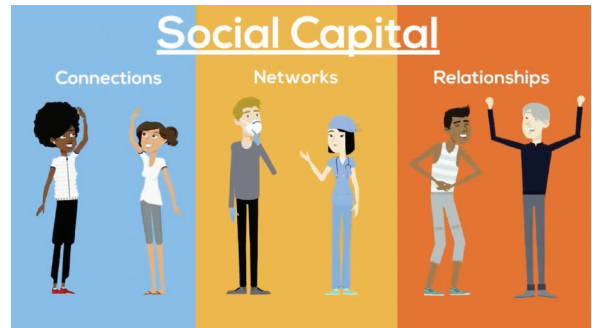
**Response:** As a subcontractor to RTI International, the ncIMPACT Initiative led the work of developing four webinars, three podcasts, and a handbook to support federal program officers and practitioners.

**Process:** The research team identified and worked with national experts, innovative practitioners, program participants, and academic literature to clarify the role social capital plays in human services programs, and to identify model programs based on their characteristics, approaches, and measures of success. The team developed five emerging principles and eight practices for implementing social capital-based programs. The team also developed a white paper draft on the use of peer supports in programs working with survivors of reentry, human (sex) trafficking and domestic violence.

**Impact:** The team and federal government shared the tools with thousands of local government and nonprofit officials across the nation who seek to use social capital at the local level to strengthen their human services programs.

**Lead Faculty:** Maureen Berner, UNC School of Government

**Funder:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



## ► Carolina Across 100

**Challenge:** As communities work to recover from the far-reaching effects of COVID-19, they seek to partner with the research-based insights generated on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus. However, with a campus as large and decentralized as Carolina, it can be difficult to know where to turn for support.

CAROLINA ACROSS



**Response:** Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz charged Carolina Across 100 to serve as a five-year initiative that partners with cohorts of communities across the state as they work on their most challenging issues, many of which COVID-19 exacerbated.

**Process:** The team began its work by interviewing and surveying community members to determine the primary pain points for which the expertise at the university is particularly well suited. The results of the survey and interviews will determine four to five focus subjects for Carolina Across 100. The team will prepare requests for participation around the focus subjects and select among communities that apply. Communities will be asked to apply as cross-sector teams of critical stakeholders that may include local governments, nonprofits, faith leaders and local business representatives.

**Impact:** Carolina Across 100 convenes cross-disciplinary experts together across campus. The pan-university Carolina Engagement Council—a select group of faculty, staff, and student leaders—will guide the initiative.

**Lead Faculty:** Anita Brown-Graham

**Funder:** Seed funding provided by the Office of the Chancellor, UNC-Chapel Hill

## ► Expanding EITC in Rural Communities

**Challenge:** The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is the federal government's largest benefit for workers. For people who earned income from working for someone or running a business or farm, it's money that positively impacts change in their life, family, and community. In North Carolina, around 180,000 filers do not claim the tax credit even though they could benefit from the boost to their household budgets. Low- and middle-income North Carolinians lose a total of \$450 million each year.

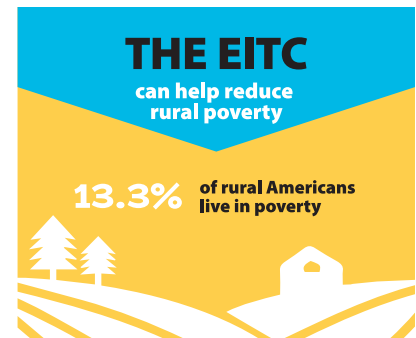
**Response:** In partnership with community leaders and stakeholders in targeted rural counties, the project team works to deliver a series of recommendations and strategies based on research and best practices to support communities in understanding and improving EITC uptake for rural counties. The Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC School of Social Work and Rural Forward at the Foundation for Health Leadership and Innovation are partners in this project.

**Process:** Hosted 12 Community Conversations on the EITC with 98 total participants in an effort to understand the different reasons people in local communities do not utilize the EITC. These conversations took place with participants from Beaufort, Bladen, Columbus, Edgecombe, Halifax, McDowell, Nash, Robeson, and Rockingham counties. Convened local research groups in the same counties and two statewide steering committee meetings to gather feedback on what was learned in the community conversations.

**Impact:** As a result of a paper produced on NC tax data and the Earned Income Tax Credit, an explainer video developed by the NC Budget and Tax Center (transcript available in Spanish), educational fliers about the EITC in NC developed by Rural Forward NC, website materials, and a blog on changes to the EITC for the year 2021, an estimated 1,500 additional North Carolinians in the target rural communities are now aware of the EITC benefit.

**Lead Faculty:** Anita Brown-Graham

**Funder:** Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



**Rural EITC Uptake**  
We're developing a comprehensive understanding of EITC Uptake in NC, with emphasis on rural communities.  
#EITCAwarenessDay

## ► Thrive Rural

**Challenge:** One in five Americans lives in a rural place. While many rural places are dynamic and thriving, others are struggling, with economies in stress and declining livelihoods and health outcomes.

**Response:** Thrive Rural is an effort of the [Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group](#) in partnership with the [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](#) that aims to create a shared vision and understanding about what it will take for communities and Native nations across the rural United States to be healthy places where everyone belongs, lives with dignity, and thrives.

**Process:** Using a National Advisory Board, which includes the ncIMPACT Initiative as well as a Theory of Change Working Group, Thrive Rural worked to:

- Discover, synthesize, curate, and share the best knowledge and evidence of what is working; build a shared understanding of the state of relevant policy, systems, and practices—and what is needed to realize improvements in rural community conditions, health, and wellbeing.

- Create systems for iterative learning, asking questions that prompt new ideas and insights, and framing new research and analysis that fills gaps, and prompts targeted action.
- Connect practitioners, policy makers, and academics across sectors and regions to weave a more organized, unified, and powerful network dedicated to improving rural community conditions and advancing rural health and prosperity.
- Heighten awareness and strengthen understanding of the interdependence of urban and rural America, providing stories of people and places that offer a truer, more balanced account of rural America—its diversity, contribution, and value to our nation.



**Impact:** Thrive Rural published a series of blogs.

**Lead Faculty:** Anita Brown-Graham

**Funding:** Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

#### ► **Experts who partnered with the ncIMPACT Initiative on its projects**

The ncIMPACT Initiative engaged 99 experts in its projects and convenings this year. The following School of Government faculty and professional staff participated in funded projects coordinated by the ncIMPACT Initiative:

- Expanding EITC in Rural Communities: **Whitney Afonso**
- Keys to Economic Recovery from COVID-19: **Obed Pasha and Dale Roenigk**
- myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives: **Ricardo Morse**
- NC Strategic Economic Development Plan: **Jonathan Morgan**
- Opioid Response Project: **Kim Nelson, Adam Lovelady, Mark Botts, Jill Moore, Sara DePasquale, Willow Jacobson, Patrice Roesler, and Amy Wade**
- Social Capital: **Maureen Berner and Aimee Wall**

## 2. **Widely-share knowledge on evidence-based insights and creative policy options for responding to the most important questions communities face through a virtual civic solutions lab.**

#### ► **Presentations to varied audiences**

We made more than 50 presentations to approximately 3,930 participants this year. Audiences included public sector policymakers, foundation staff and boards, business leaders, community residents, and nonprofit organizations.

#### ► **Help decision makers dig in and use data**

The ncIMPACT Initiative sponsored 10 data-rich webinars this year.

- **Keys to Economic Recovery from COVID-19**
  - › *Project introduction: September 30, 2020*
  - › *Innovations in the Face of Crisis: October 28, 2020*
  - › *Collaboration in the Face of Crisis: November 18, 2020*
  - › *Making Data Informed Decisions for Economic Recovery: January 27, 2021*

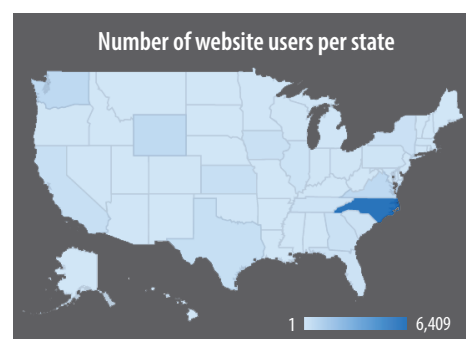
- **Leveraging the Secret Sauce of Relationships to Improve Reentry Outcomes: The Value of Social Capital**
  - › *Valuing Data and Individuals with Similar Experiences*: August 4, 2020
  - › *Developing Organic Connections, Peer Groups, and Accountability*: August 18, 2020
  - › *Fostering Organizational, Participant, and Mentoring Relationships*: September 1, 2020
  - › *Incorporating Relationship Building Practices in Your Organization*: September 15, 2020
- **myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives**
  - › Information Session for interested communities: March 11, 2021
  - › Kickoff Session for collaboratives selected: June 24, 2021

► **Expose leaders to new facts and emerging research—*Facts That Matter* blog**

The team published 37 blog pieces this year.

► **Website utilization**

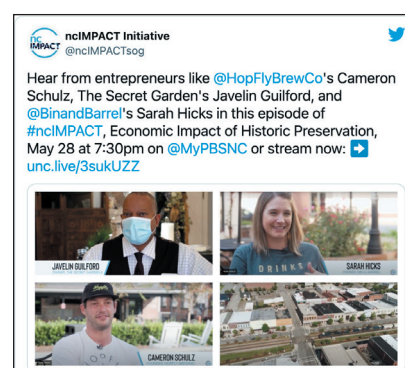
Traffic increased on our website this year as we continue to drive our audience to this resource, including nearly 38,000 views and users from all 50 states in the nation.



► **Social Media**

We leverage social media to publicize our work, targeting local, state and community leaders, as well as strategic partners whose work aligns with the ncIMPACT Initiative. Aside from our own content, we share content related to community innovations and collaborations. We also utilize social media advertisements to increase followers, particularly on Facebook. We package content for each social media channel, prioritizing high-quality and high-interest images.

- **Facebook**: Followers increased from 1,101 in the first quarter to 1,428 in the fourth quarter.
- **Twitter**: The ncIMPACT Initiative's use of Twitter as a social media vehicle remained strong. We ended the fiscal year with a total of nearly 950,4000 impressions, 2,141 followers, and 7,300 engagements (likes, tweets, replies).
- **Instagram**: We saw similar growth with Instagram, from 209 followers in the first quarter to 400 in the fourth quarter.



**3. Help create a high-impact culture of innovation in NC communities by supporting relevant practices.**

► **ncIMPACT television series**

By leveraging the reach of television and digital media platforms, ncIMPACT introduces promising community collaborations to hundreds of thousands of civic innovators (or potential civic innovators) in North Carolina. We highlight partners working together to respond to challenges that are often mirrored in other NC communities. In each episode, we ask, "Could you do this in your community?" and offer online resources to support viewers who choose to do so.

- During season three, PBS North Carolina with sponsorship by Civic Federal Credit Union, worked with the nclIMPACT Initiative to produce and distribute 13 new episodes.
- These episodes drive the series' multi-platform content distribution strategy across broadcast, the website, and social media.
- The content is complemented with a dynamic social media and marketing campaign promoting the series. This strategic approach generated more than **6.95 million impressions** for season three.

For season three of the nclIMPACT series with PBS NC, the team offered a Facebook Live event weekly during production of 13 episodes so viewers across the state could participate as we recorded the broadcast and pose questions to the panelists. In addition to engaging with the expert panelists, these events also enabled viewers to engage with each other in the comments section. Viewers shared resources and connected with other innovators working on the similar challenges in their communities.

As part of the Keys to Economic Recovery from COVID-19 project, the team hosted peer learning sessions for local innovators to engage with each other and ask questions about strategies pursued in various communities. More than 25 individuals participated in a peer learning session about business supports on Nov. 12, 2020 and 30 individuals participated in a second peer learning session about hospitality industry and childcare support strategies on Dec. 10, 2020. Evaluation data from attendees indicates respondents found the information presented helpful to their work (94% of respondents) and found value in discussion among participants (91% of respondents).

### EXPERIMENT

By engaging in on-the-ground projects that are bold, creative, and that tackle the most pressing issues facing communities, with new tools and strategies, *nclIMPACT will produce measurable improvements in each of NC's 100 counties.*

### SHARE

By using multiple platforms to communicate the learnings from projects and disseminate relevant tools, *nclIMPACT will facilitate the creation of a virtual civic solutions lab across NC.*

### CREATE

By connecting the learnings from civic solutions delivered across the state, *nclIMPACT will support a culture of innovation where leaders experiment, take strategic risks, and collaborate effectively.*