

North Carolina Evaluation Fund Grants

Call for Proposals

April 2022

Background

Decisionmakers want to know what works to improve outcomes for North Carolinians and how best to design and deliver government services. Generating actionable evidence to answer those questions requires time, funding, and specialized expertise. The North Carolina Evaluation Fund was established to support research partnerships that inform policy and program decisions.¹ The fund supports fast-moving evaluation needs, with a straightforward application and quick review process. Applicants may request technical assistance to develop their application and find a research partner.

The Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) anticipates awarding 5-10 grants totaling up to \$1M over the next six months. Most awards are expected to be about \$100,000.

Application Instructions

North Carolina state government agencies can apply. Higher education institutions and other research organizations cannot apply directly but are encouraged to be research partners with a state agency applicant.

The application form is on page 3; the questions seek information about why the research question is important for decision-making, how the research will be conducted, and how results will be used.

A panel of reviewers with expertise in evaluations and evidence-based decision-making will score applications according to the rubric on page 6. Applicants are encouraged to use the rubric as a guide for what to include in the application. These scores will primarily determine award decisions, but OSBM will also consider the overall portfolio of potential awardees with the goal of funding a variety of agencies and projects.

To apply, email your application to evaluationgrants@osbm.nc.gov under the subject line “Evaluation Fund Application.” Two rounds of awards are anticipated, with the following application deadlines:

- **Round 1:** applications due June 24, 2022
- **Round 2:** applications due August 31, 2022

OSBM anticipates notifying Round 1 applicants of a decision by July 15 and Round 2 applicants of a decision by September 15. If your application is not awarded funding in Round 1, OSBM will provide feedback, and may encourage you to refine your proposal and submit it again in Round 2.

Technical Assistance

If you have any questions about this process or how to complete the application, please contact evaluationgrants@osbm.nc.gov.

OSBM will host a series of open work sessions and 1-on-1 office hours where you can get assistance and feedback from evaluation experts on how to approach your research question and draft your application. We encourage applicants—especially those new to evaluation—to take advantage. [Sign up here](#).

The NC Office of Strategic Partnerships can help post your project on the [North Carolina Project Portal](#) and identify a research partner. The application has a checkbox where you can request this help.

¹ Current Operations Appropriations Act of 2021, [Session Law 2021-180 Sec 23.1](#) (“Evidence-Based Grants”).

Application for North Carolina Evaluation Fund Grant

1. **Project Title:**

2. **Who is the contact for this application?**

a. Name:

b. Title:

c. State Agency:

d. Email:

e. Phone Number:

3. **What is the primary question that your project will attempt to answer?**

4. **How will the answer to that question inform a policy or program decision?**

5. **Do you need assistance identifying a research partner?**

No, we already have a research partner (in which case please **list your partner(s) and hyperlink to their bio and/or resume**).

Yes, I need help posting this opportunity on the [North Carolina Project Portal](#) and finding a research partner.

6. **How will the research team attempt to answer the question you shared in question 3 above?**

Consider the following in your response: (a) what qualitative or quantitative data will be used (and whether you already have the data or it needs to be collected); (b) what is the sample size; (c) what methods will be used to analyze that data; and (d) if assessing causal impact, how will the control group(s) be constructed and how will effect sizes be estimated and reported? (Recall that you can sign up for [OSBM office hours](#) if you need help here.)

7. How will you share results and when will those deliverables become available? 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.

8. What is the total estimated cost of the project?

9. How much funding are you requesting, and how will you allocate it? It may be efficient to present the budget as a table.

If you are requesting less than the total cost of the project, please indicate the status of additional funds needed:

- Additional funds are already allocated for this project.
- Additional funds are available, but conditional on a grant award from the NC Evaluation Fund.
- Additional sources of funding have been identified but funding has not been secured.
- Additional sources of funding are needed.

10. What is the biggest risk or challenge for this project?

11. Will the project adhere to open science best practices? To promote the research integrity of funded projects, OSBM requires that NC Evaluation Fund grantees adhere to open science best practices, including the registration of a pre-analysis plan and a commitment to publicly share all results and, where possible, underlying research materials such as data and code. If you are unfamiliar with these practices, OSBM can provide technical assistance. Unfamiliarity will not adversely impact your application—technical assistance is available to help you. Which of the following best describes your project’s ability to adhere to open science best practices?

We commit to, and we’re already familiar with, open science best practices.

We commit to open science best practices, but we request OSBM assistance on how to implement these practices.

We cannot commit to registering a pre-analysis plan and/or publicly sharing the results of this project.

12. How, if at all, will completion of this project increase your or another state agency’s ability to use and generate evidence in future projects?

13. Do you have any additional information you want the review panel and OSBM to consider?

Evaluation Fund Scoring Rubric

A panel of reviewers 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.