



# North Carolina Evaluation Fund Grant Annual Report

June 30, 2022

NC Office of State Budget & Management  
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## Introduction

Session Law 2021-180 [Sec. 23.1](#) set aside \$1 million for the 2021-2023 biennium to award grants to state agencies for research partnerships that inform policy and program decisions (see Appendix A for details). The Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) and the NC Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) launched the [North Carolina Evaluation Fund](#) grant program in April 2022. This report provides an overview of the program and first round applications. Subsequent reports will include updates on award decisions, project status and findings, and associated program or policy changes.

## About the North Carolina Evaluation Fund

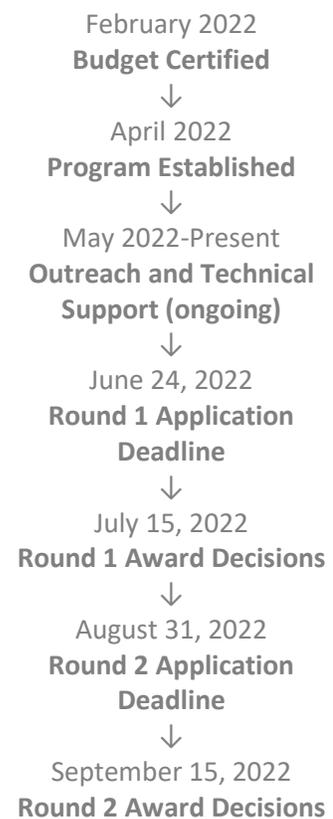
Decisionmakers want to know what works to improve outcomes for North Carolinians and how best to design and deliver government services while using taxpayer dollars efficiently. Generating actionable evidence to answer those questions requires time, funding, and specialized expertise. The North Carolina Evaluation Fund's competitive grants facilitate opportunities for state agencies to partner with outside experts to conduct rigorous evaluations of their programs and policies.

Through these partnerships, the Fund helps to build capacity across state government to both generate and use evidence to drive policy decisions and accomplish strategic goals. Evaluations may measure how well new or existing interventions work to achieve their intended outcomes, test how to improve implementation to maximize benefits for North Carolinians, or may pursue other approaches to evaluating state efforts.

In addition to funding, agencies who are new to evaluation often need support to develop a proposal and find a research partner. A unique feature of the North Carolina Evaluation Fund program is the technical assistance available to applicants. OSBM and OSP host office hours where applicants can receive feedback and guidance from an evaluation expert to refine their research question and evaluation design. OSP also helps state agencies post and advertise their projects on the [North Carolina Project Portal](#)<sup>1</sup> to identify research partner.

The Fund targets fast-moving evaluation needs with a straightforward application and quick review process. OSBM plans to issue 5-10 awards in two rounds. OSBM anticipates notifying Round 1 applicants of a decision by July 15 and Round 2 applicants of a decision by September 15.

## TIMELINE



<sup>1</sup> OSP recently launched the North Carolina Project Portal, a tool for developing and launching partnerships with government and for bolstering cross-sector collaboration. The Portal includes information about opportunities for partnering with state agencies on their research needs and how to express interest in pursuing those opportunities.

## Round 1 Review and Awards

OSBM convened a [five-member panel](#) of external reviewers with expertise in evaluations and evidence-based decision-making to assess the applications. The panel is currently reviewing Round 1 submissions.

The panel will score applications on four criteria (see Appendix B for details on these scoring rubrics):

1. Clarity and usefulness of project question,
2. Rigor of methods to answer the question,
3. Ability to complete the project, and
4. Enhancement of state capacity to use and generate evidence.

The review panel's scores will primarily determine awards, but in its final decision, OSBM will also consider the overall portfolio of potential awardees to ensure a variety of agencies and research partners are represented. OSBM aims to notify selected applicants by July 15.

## Round 1 Highlights

**80+** Individuals Expressed Interest

Statewide interest in evaluation opportunities made possible by the new grant program, and demand for evaluation support, exceeded expectations.

**25+** Hours of Applicant Support

Outreach efforts included communicating this opportunity to people across government and institutions of higher education across North Carolina. Prior to the Round 1 application deadline, OSBM issued a memo on May 6, 2022, to all agency heads and CFOs to raise

**7** Applications Received

**6** Departments Represented

awareness of the Fund. On May 26, 2022, OSBM and OSP hosted an evaluation grant information session for over 80 registrants, representing both prospective agency applicants and research partners. Nearly 20 agencies and research entities expressed interest in this evaluation opportunity.

OSBM and OSP also provided over 25 hours of one-on-one technical support to potential applicants in May and June. OSP and OSBM fielded many additional inquiries informally outside of structured office hours and information sessions.

OSBM received seven applications for application Round 1, which closed June 24<sup>th</sup>. OSBM expects more submissions for Round 2 as applicants continue to develop their proposals and establish partnerships.

Round 1 applications came from seven divisions across six agencies. Three applicants have identified teams from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the North Carolina State University, and the Carolina Small Business Development Fund as partners. Four applicants have requested help finding a partner.

The Round 1 applications demonstrate the versatility of the North Carolina Evaluation Fund to enable agencies to answer a variety of questions, as well as the scope of evaluation needs around state government (despite this only showing a small fraction of the need). Proposed projects come from both Cabinet and Council of State agencies, and range across six policy areas. They address questions about program and policy impact, cost-effectiveness, and implementation design. Some are proposing shorter-

term analyses, while others require tracking outcomes for multiple years. More details about the applications submitted for consideration in Round 1 can be found in Appendix C.

## Round 2 and Future Impact

OSBM expects both new and revised applications in Round 2. Some applicants from Round 1 whose projects were not selected may refine their proposal and re-submit in Round 2. Subsequent reports will include updates on final award decisions, project status and findings, and associated program or policy changes from these grant awards.

Since launching the North Carolina Evaluation Fund grant program in April, it is apparent that **demand for these opportunities far outstrips OSBM's and OSP's existing funding and support capacity**. The Governor's recommended budget replaces the nonrecurring grant funds provided in Session Law 2021-180 [Sec. 23.1](#) with recurring funds of \$500,000 per year. OSBM also requested funding for a Chief Scientist position to advise leadership, support staff, and agencies through this grant program, as well as OSBM's other existing and future efforts to bolster evidence-based policymaking across state government. Additionally, OSP had requested four positions to meet the increased demand for creating partnerships between state agencies, academic institutions, and philanthropic organizations. These investments would enable OSBM and OSP to better support research partnerships that generate the evidence decisionmakers need to ensure effective and efficient operations

## Appendix A: Session Law 2021-180 Section 23.1, Evidence-Based Grants

**SECTION 23.1.** Of the funds appropriated in this act to the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), the sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring funds in each year of the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium shall be used to provide grants to State agencies to do the following: (i) in partnership with research institutions, conduct research projects that will directly inform the agencies' policy and program decisions and (ii) pursuant to contract with an outside entity or in conjunction with OSBM, evaluate how well the agencies' programs are achieving their intended outcomes. OSBM shall develop guidelines and procedures for the administration and distribution of these funds to State agencies through a competitive process and shall, by June 30, 2022, and June 30, 2023, submit reports on the administration and use of the funds to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government and the Fiscal Research Division. Each report shall include all of the following for both research projects and evaluation projects for each fiscal year:

- (1) The criteria used by OSBM to evaluate applications from State agencies for grant funds.
- (2) The number of applications received.
- (3) The number of applications accepted and rejected.
- (4) For each State agency, a description of the specific policies and/or programs that were included in the projects as well as the data and research methodology used.
- (5) The names of the research institutions that partnered with State agencies to conduct research projects.
- (6) The names of the outside entities with whom State agencies worked in conjunction to evaluate program outcomes.
- (7) The amount spent on each project.
- (8) The findings of each project.
- (9) A summary of all policy and program changes planned or enacted as a result of project findings.

## Appendix B: Evaluation Fund Scoring Rubric

The review panel will score applications according to the rubric below. For each criterion, a score from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) will be provided. The relative weight of that criterion is in parentheses.

- 1. Clarity and usefulness of project question (30%).** The primary research question is clearly stated and, critically, there is a compelling explanation of how answering that question will inform policy or programmatic decisions and lead to action. The application includes relevant background context, discusses scope and significance of the project question, and shows how the question relates to agency or division goals/ policy priorities. Strong applications explore different possible results and how each result might tilt decisions (e.g., if a program is found to improve outcomes by 5%, then the results favor a decision to do X; but if less than 5%, then Y is favored instead).
- 2. Rigor of methods to answer the question (30%).** The method proposed is appropriate for answering the question. Projects involving impact evaluations—that is, research that aims to measure the causal effect of a program or policy—are particularly encouraged. Strong applications clearly explain what is being measured, what is being compared, and how relevant statistics will be calculated and reported. For proposals that include an impact evaluation, there is a compelling explanation for how counterfactuals will be conceptualized and how differences between controlled groups will be estimated.
- 3. Ability to complete the project (30%).** The scope of the project is feasible to complete within the requested timeline and budget and by the proposed project team. Strong applications will: demonstrate the availability of—or ability to collect—needed data in a timely fashion; provide a well-calibrated budget; and describe a compelling strategy for how results will be communicated to decision-makers and the public. Strong applications are also clear-eyed in their assessment of the biggest risk to the project; a big risk does not necessarily adversely impact a score, but rather the assessment is whether the applicant has a proactive strategy for mitigating and handling the risk if it materializes.
- 4. Enhancement of state capacity to use and generate evidence (10%).** The project increases an agency’s ability to use evidence within its operations and to pursue future evidence-building projects. For example, the project might: be the first time an agency or one of its divisions has completed a randomized controlled trial (RCT); establish a new partnership with a university; produce tools to ensure programs follow proven effective practices; or involve cleaning and documenting a dataset that could also be used in future research projects.

The above scores will primarily determine awards, but in its final decision, OSBM will also consider the overall portfolio of potential awardees to balance the following goals for the Fund:

1. Strive to ensure that a variety of agencies and research partners are represented.
2. Anticipated to show results within a year. Projects that can produce results before May 2023 or field a randomized controlled trial (RCT) before May 2023 (with results within 5 years) are particularly encouraged.
3. Aim to distribute \$1M across 5-10 projects.

## Appendix C: Round 1 Applications Overview

Agency	Division	Research Partner Affiliation	Research Project	Evaluation Approach	Requested Budget
<b>Department of Administration</b>	Council for Women and Youth Involvement	UNC Chapel Hill	Project RESTART Evaluation Planning for model Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP)	The project will lay the foundation for a rigorous evaluation of a model DVIP. DVIPs are court-mandated and designed as an alternative to incarceration that's intended to reduce recidivism among domestic violence offenders. The long-term goal for the project team is to assess the feasibility and efficacy of the model in community settings in a future intervention trial using a cluster-randomized design.	\$147,860
<b>Department of Commerce</b>	NC Works Commission	TBD	Evaluation of the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways Program	The first part of the project would gather data and generate themes about current career pathways across the state. The second part will measure the impact of four pathways (healthcare, agribusiness, business support services, and advance manufacturing) on training and certification achievement for participants, as well as determine how evaluation metrics can be applied to all career pathways.	\$100,000
<b>Department of Insurance</b>	Office of State Fire Marshal	TBD	Reform of North Carolina's development permit process to support statewide economic development goals	The project would gather data on development permits for residential and commercial construction at different levels of state and local government to determine timelines for a variety of projects. The data would be used to determine any needed changes to the permitting process.	\$100,000
<b>Secretary of State Office</b>	N/A	Carolina Small Business Development Fund	Evaluating Factors for Small & Medium-Sized Firm Failure in North Carolina	The research will use an exploratory cross-sectional survey to identify factors for firm failure and eventually create a longitudinal survey instrument. The data collected would be used to inform agency programs to support businesses and prevent firm failure.	\$75,000

Agency	Division	Research Partner Affiliation	Research Project	Evaluation Approach	Requested Budget
<b>Department of Public Safety</b>	Adult Corrections	TBD	Effectiveness of In-service Education to Enhance the Knowledge of Medical Providers in the Application of a Functional Assessment tool in Corrections	The project would use mixed methods and gather data from focus groups to design a formal education program in the first phase. The second phase of the project would use a quasi-experimental design to determine the effect of the educational program.	\$5,250
<b>Department of Public Safety</b>	Prisons	TBD	Evaluation of an Analytical Modeling Tool for Optimizing Prisons Assignment and Transportation	This project would evaluate the benefit of using a custom analytical tool for offender assignment and movement relative to its cost. The project would also assess the impact of the tool on offender outcomes. If the tool proves to lead to efficiencies and reduced costs, the division will implement the tool for other operations.	\$210,000
<b>Department of Public Instruction</b>	District Human Capital	North Carolina State University	Teacher Compensation Models and Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) Evaluation	The evaluation will use mixed methods convergent design. The project will gather data to perform a comparative analysis of ATR implementation at different Public Schools Units. Concurrently, the evaluation team will use a comparative interrupted time series design to estimate the immediate effects of ATR on outcomes of interest (student achievement, teacher recruitment and retention, etc.) and effects on trends over time.	\$114,904